

Gracism: The Art of Inclusion
June 2021
A Joint Study with the Converge Church & First Presbyterian Church of
Moorestown

Small Group Discussion Guide

Small Group Participants: Welcome to our Gracism study and discussion. Your decision to participate is a huge gift to both congregations and the members of your small group. Before our first meeting, review the information on the RESPECT guidelines and Mutual Invitation that you'll find below. Do your best to read ahead in the book. God bless you and those in your group.

Small Group Leaders: Thank you! You're stepping into an important role of servant-leadership by helping members from these two congregations meet each other as we talk about Gracism. The goal of our study is not just completing Dr. Anderson's helpful book, as much as beginning relationships, hopefully friendships, which will last for years to come. Your job is to help your group members to get to know each, build trust and confidence and facilitate meaningful, grace-filled conversations on race.

The leader's orientation video that Rev. Leath and Rev. Spencer created referred to Mutual Invitation. You're asked to use this method for your discussions. It's probably a wise idea to review the principles of the RESPECT guidelines and the Mutual Invitation Process as the first thing you do at the first session, after you welcome the members of your small group. Remember that you should participate in the discussion too. Often, you'll end up being the last person invited to share.

Building Community: RESPECT

Mutual invitation¹ begins with identifying the Respect Guidelines. This set of guidelines is a behavioral covenant that people are invited to discuss, digest, and affirm. It states what we will *not* do in the small group discussions. These guidelines are intended to create a safe place for people to form groups and to learn how to agree and disagree with each other. The guidelines encourage people to listen, ponder, self-examine, and be sensitive to one another.

¹ Eric H. F. Law, *Inclusion: Making Room for Grace*, (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2000) 64.

They address the fear of people's blaming, debating, and not keeping confidentiality. These are not laws that we enforce but rather they are a description of how we are to relate to each other for the sake of building community.

R= take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others.

E= engage in EMPATHETIC listening.

S= be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles.

P= PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak.

E= EXAMINE your own assumptions

C= keep CONFIDENTIALITY

T= TOLERATE ambiguity because we are *not* here to debate who or what is what is right or wrong.

Mutual Invitation

The Process

1. A question is posed.
2. A criterion is given for who should start first. This can be something as simple as the person who is wearing the most pink, or whose birthday is closest to today's date.
3. The person who starts has a choice:
 - a. they may answer – in a short time period so that everyone else has a chance to share or
 - b. they may pass and not come back or
 - c. they may pass but say that they would like to come back later.
4. Whatever is done that person then invites someone to share by using the words: (Name of other person) I invite you to share.
5. The next person also chooses to share and then invites until all have shared.

Note: Particularly with adults, there is a strong tendency to for others to jump in and ask questions. This practice is called “cross talk”. Cross talk is not allowed until all people have shared.

Class & Reading Schedule

This is the reading schedule for our study. The members of your small group may not have read much of the book at the first meeting. We're asking participants to read the assigned chapters before the Thursday meetings.

<u>Session</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Facilitator</u>
Week 1	6/3/21	7-9p	Intro to Gracism: Chs 1-3	Dr. Anderson, Rev. Spencer, Pastor Leath
Week 2	6/10/21	7-9p	Gracism Sayings: Chs 4- 5	Rev. Spencer & Pastor Leath
Week 4	6/17/21	7-9P	Gracism Sayings: Chs 6- 8	Rev. Spencer & Pastor Leath
Week 5	6/24/21	7-9P	Gracism Sayings: Chs 9- 11	Rev. Spencer & Pastor Leath

Note: The reading schedule can be found on the Gracism page that's located on the Events section of the FPC Moorestown website. Here's a link to the reading schedule and the FAQ's: https://www.fpcmoorestown.org/hp_wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Gracism-FAQs-Rev.-52121.pdf

Week 1: June 3, 2021: Introduction, Chapters 1 – 3

1. Welcome the members of your group. If the participants don't have their full names for their Zoom screen, ask them to rename themselves. It will assist as others learn their names and help when they call on group members.
2. Briefly (3 or 4 minutes) explain Mutual Invitation, including the RESPECT principles and the process of Mutual Invitation. You may need to coach folks through the first time or two. They'll get it quickly.
3. Invite: Tell us your name, where you live, which church you belong to, and one thing you love about your congregation.

4. Ask: What's brought you to this study? What do you hope might happen for you and your congregation by the end?
5. (From chapter 2) Ask: Can you think of a situation where you acted like a gracist—one who sees, hears or pays attention to people on the margins, extending positive ministry and service?
6. (From chapter 1) Ask: Are you aware of your personal "red dot" (whatever makes you feel insecure around others, such as race, gender, age, weight, facial feature, emotional or physical disability)? How do you manage your feelings about it?

Week 2: June 10, 2021: Chapters 4 – 5

1. Welcome back the members of your small group. Thank them for returning.
2. Invite: Share your name, your church and favorite summer food.
3. (From chapter 4) Ask: Within the walls of your church as it is now, who are the marginalized people—who are not "in"? The poor? The less educated? The teenagers? The singles? The divorced? Single mothers? Identify at least two marginalized groups within your church. How can you be an ambassador of reconciliation to that group? How can you educate yourself about them?
4. (From chapter 4) Ask: Who are the people you usually are drawn to lift up? What is it about them that draws you? Are there other important characteristics that you might be excluding but that you should recognize?
5. (From chapter 5) Ask: What biblical examples can you think of where one person in the power position did not embarrass or share someone in a weaker position but rather protected, cared for or shielded that person? [Help: Boaz protects and supports Ruth (See Ruth, chapters 3, 4) Joseph takes Mary as his wife rather than divorcing her (See Matthew 1: 18 – 25)] What inspires you towards the actions of gracism from these stories?

Week 3: June 17, 2021: Chapters 6 – 8

1. Welcome the members of your small group by name. Invite: Share an insight or a gift from our study to date.

2. (From chapter 6) Ask: Why do we struggle with the choices of community verses comfort? What are the benefits of each? What are the downsides of each?
3. (From chapter 6) Ask: “Gracist living doesn’t refuse the good things that life has to offer,” the author say. “It simply refuses to ignore those who aren’t as privileged to enjoy such benefits and is committed to doing something about it.” What are three commitments you can make today that will help you be more of a gracist? Share with the group the commitments you’d like to make.
4. (From chapter 7) Ask: When have you heard someone say something negative about a particular people group? What was your internal reaction? Did you respond to the people present there? If not you, did someone else? Think about and write a proactive response you can use at a future time when someone speaks negatively about a particular people group.

Week 4: June 24, 2021: Chapters 9 – 11

1. Welcome your small group members by name. Invite: what you are you most thankful for from our Gracism study?
2. (From chapter 9) Ask: Reflect upon any encounters you have had with the homeless or poor. What were your initial thoughts and feelings? How do you normally respond to the homeless?
3. (From chapter 9) Ask: How do you want God to minister through you to those who are in need? Can you identify ways that you might be able to position yourself to move in this direction?
4. (From chapter 10) Ask: When it comes to conversations on diversity and race, how do you view or hear whites? If you are a white person, do you feel like you have a voice? Explain. If you are a nonwhite person, do you feel like whites have something to offer when it comes to these types of conversations? Why or why not?
5. (From chapter 2) Ask: The author admits that the exercise of gracism seems too simplistic an answer for the conflicts of race and culture in our world. Yet how could the exercise of gracism at the one-on-one level help the conflicts in your world? How could the exercise of gracism help Moorestown?

6. Be sure to thank your group members for participating. Your group may like to meet together. Go ahead, though make sure the group respects the comfort level of each member in our post-pandemic days.