

LIVE † JESUS

How to be a Gentle Visitation Voice

PRINCIPLES OF SALESIAN DIALOGUE



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Visitation Salesian Network (VSN) member schools, all Visitation schools in the United States, are rooted in the Roman Catholic faith and strengthened by their shared vision of Salesian Spirituality inspired by the founders of the Visitation, Saint Jane de Chantal and Saint Francis de Sales.

Visitation Philosophy of Education

Visitation schools seek to educate the heart and the mind so that our students become people who bear witness to Christ's love in a world that often seems divided. Inspired by the teachings of Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Jane de Chantal, and our Catholic faith, members of the Visitation community seek to communicate with respect, upholding the dignity of each human person, always seeking to foster inclusive communities that reflect the values of our Visitation tradition.

Saint Francis de Sales taught the Little Virtues—small, daily steps like patience, joyful optimism, humility, and kindness—that draw us closer to God and deepen our relationships. He believed that gentleness and humility come from a person's inner strength. Salesian dialogue helps us practice this inner strength as we listen openly to others, embrace opportunities for growth, and courageously share our perspective while taking action when needed.

The foundational document, *Educating the Mind and Heart in The Visitation Tradition*, "encourages all faculty members to incorporate an awareness of current social and political issues in the classroom" (Goal 5). While the topics brought forward can be difficult, it is the way of Christ, indeed the Salesian way, to engage with each other in a manner that encourages profound humility before God and great gentleness with each other in compassionate conversations.

This guide is created to help Visitation students, faculty, staff, and members of the Visitation community approach difficult conversations with grace, gentle strength, and truth. The acronym "**GRACE**" represents five key principles of Salesian Dialogue, helping us become **Gentle Visitation Voices** and move forward with civility in a world in need of healing. Another Visitation Salesian resource, *Justice Shall Flourish: Changing the World from Within, The Salesian Tradition and Catholic Social Teaching* can be partnered with this booklet to provide a solid background for learning and growing in the tradition of Saints Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal.



PRAY

"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:34-35

CONSIDER

One of the Little Virtues most encouraged by Saint Francis de Sales is **gentle strength**. This virtue invites us to stand firm in our convictions and stay true to our beliefs while finding a way to communicate in a gentle and peaceful manner.

The world today can be a harsh, judgmental, and even a violent place. Many individuals have been cast out from family systems or turned away from community by words or actions that harm them. Saint Francis de Sales was Bishop of Geneva in the time of the Protestant Reformation where religious wars, political upheaval, and persecution marked the landscape. After becoming a priest, Saint Francis was missioned in the Chablais region, preaching God's love for all people.

Saint Francis focused on doing all things through love, never through fear or force. This gentle approach brought many back to the Church in the 1600s and helped ease tensions across the Savoy region, a segment of modern-day France and Switzerland.

REFLECT

When I encounter difficult conversations, how can I recall Saint Francis's gentle approach to be a source of strength in building relationships?

How can I show gentleness of spirit alongside strength of conviction? What challenges do I face in being gentle?

Where have I seen gentleness powerfully at work to transform a situation?

The mark of love of God is the love of our neighbor...we must believe that we are without true love of God if we do not love our neighbors.

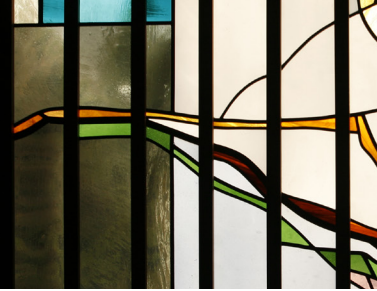
Saint Jane de Chantal

PRACTICE

- Be aware of how my words impact others. Speak to others with kindness, avoiding harsh or accusatory language.
- When discussing polarizing topics, approach disagreements gently. I can strive to remember that I am called to love my neighbors, even those with whom I have differing opinions.

R

Respect:
HONOR EACH
PERSON'S DIGNITY



Awareness:
BE MINDFUL
OF WORDS

A

PRAY

"So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them." Genesis 1:27

CONSIDER

Respect points us toward a profound truth in the Christian faith tradition: every person is created in the image and likeness of God (*imago dei*). This divine imprint makes each individual infinitely precious and worthy of esteem, regardless of personal differences or disagreements. When we fully embrace this understanding, it changes not only the way we think about others, but also how we speak and act toward them, especially during challenging conversations.

Instead of dismissing opinions that diverge from our own or slipping into harmful speech with rash judgments or slander, we are encouraged to adopt a more Christ-like posture—to Live Jesus! This means listening more carefully, seeking to understand the deeper experiences that shape others' viewpoints, and looking for shared values that can serve as common ground. Respect is not passive tolerance, but an active choice to affirm the God-given dignity of every person.

REFLECT

What makes it challenging to see some people as deserving of respect? How do I show respect for another person after a disagreement surfaces?

How does it help to consider another person as made in the image of God?

