



# CATHERINE PROJECT

## *Guidelines for discussion*

The spontaneous discussion of profound texts requires that its participants attend carefully to the conversation. In these discussions we face a constant challenge to be perceptive, thoughtful, and flexible. The following are some guidelines that are conducive to good conversation.

- ⊗ Respect one another. Strive for civility. However, it is not impolite to challenge others: true respect does not entail disingenuous approval.
- ⊗ Be mindful of others. Avoid speaking in a monologue. Attend to those who may wish to speak, especially those hesitant to enter the discussion.
- ⊗ Cultivate your ability to listen well. The conversation and its participants are benefited by the engagement of those who are listening closely.
- ⊗ No question is too simple or elemental. If you're having trouble understanding what someone means, you're unlikely to be alone.
- ⊗ Be willing to doubt what you think you know. Have the courage to be willing to change your opinions.
- ⊗ We are thinking together for ourselves, not just studying the thoughts of others. Help one another to clarify thoughts and assumptions by asking questions of each other.
- ⊗ Cite the text. We all have the text in common. Conversation is deepened by focusing on the text.
- ⊗ When you refer to sources outside the shared reading, including historical or other context, you claim to be an expert at the table. A good conversation relies on sources that all present can evaluate; the text read in common should be central.
- ⊗ It is bad to interrupt, but it is worse to speak so that you need to be interrupted.
- ⊗ Silence isn't a problem; it's a sign that everyone is thinking. Endure it rather than rushing to fill it.
- ⊗ Please disregard any of these rules if they cause you to do something awful.