



History

Middleham and St. Peter's Episcopal Parish offers the "Big Conversation" (BC) events annually in the belief that communities can benefit from the opportunity to learn about important issues through open and civil dialogue.

The concept began in 2010 when a group of parishioners attended a forum on "Civil Discourse in the Nation" at the Washington National Cathedral. At that time, some national leaders were worried that, as a country and especially in Congress, we had lost our ability to listen and talk civilly with each other about conflicting ideas or issues. The local group came away feeling strongly that the opportunity to have a civil discourse on national issues was just as important at the local level as it was on the national level. They wanted to explore the opportunity for Southern Maryland. Thus began the concept for "The Big Conversation".

The group formed a Big Conversation Committee and began to explore two questions: 1) what does civil discourse look like and how can it be promoted 2) what were the national issues that were important to the population of Southern Maryland.

The Process

Each year the committee first reviews various national issues, before deciding on an issue for that year. Then the committee spends a great deal of time studying the issue. They interview local and national experts and everyday people involved with the issue. They are particularly interested in learning about how the issue impacts the citizens of Southern Maryland and what are the different points of view concerning the issue. Finally, with the help and guidance of the experts, the committee molds what the "Big Conversation" will look like in form and presentation for that year. The Big Conversation has looked different each year as the committee has learned and the subject dictates how it is addressed. This entire process takes the committee between 6-9 months. However, for BC6, the committee decided it needed more time to study and understand the issue of racism. Thus the committee took a year to do its background work.

The topics presented over the seven years are:

- BC 1 2011 – Immigration – The Maryland Dream Act
- BC 2 2012 – Health Care in Southern Maryland
- BC3 2013 – Veteran and their Families – Welcomed or Shunned?
- BC4 2014 - Inequality and Equality
- BC5 2015 – Gun Violence
- BC6 2017 – Racism and Privilege – "I Didn't Know: Exploring Racism and Privilege in Southern Maryland"

Each year the committee's membership changes and grows. The members for BC6 are:

Dr. Nancy Briggs	Rev. David Deaderick	Vicki Rhoades
Rev. Sarah Akes- Cardwell	Malcolm Funn	Rev. David Showers
Diane Davies	Lauretta Grier	Rev. Skip Steiner
Hugh Davies	Richard (Dusty) Rhoades	John Wilson

We are indebted to the many individuals, from all walks of life, who have patiently dialogue with the committee on the different topics. They have been crucial in guiding the committee members into a deeper understanding of the different national issues in the context of the needs of our Southern Maryland community.