



Addressing Conflict in your Chapter Meetings: What to do when Group Agreements are Broken

Objective: To maintain a respectful space if group agreements are broken.

Introduction: Group agreements sound good in theory. But whether you're talking about your religious practice or a highly charged issue, it's likely that at some point during a meeting, you or another sister will feel misunderstood or offended. It's important to regularly remind sisters that while they may have very strong opinions about what is "right" and "wrong", beliefs and practices are personal. Our role is to listen to understand each sister's experience, not to suggest that her beliefs or practices are incorrect. Remember, she's not representing her religion, she's representing herself! It's helpful to periodically post and review the group agreements during regular meetings and to always review them before talking about a highly charged issue.

Every chapter and situation are different, but here are **four general strategies** you can use if you notice tension in your chapter meeting or someone explicitly says they're upset:

1. Name what you see
2. Ask for clarification
3. Seek input from others
4. Explore feelings

If you find yourself wondering how to respond, keep these four strategies in mind. And since you may not know when a sister has said something that's offensive to another sister, remember to assume good will! Here are a couple of examples to get you started.

What if...a sister "corrects" another sister, implying that she doesn't know enough about a religious practice to speak about it. Or,

What if... a sister says that everyone should practice her faith in a certain way. For example, "every Jewish sister should keep a kosher home", or "you're not a 'good-enough Muslim' if you don't eat halal meat."

General response: "Remember, we each speak for ourselves and not on behalf of our religious group. Our religious practices may vary widely and part of the joy of inter-religious dialogue is learning about the variety of belief and practice within each religious group. We've committed to 'step up' to share our thoughts and beliefs, and then 'step back' and listen to others. If the sister insists that information is incorrect, you might:

1. **Name what you see:** "It seems like there are different opinions and perspectives about (fill in the blank). Do people think it's possible for both to exist side-side?"

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2. **Seek input from others:** “Does anyone else in the group have information that might shed light on different ways of looking at (fill in the blank)?”
3. **Ask for clarification:** “When you say (fill in the blank), do you mean (fill in the blank)?”
4. **Explore feelings:** “I’m noticing some tension in the room and wondering if anyone else is feeling uncomfortable?” If a sister says something that you feel is judgmental, you might ask a general question: “Has anyone ever felt judged because of her beliefs or practices? What was that like for you?”