

Live Justice

A Participatory Research Project about Public Witness in The United Church of Canada (2019)



Kitchen Table Conversation Kit: Facilitator's Manual

Live Justice Kitchen Table Conversation Kit: Facilitator's Manual



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L'Église Unie du Canada



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This document should be used with the Note-taker Reporting Form (2019).

Contents

Introduction to the Public Witness Research Project.....	4
Purposes of This Research Project.....	5
Key Themes and Questions.....	5
The Kitchen Table Conversation Kit.....	6
What Is a Kitchen Table Conversation?	6
Hosting a Kitchen Table Conversation	6
Recruiting Participants.....	6
Creating the Environment.....	7
Additional Tips	7
Facilitating a Kitchen Table Conversation	7
Convening, Introductions, and Sharing the Agenda/Process	7
The Role of the Facilitator.....	8
Sample Process (Agenda) for a 90-Minute Kitchen Table Conversation	8
Themes and Questions Guide	8
Appendix 1: Introducing the Issues.....	10
Talking Public Witness.....	10
Purposes of This Research Project.....	11
Key Themes and Questions.....	11
Appendix 2: Note-Taking Tips	12
Options for Submitting Your Notes (by March 29, 2019)	12
Appendix 3: Note-taker Reporting Form	13
Appendix 4: Guidelines for Group Discussion.....	19
Appendix 5: Introductory Activities	20
Simple Introductions.....	20
Names and Expectations.....	20
Names and Family Sayings	20
Appendix 6: Facilitating Difficult Situations.....	22
One Participant Dominates the Discussion.....	22
There Is Little Discussion or No One Responds to a Question or Invitation to Comment.....	22
The Group Is Getting Off Track	22
Side Conversations, Checking Phones, and Other Distractions	22
A Question or Topic Creates Obvious Discomfort	23

Introduction to the Public Witness Research Project

The United Church of Canada's structure is in the midst of changing, and it is important to think about new ways of connecting to faith communities for public witness. You are invited to participate in this research project to help the United Church's General Council Office (GCO) strengthen the church's public witness in its varied expressions. Where and how should the GCO focus its energy (human, spiritual, financial, programmatic) over the next five years? While many variables affect the United Church's involvement in public witness, this research project is ultimately focused on the role of the GCO in strengthening public witness.

Public witness is our way of raising our voices for justice, peace, and the healing of creation. Individuals and faith communities may speak out on behalf of ourselves; our partners (Canadian, global, local); and/or causes we stand with to participate in God's transformative work of justice, peace, and love. We speak out on behalf of ourselves and our partners, and in support of causes we stand with to participate in God's transformative love for all creation. We can publicly and prophetically witness to God's love by expressing our faith through prayer, vigil, art, song, contacting elected officials, presence, and accompaniment, among other ways.

In witnessing publicly, we seek to

- recognize that we are all impacted by injustice and colonial violence.
- recognize that it has been "the default" of the church over centuries to "do for the other."
- respond to the invitations of those who ask for our solidarity. We should listen to, discern, and follow the lead of partners.
- open hearts and ears to ensure that we do not bend the work to institutional goals.
- be an intercultural church where Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC), as well as colleagues, partners, and those holding White privilege, work together to adhere to human rights norms, practices, and standards—including those of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- create collaborative partnerships based on mutuality, equity, and respect.

The report commissioned by the 42nd General Council, Faithful Decision-Making on Social Justice Issues in The United Church of Canada, found that "overall the people of the United Church, at all levels, attach importance to the church's involvement in social justice. Social justice is also central to the denomination's ethos. These findings echoed observations gathered in 2011 when The United Church of Canada conducted the Identity survey."

We need to update ourselves and better understand the best way to engage United Church people in social change work through social media. Due to capacity issues and cultural shifts, this is the predominant way that General Council is able to do outreach and communication now. How far does social media reach? Do we need other strategies?

Purposes of This Research Project

This research project intends to

- produce offerings and results that have concrete application; i.e., implementable outcomes
- engage in research about the current reality and the coming five years that is grounded in experience but not weighed down by worry
- use a participatory research methodology to model one of the hoped-for outcomes through engaging those already committed to and widening the networks of those involved in public witness
- continually ask who is and who is not at the table when shaping the research project and its questions

Key Themes and Questions

The key themes and questions for this research are

- A. Barriers/Challenges to Participation**
- B. Tools and Communicating the Work**
- C. Building and Addressing Capacity**

The most valuable information this project can gather is stories about the experiences of people from all levels of the church. This project is an opportunity for both storytelling and dialogue. Documenting these experiences and opinions will enable us, together, to strengthen and further our public witness work across all levels of the church.

