

### Meaningful Conversations Lead to Improved Race Relations

The Northern Neck is a large area and, as in any large area, race relations will vary from community to community and from person to person. However, there is one aspect of race relations that I would like to bring to your attention this morning. And that aspect deals with communication as a tool to confront issues and improve race relations. Since moving to the Northern Neck in 2007, I have had the pleasure of working with various community organizations. During this time, I have observed that there is a need to overcome certain generational thinking and practices that, at times, have caused a form of oppression for many Black families in the Northern Neck. Often, this thinking is based on the premise that persons who are White and persons who are Black do not have equal standing within the community. Whites have their place and Blacks have their place. This is especially noticeable when working with families who are trapped in a cycle of poor self-esteem with a lack of self-determination that is passed from one generation to the next. But do not be quick to judge. It has been my experience in life that you cannot begin to address a problem without first understanding the underlying factors that contribute to the problem. You must first seek to understand.

### **Seeking Understanding is the Key**

*“Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”* – Stephen R. Covey

Stephen Richards Covey was an American educator, author, businessman, and keynote speaker. His most popular book is “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People”.

*“Never criticize a man until you’ve walked a mile in his moccasins”* – American Indian proverb.

*“Understanding is a two-way street.”* – Eleanor Roosevelt.

*“The noblest pleasure is the joy of understanding.”* – Leonardo da Vinci.

*“Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.”* – Albert Einstein.

*“Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.*

## **So, what method do we use to obtain understanding?**

### **Meaningful Conversations**

Conversation: an informal, unstructured talk between two or more people in which thoughts, feelings, and ideas are expressed, questions are asked and answered, or news and information is exchanged.

### **Barriers to Effective Intercultural Conversations**

1. Fearing diversity; seeing diversity as a negative
2. Stereotypes
  - a. Forming a mental picture of what one thinks are the main characteristics of a group
  - b. Viewing a person as a representative of a defined group of people rather than as an individual
3. Cultural Biases
  - a. Unwarranted (unjustified, undeserved, unnecessary) assumptions
  - b. A lack of awareness or acceptance of cultural differences -  
Misinterpreting intentions, symbols, messages, actions
4. Language Differences
  - a. Use of words, expressions, jargon, slang
5. Ethnocentrism – believing in the superiority of one’s own ethnic group; believing that the way you’re used to doing things is the only right way to do them, and that people or cultures that do things differently are wrong.
6. Inactive listening – not focusing, not concentrating, not caring, not comprehending