How can I assume a positive intent on the part of someone I will encounter in dialogue?

Honor God in one another whose temples you have now become. This consists of the true love and honor which we must have for one another, not regarding our sisters in themselves, but in God whom we are to honor in them; for he dwells in us as in his temple.

Saint Jane de Chantal

PRACTICE

- When possible, pause and pray before encountering another person, especially if anticipating a difficult conversation.
- Assume the best of others and their intentions.
- Before responding, take time to consider what I have heard. This time for internal reflection may offer a better perspective for responding in a more respectful manner.

PRAY

"No foul language should come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for needed edification, that it may impart grace to those who hear. All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. [And] be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ." Ephesians 4:29-32

CONSIDER

Awareness invites us to recognize the profound impact of our words on others. Each statement we make can either build a more compassionate community or sow seeds of hurt and division. A hasty word, a careless joke, or an uncharitable comment can leave lasting wounds, erode trust, and diminish fellowship.

As we honor the God-given dignity in every person, we are called to be mindful of the impact of slander, gossip, or rash judgments, and remember that words can either heal or harm.

Saints Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal urge us to speak not only with kind words, but from the fullness of our hearts, infused with genuine love.

REFLECT

When someone has used words in anger, frustration or sarcasm that hurt me, how did I feel? Can I find a way to forgive this person?

How can my emotions influence my ability to participate in fruitful conversations?

How does my personal experience influence my ability to listen to another's statements?

We should have not only kind words for our neighbor but also the whole heart, that is, the whole interior of our soul.

Saint Francis de Sales

PRACTICE

- Before uttering words that might wound, belittle, or misrepresent, pause and consider, "Will this bring light or darkness into someone's life? Will it uplift or tear down?"
- Is there someone whom I have hurt by my words, intentionally or unintentionally, that I need to reconcile with and apologize to?



Clarity: SEEK TRUTH IN DIALOGUE



Encounter: LISTEN AND LEARN



PRAY

“Teach me, LORD, your way that I may walk in your truth, single-hearted and revering your name.”

Psalm 86:11

CONSIDER

The writings of the Visitation founding saints are a compass for how to integrate a love of truth with heart-to-heart relationships. One of the gifts of growing in faith is greater **clarity** about who we are and what we believe. We can have firmness of mind and still possess curiosity and openness to others’ ideas and opinions. Understanding that all our actions, beliefs and words reflect our love of God, we can seek first to know and then to witness His truth through kindness, respect, and cordiality.

Saint Francis suggests many times in his writing to follow the Little Virtue of simplicity and use words that are “both frank and honest,” while spoken in charity.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church encourages that “conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened. A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator” (CCC, 1783).

REFLECT

How can I determine the integrity of the sources from which I get news and information?

What are challenges to speaking the truth, particularly with people in authority?

The Little Virtue of simplicity is to have no other aim in all our actions but the one desire of pleasing God. How is this posture productive in dialogue?

Do I invite the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in my discernment journey?

Truth is the object of our understanding, which consequently has all its content in discovering and knowing the truth of things; and according as truths are more excellent, so the understanding applies itself with more delight and attention to the consideration of them.

Saint Francis de Sales

PRACTICE

- Strive for clarity in both understanding and expressing views.
- Do research, seek reliable sources, and engage in dialogue with an open heart, ready to learn from others while remaining grounded in truth.

PRAY

“Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of a person does not produce the righteousness of God.”

James 1:19-20

CONSIDER

The biblical mystery of the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth is of primary importance in what it means to understand a true **encounter** with Salesian Spirituality. Blessed Mary found her purpose in deep listening with openness to learn God’s beautiful plan. She went in haste to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, at a particularly difficult time for each of them. At first glance, these women were so seemingly different because of their stages of life. Yet, the openness of Mary’s service to Elizabeth marks this encounter as they literally give and receive Christ.

When encountering others, Saints Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal sought to listen with an open mind and heart so that authentic dialogue and mutual learning might develop.

Jesus often showed His first act of love in His posture of deep listening. Keen listening requires that we minimize distractions so we can be prepared to fully receive and have complete attentiveness to another. This also requires that we trust in the goodness of others’ intentions.

REFLECT

How can I limit distractions so as to be fully present to someone, in physical posture and mindful attention?

What preconceived notions might I bring to a conversation?

How am I willing to truly hear and understand someone else’s perspective?

We offend our neighbor, or rather God in our neighbor, when we speak unreasonably... strive then to avoid all words of hearsay and disunion, I beseech you with all my heart.

Saint Jane de Chantal

PRACTICE

- Remain awake and alert to what the Holy Spirit might be saying through others.
- Listen first, ask thoughtful questions, and respond with empathy.
- When disagreements arise, lean into the conversation rather than avoid it. Work together to find creative solutions.



Live Jesus

Live, Jesus, Live...
so live in me

That all I do
be done by thee.

And grant that
all I think and say

May be thy thoughts
and words today.



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