The Kitchen Table Conversation Kit

Welcome to your Kitchen Table Conversation Kit, a guide designed to assist you in facilitating a discussion with others in your faith community about the public witness work being done locally, nationally, and abroad.

What Is a Kitchen Table Conversation?

A Kitchen Table Conversation (KTC) is a brief (60–90 minute) small-group discussion process that takes place in someone’s home or at a local venue such as a church meeting room, café, public library, community centre, or similar place. KTC participants are members of a community interested and involved in a particular issue. In this case, KTCs are being used to engage interested members of the United Church to share experience and opinion about our public witness work practised locally, nationally, and abroad.

A host invites and convenes the group with a facilitator who guides the discussion based on the set of questions identified by the project leadership. The discussion is recorded in notes that are collected by the note-taker of the KTC (see Appendix 2: Note-taking Tips and Appendix 3: Note-taker Reporting Form).

Similar small-group discussion processes that you might be familiar with include conversation cafés, world cafés, focus groups, roundtable discussions, and the like.

Hosting a Kitchen Table Conversation

A KTC requires a local host who recruits participants, a facilitator, and a note-taker. The host also organizes the space and time of the meeting and establishes a conducive environment for discussion.

Recruiting Participants

1. Create a list of 6–12 participants you feel will contribute to a worthwhile discussion on public witness. Consider the diversity of social identity, experience, and opinion that exists in your community in composing your list.
2. Invite people on your list using the most effective method (e-mail, phone, in person). Share
 - the date, location, time, and duration (60–90 minutes)
 - your contact phone number and e-mail address
 - Appendix 1: Introducing the Issues

A reminder and confirmation message for your participants just before the event may be helpful. An attendance list with names and their connection to your congregation or faith community is required as part of the notes from your KTC (see Appendix 3: Note-taker Reporting Form).

Social identity refers to how we identify ourselves in relation to others. This can be a fairly large set of identities, including, for instance, gender, religion, racialization, age, vocation, and so on. Some identities are stigmatized and/or subject to oppression from dominant society through practices such as anti-Black racism, homophobia, ageism, and so on. Social identity is always multiple.

Creating the Environment

Consider the needs and desires of the participants and how you might create an environment that is welcoming and conducive to sharing stories, experiences, ideas, and opinions. Some tips to consider:

- Arrange seating so all can see one another.
- Consider participants' accessibility needs, including mobility, visual and auditory capacity, and so on.
- Refreshments and snacks are a lovely addition, if you are able.
- If children are attending with their parents or caregivers, can you arrange childcare or a place for them to play?

Additional Tips

- Make sure everyone is introduced. This may happen informally as people arrive, or once the meeting is convened either by the host or facilitator.
- Consider the need for an informal social time before or after the discussion. For example, participants could be invited to come 15–30 minutes before the session begins in order to enjoy coffee, tea, and snacks. Once the session is adjourned, participants may value a moment of informal networking or to otherwise conclude their participation.

Facilitating a Kitchen Table Conversation

A KTC host may also be a facilitator, but it is helpful if someone else is available to do the facilitation in order to distribute the work of the KTC.

Convening, Introductions, and Sharing the Agenda/Process

- Convene the group and introduce the facilitator.
- Invite the participants to introduce themselves if they have not already done so. You may still want to do introductions to give everyone a chance to share, in addition to their name, one hope or expectation they have for the discussion. (See Appendix 5 for other suggestions for introductory activities.)
- State the general purpose of the Kitchen Table Conversation, referring to the information that has been shared beforehand (see Appendix 1).
- Affirm the duration of the KTC and the adjournment time.
- Share the agenda or process of the KTC. The term “process” is preferable; calling this an “agenda” might disrupt the informal nature of the discussion.
- Emphasize the ground rules (or “guidelines”—however you wish to name them) for the discussion (see Appendix 4: Guidelines for Group Discussion; you may wish to provide copies to participants).
- Identify the note-taker and explain that notes of this conversation will be shared with the leaders of the project. See Appendices 2 and 3 for more information on note-taking.

The Role of the Facilitator

The primary role of the facilitator is to ensure that everyone has opportunities to contribute to the discussion and to be heard. Attending to participants' comfort, keeping the group focused, moving the conversation forward, and making sure people are taking turns (and not using up an inordinate amount of the shared time) are also part of the facilitator's responsibility.

