

## Civility

### **Candle Lighting and Opening Words:**

Definition: What is Civility? "Civility is claiming and caring for one's identity, needs and beliefs without degrading someone else's in the process." ...and it begins with us.

Civility is about more than merely being polite, although being polite is an excellent start. Civility fosters a deep self-awareness, even as it is characterized by true respect for others. Civility requires extremely hard work of staying present even with those with whom we have deep-rooted and perhaps fierce disagreements. It is about constantly being open to hear, to teach and to change. It seeks common ground as a beginning point for dialogue when differences occur, while at the same time recognizes that differences are enriching. It is patience, grace, and strength of character.

*Institute for Civility in Government Co-Founders, Cassandra Dahnke and Thomas Spath.*

### **Check-In:**

**Focus Readings:** *Why Civility Matters:* Excerpt from March 2012, AARP.org/Bulletin

"Whatever happened to civility?" is oft-heard lament, particularity among those of us over 50 who recognize civility's increasing absence in a world changing at warp speed. Technology has forever altered the style, speed and reach of our decidedly less personal communication. Escalating vulgarity, lax standards, sensational media and polarized politics reign. Society today is far different than it was when we were young.

While rudeness is pervasive and rising (one recent report concluded that bad behavior may be the "new normal"), the societal and financial costs of incivility are astronomical-impacting our homes and relationships, schools, economy, health care and government.

Civility is more than polite correctness. Derived from the old French and Latin term for "good citizen," civility enables us to live respectfully in communities; it is the glue that binds our society. It can be the difference between life and death-as, for example, when health care professionals bully subordinates, cover mistakes and create mistrust. It is an essential component of our human sustainability, enabling us not only to survive but thrive.

Reversing the current course of incivility is a challenge for our times. Until a rudeness vaccine is developed, we must dig into our civility tool kit. There are compelling reasons why we should. A life is not defined by a single act, and few of us will ever achieve national acclaim or perform deeds that change the course of history. However, there is "greatness" in treating others with respect, compassion, kindness and generosity. With this we can make a difference in the lives of many.

We all encounter this: people associating their own view with being moral or good, and an opposing one as inherently bad or damaging. To point this out in conversation is a way of shutting down discourse; to suggest that a perspective is in itself bad without querying the reasons behind it is to refuse the opportunity to test your own view, or learn whether and why you are wrong. - Laura Kennedy

People these days who are civil often lack strong convictions, and people with strong religious convictions often are not very civil. What we need is convicted civility. - Martin Marty, Lutheran scholar

### **Questions:**

1. Have you ever been treated in an uncivil manner and, if so, what were your feelings and reaction?
2. Have you ever treated someone in an uncivil manner and, if so, what are your feelings today and how would you handle the situation differently?

3. Do you believe civility has declined and, if so, what factors do you believe have contributed to this decline?
4. What impact do you think civility, as it exists today, will have on the future of America? On the future of the World?
5. Is civility something you pay attention to? Why or why not?
6. High self-awareness is said to be correlated with high levels of civility. Are you a little, somewhat or very self-aware?

### **Likes/Wishes**

### **Closing Words:**

May the nourishment of the earth be yours,  
may the clarity of light be yours,  
may the fluency of the ocean be yours,  
may the protection of the ancestors be yours.  
And so may a slow  
wind work these words  
of love around you,  
an invisible cloak  
to mind your life.

--John O'Donohue, last stanza of Beannacht, from "To Bless the Space Between Us"