## **What Works**

*“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.” – James 1:19, NIV.*

**Know yourself – what are you bringing to the conversation**

**Recognize the Complexity of the topic**

**Be Open/Be Honest/Be flexible – Sincerity counts**

**Respect Others/Respect Differences**

**Listen Actively/Ask Questions**

**Control Emotions/Reactions**

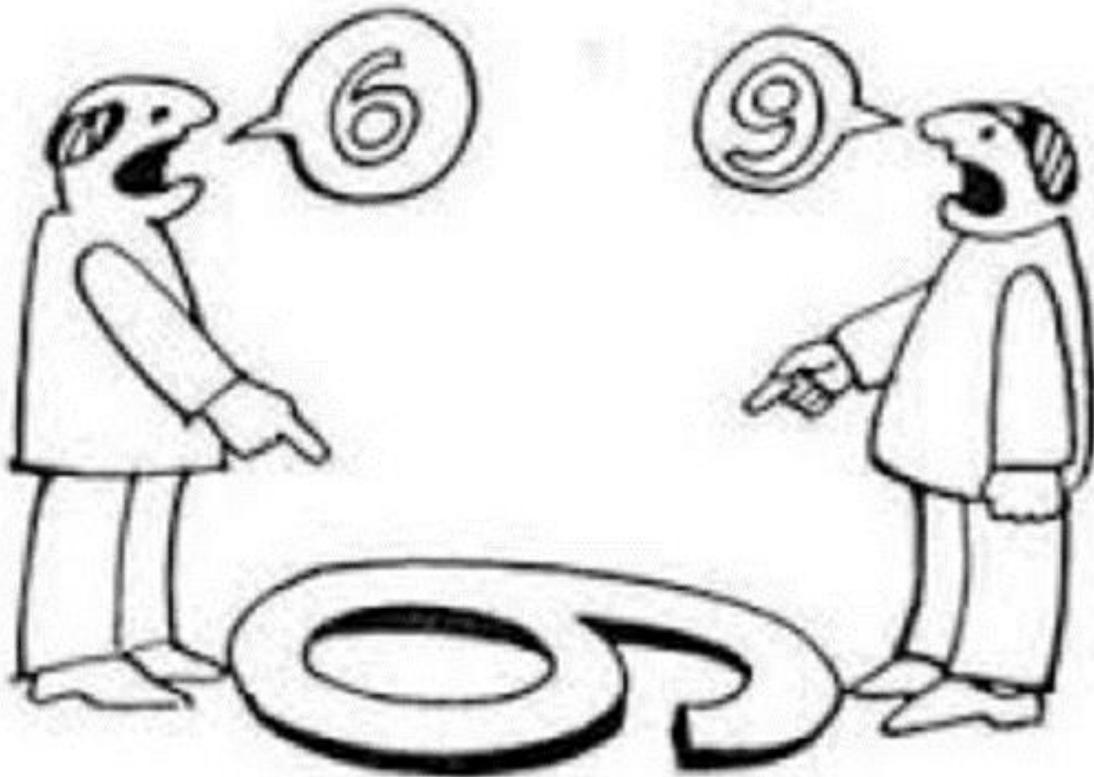
**Discard Assumptions/Preconceptions**

**Do Not Stereotype**

**Think before you speak**

**Seek to understand other’s perspective**

Seek to understand other's perspective



## **Sensitive topics that have been explored by Interracial Conversations**

- The concept of White Privilege
- Hand-in-Hand listening session on racial reconciliation
- Dealing with racist language or attitudes in our family and among friends
- Roots of racism
- Anti-Racism Workshop
- Education and Race, Part I & II
- Life as a Black farmer in the Northern Neck
- Experiences of being Black in the Northern Neck and elsewhere
- Conflict Management
- Showing of the movie “White Like Me”
- Presentation on Disenfranchisement
- Showing of the movie “Race”
- Sermon on Racial Justice
- White Fragility
- Understanding American Denial: Workshop & Seminar
- Workshop on “Healing Unhealed History”
- Racial Identity in Children
- Presentation on Buffalo Soldiers, including those who were from the Northern Neck
- Presentation on gerrymandering



## WHO ARE WE

### *The Interracial Conversations Group of the Northern Neck of Virginia*

#### *Dealing with tough issues in challenging times*

The name says it all! The group was formed through the efforts of local clergy led by the Reverend Lucia Lloyd, Rector of St. Stephens Episcopal Church in Heathsville. Individuals from various backgrounds strive to increase their understanding, and learn from each other, recognizing that unity of purpose can be achieved in an environment where diversity is welcomed and all individuals are respected.

It is universally acknowledged that communication is key to building strong relationships, serving as the foundation for successful interracial discussion. Our participants engage in free and open exchanges of ideas to build understanding of the racial and cultural dynamic of our community, the state, and the nation.

It is often said that “perception is reality”, but we are also aware that perception can be colored by

personal experience, leading to a skewed or flawed vision. By exploring these perceptions through dialogue and fellowship, we strive for all participants to understand that clearer reality.

The diversity we work toward is defined as **Different Individuals Valuing Each other, Regardless of Skin color, Intellect, Talents, or Years.** Through our exploration of diversity, our goal is to attain a unity of purpose.

#### **Our mission is as follows:**

- Develop and promote diverse cultural understanding throughout the Northern Neck.
- Provide a forum for thought and discussion as a means to promote multi-cultural awareness, and to minimize stereotyping used to judge various individuals and groups.
- Leverage our collective knowledge and experience to improve an environment of discrimination and prejudice.

We recognize action is needed to move forward. Having a better understanding of your fellow human being and the world we inhabit can prove to be an energizing catalyst that keeps us moving in the right direction. Love can be shown through action, and we are prepared to act to benefit those who have been marginalized within our community.

The topics we cover are tough, relevant and often deeply rooted in the systematic racism that has divided our nation for centuries. In a congenial atmosphere of openness—driven by each participant’s desire to gain knowledge and to better understand another’s perspective—these topics are thoroughly explored.

All are welcome to join in the conversations. If you want to make a difference in our community, if you want to be a part of the solution to overcome inequality, come and be a part of an initiative that is having a significant impact in bringing about positive change in race relations in the Northern Neck. To receive notifications on upcoming group activities, send an email to [lucia@ststephensheathsville.org](mailto:lucia@ststephensheathsville.org).

We are currently holding regular meetings on the fourth Tuesday of every month at Mt. Olive Baptist Church, 6749 Jessie DuPont Memorial Highway (potluck at 5:00pm, program at 6:00pm). We also post video of selected presentations and events on our YouTube channel, which is linked to the [Lancaster/Northumberland Community Roundtable Facebook page](#). **Check us out!**



*“I see what’s possible when we recognize that we are one American family, all deserving of equal treatment, all deserving of equal respect, all children of God. That’s the America I know”*

*Barack Obama*



*During a time of negativity and division throughout our nation, a positive force is at work within the Northern Neck of Virginia: The Interracial Conversations Group.*



*"America is not like a blanket - one piece of unbroken cloth. America is more like a quilt - many patches, many pieces, many colors, many sizes, all woven together by a common thread."*

*Rev. Jesse Jackson*

*"We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams."*

*Jimmy Carter*



*"We may have different religions, different languages, different colored skin, but we all belong to one human race." Kofi Annan*



**D**ifferent  
**I**ndividuals  
**V**aluing  
**E**ach other  
**R**egardless of  
**S**kin color  
**I**ntellect  
**T**alents or  
**Y**ears

**Interracial  
Conversations  
Group  
of the  
Northern Neck  
of  
Virginia**