Some tips for the facilitator:

- Be observant of the entire group.
- Check to make sure everyone is clear about the question being addressed.
- Ask and suggest that the group move on to another topic or question when necessary.
- Energize the group when needed. For example, use humour or lead a simple stretch break at an appropriate time.
- Paraphrase and summarize to help bring a topic to a close or move on to another topic.
- Check with the note-taker to make sure they are having success. Invite them to share a comment if this helps with note-taking.
- Use visual aids (for example, write the agenda on a flip chart, write the questions on a flip chart, etc.).

Sample Process (Agenda) for a 90-Minute Kitchen Table Conversation

1. Assemble, convene, and welcome participants (5 minutes)
2. Introductions (5–10 minutes)
3. Introduce the purpose of this Kitchen Table Conversation (5 minutes)
4. Review process (agenda) and conversation ground rules (5 minutes)
5. Discuss chosen themes and questions (50 minutes)
6. What's missing? What still needs to be said? (10 minutes)
7. Summarize highlights of the discussion (5 minutes)
8. Thank you and closing (5 minutes)

(Adapt the sample process as desired.)

Themes and Questions Guide

A Kitchen Table Conversation is brief (60–90 minutes), and the themes and questions that are explored in this project are many. It is necessary to prioritize, from among the themes and questions provided, what will be most germane for the participants to discuss. This decision can be made by the host and facilitator and, if desirable, with the support of the project leadership.

A KTC could focus either on one theme and all its questions or on several themes (two or more) but with only one or two questions for each.

A. Barriers/Challenges to Participation

1. What are the ways that the United Church's practice of public witness perpetuate oppression and colonialism?
2. What mechanisms do we need to develop so that we better engage voices at the margins in public witness?

3. What do the church's adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the church's commitment to becoming an intercultural church mean for how it engages in public witness?

B. Tools and Communicating the Work

1. What tools and techniques are needed to better support people, networks and communities of faith in addressing systemic change? What tools are needed to engage heart, soul, and mind in working for a better world?
2. What are the best ways for the United Church to engage in social change using social media and other electronic tools?

C. Building and Addressing Capacity

1. Where/how is there untapped capacity in the United Church for engaging in public witness?
2. Given diminished General Council Office staff capacity, how can face-to-face encounters be sustained?

Systemic change refers to changing whole systems such as political systems, organizational systems, and/or educational systems. It is distinct (though connected) from individual (behavioural) change. Systemic change is necessary when changing only one aspect of a complex system fails to resolve a problem. Systemic change is often gradual and requires some combination of education, policy reform, organizational change, proactive enfranchisement of groups that have been systematically excluded, and addressing the fundamental aspects of a system.

Appendix 1: Introducing the Issues

Send this appendix to participants before your Kitchen Table Conversation and have copies of it available at your KTC for reference.

Talking Public Witness

The United Church of Canada's structure is in the midst of changing, and it is important to think about new ways of connecting to faith communities for public witness. You are invited to participate in this research project to help the United Church's General Council Office (GCO) strengthen the church's public witness in its varied expressions. Where and how should the GCO focus its energy (human, spiritual, financial, programmatic) over the next five years? While many variables affect the United Church's involvement in public witness, this research project is ultimately focused on the role of the GCO in strengthening public witness.

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- open hearts and ears to ensure that we do not bend the work to institutional goals.
- be an intercultural church where Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC), as well as colleagues, partners, and those holding White privilege, work together to adhere to human rights norms, practices, and standards—including those of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- create collaborative partnerships based on mutuality, equity, and respect.

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Appendix 2: Note-taking Tips

An effective note-taker

- has strong listening skills
- is able to observe carefully and refrain from participating in order to remain impartial
- is able to note down accurate quotes that are germane to a given point
- has handwriting that is legible
- is able to submit their notes from their Kitchen Table Conversation to the General Council Office by **March 29, 2019**

For this research project, the note-taker's role is to capture the information being shared as accurately as possible. This may be done by

- transcribing comments.
- checking with participants to ensure that their comments are captured accurately. This can be done during the conversation (if it will not disrupt the flow), during a break, or after the meeting adjourns.
- drawing pictures/diagrams, if appropriate.
- encouraging participants to write down their comments (legibly) the way they wish them to be recorded.

Some tools the note-taker may wish to use include

- paper and pen
- notepaper or sticky notes (that can be shared with participants)
- flipchart, markers, and masking tape
- a laptop computer
- a smartphone camera (to snap pictures of participants' notes, flipchart notes, drawings, or any other images relevant to your discussion)

Options for Submitting Your Notes (by March 29, 2019)

1. Submit your information using the [Note-taker Reporting Form](#) available online. The online form also allows you to upload files with your notes (i.e., photos, scanned images, and so on).
2. Fill out the Note-taker Reporting Form.docx (available for download at www.united-church.ca/social-action/act-now/live-justice) using a word processor and send your completed form (attaching photos or scans if necessary) by e-mail to justice@united-church.ca.
3. Fill out the Note-taker Reporting Form.docx (available for download on www.united-church.ca/social-action/act-now/live-justice) by hand and either
 - scan your completed form and e-mail it to justice@united-church.ca (.pdf or .jpg files, please), or
 - mail a hardcopy of your completed form to: The United Church of Canada, Attn: Public Witness, 3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 200, Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4

Appendix 3: Note-taker Reporting Form

The Note-taker Reporting Form is reproduced here for reference. Consider using the online version: [Note-taker Reporting Form](#). You can also download a .docx version at www.united-church.ca/social-action/act-now/live-justice to use with your own word processor.

A. Barriers/Challenges to Participation

1. What are the ways that the United Church's practice of public witness perpetuate oppression and colonialism?

2. What mechanisms do we need to develop so that we better engage voices at the margins in public witness?

3. What do the church's adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the church's commitment to becoming an intercultural church mean for how it engages in public witness?

C. Building and Addressing Capacity

1. Where/how is there untapped capacity in the United Church for engaging in public witness?

2. Given diminished General Council Office staff capacity, how can face-to-face encounters be sustained?

Participants' Information

Please provide the following information about the participants of your Kitchen Table Conversation. You may wish to simply pass this sheet around at the beginning of your KTC as a sign-up sheet.

Name (First and Last)	Association with Your Community of Faith

In case we need to contact you for further clarification on the notes you have submitted from your Kitchen Table Conversation, please consider providing your contact information.

Please provide the following information about the note-taker (you) and your congregation/faith community:

Your first name:

Your last name:

Your e-mail address:

Your daytime phone number:

The name (or a brief description) of the congregation/faith community that participated in your Kitchen Table Conversation:

The city/town/municipality in which your congregation/faith community is located:

The province/territory in which your congregation/faith community is located:

Describe the region in which your congregation/faith community is located (select one):

Urban	Suburban	Town or village	Rural
First Nation	Other	Not applicable	

Describe the size of your congregation/faith community (select one):

Large (more than 100 active members)	Medium (50–100 active members)	Small (fewer than 50 active members)	Unsure/Not applicable
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Appendix 4: Guidelines for Group Discussion

The Kitchen Table Conversation facilitator may find these guidelines helpful. You may wish to have copies of these guidelines available at your KTC for all participants' reference.

- Respect that there are different abilities to communicate in the group.
- Respect that there are different cultural norms to communicate in the group.
- If you are uncertain how to assist a person with communicating, ask them how they would like to proceed with a situation (for example, how would they like to have their messages communicated?).
- Be mindful of the disabilities (visible and invisible) that some participants may have. For example, if participants have visual impairments, the flipchart notes should be read out loud.
- Listen more, and listen actively.
- Speak only for yourself.
- Don't volunteer other people to speak.
- Turn off cell phones during the meeting.
- Don't interrupt when someone else is speaking.
- If the process is unclear, ask the facilitator or a fellow participant to clarify.
- Respect the process.
- Minimize cross-talk (incidental conversation not related to the topic at hand).
- Take your turn to speak.
- Speak from your experience as much as possible.
- Take responsibility for your own participation.
- Offer assistance to the process when appropriate.
- Look at the person to whom you are speaking.
- Be aware of using acronyms and other jargon that may need translation or explanation for other group members. Take responsibility for the language you use.
- Give space for people who haven't spoken yet.
- Think about what you are going to say before speaking.

Appendix 5: Introductory Activities

The Kitchen Table Conversation facilitator may wish to use one or some of these introductory activities at the outset of their KTC.

Simple Introductions

Have all participants introduce themselves with their name and their affiliation or relationship with the group. This is best used when time is limited.

Names and Expectations

Have participants introduce themselves with their names and one expectation (or hope) each one has for the group discussion.

Names and Family Sayings

Have participants introduce themselves with their name and one personal or family saying each that has something to do with public witness and/or social justice work. This is best used when there is enough time to devote to introductions without taking away from discussion time. You can use or adapt the following process:

1. Explain that our families are richer in sayings than many of us are aware of. These sayings often hide in plain sight, and this exercise is a way to share some of that richness. Family sayings are a source of values, ethics, and morals (i.e., rules, advice, cautions, warnings, and so on). These can either be things that we learned as children and still hold dear, or they can be things that we have had to struggle to overcome or reframe and about which we have a very different understanding now. Such sayings can be remembered fondly and provide affirmation or can be a critical recovery of the history of the ideas, values, ethics by which we now live. Such things learned as children tend to be powerful and lasting in ways that some of us find mysterious, or others perhaps frustrating.
2. Invite everyone to remember. In pairs or groups of three, recall a family saying that you grew up with. Search the memory of your childhood and the things you heard the adults around you saying. Think of your parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, older siblings, teachers, doctors, elders, and others. What types of expressions, sayings, and aphorisms did they utter? When you behaved badly, was there something that would be said to you? When you accomplished something positive, what words were shared with you that you recall?
3. Share the saying, as well as the meaning and context. The facilitator should model this with a family saying from their own family. Encourage participants to think about their family saying in their mother tongue—this can help with remembering.
4. Invite participants to report back. If the group is small enough and there is enough time, have each individual provide their name and their family saying. If the group is large and/or time is short, have each group decide on one saying to share with everyone. This could be self-selected, recommended in the group, or voted on. Ask participants to share their saying and a little bit

about its meaning and/or the context in which it was used. Encourage participants who are not first-language English speakers to share their saying in their mother tongue.

5. If the purpose of this exercise is simply introductions and group energizing, then a “little bit” of explanation is appropriate. However, the “little bit” can be expanded or focused on. Participants can be asked to tell as much as they’d like about the context, use, and meaning of the saying they shared. In a storytelling workshop, this can work as an example of the phenomenon that everyone tells stories regardless of whether or not they think of themselves as storytellers.
6. Once everyone has shared, note how these sayings have, in a sense, taken us around the world and/or throughout time (assuming the participants are a diverse group).

Appendix 6: Facilitating Difficult Situations

The purpose of these sessions is for people to be able to share their experiences, give voice to their opinions, and to listen to and engage in dialogue with each other. Difficulties are common. Discussions may get heated, one or a few participants may dominate the discussion, participants may act passively and respond with few or no questions, and so on. Starting a group with discussion guidelines (such as those in Appendix 4) and reminding participants about them during the process can help avoid many common problems. Using brief small-group discussions (for example, in pairs or trios) can help even out participation by giving shy or reticent participants chances to voice their thoughts to a smaller group before having to do so in the full group. However, some problems may persist. Some examples of common situations that arise and suggestions for coping with them are:

One Participant Dominates the Discussion

- Invite comments from people who have not yet had a chance to speak before others speak for the nth time.
- Acknowledge the dominating participant respectfully and emphasize to them that you would like to hear what other participants think about the issue.

There Is Little Discussion or No One Responds to a Question or Invitation to Comment

- The question you have asked may be posed in a way that fails to connect with people's experience. Consider rephrasing the question, or even asking participants what question might be better to ask.
- Suggest moving on to another question and perhaps returning to unaddressed questions later.
- Breaking out briefly for discussions in pairs or small groups might help elicit responses.

The Group Is Getting Off Track

- It is normal for conversations to digress or otherwise veer off track. If the digression seems important to an individual or a group, acknowledge the value of this route for discussion, suggest it be taken up after the meeting, and invite the group to focus on the main purpose of the meeting.
- Offering a gentle reminder of the time remaining to address further topics may help.

Side Conversations, Checking Phones, and Other Distractions

- Offer a gentle reminder of the discussion guidelines that were shared at the outset of the conversation.
- Task the note-taker with the responsibility of asking the group to focus for the sake of good record-keeping.
- If a side conversation seems particularly urgent, suggest a five-minute break.

A Question or Topic Creates Obvious Discomfort

- Acknowledge that no one should feel forced or coerced to answer a question or address a topic.
- Offer participants the option to write their responses rather than offering them out loud.
- Affirm that discomfort with some questions and topics is normal, and that the purpose of this dialogue is for people to share only what they want to share.