

GRACE Conversation Preparation Pro Forma

How we hold difficult conversations well

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Before the conversation

What is the situation I need to address - the “Why” of having the conversation in the first place?

G — Get ready by getting calm

What might be triggering my stress or defensiveness here? What do I need to do to arrive calm and grounded? What is my intention for this conversation?

R — Respect the person, challenge the problem

How can I clearly separate the person from the issue? What dignity or value do I want to communicate to them? What is the problem we need to look at together?

A — Ask and listen to understand

What do I need to understand about their experience? What assumptions might I be holding lightly? What would good listening look like here?

C — Check we mean the same thing

What words or ideas might we define differently? What outcome words need clarifying (e.g. “fair”, “possible”, “resolved”)? How will I check shared understanding?

E — Explore options, agree the next step

What small, realistic options might exist? What would “better” look like in the short term? What clear next step would help us leave with clarity?

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Example 1

Before the conversation

What is the situation I need to address - the “Why” of having the conversation in the first place?

My workload has become unsustainable. A project I'm leading is valuable but continuing it now risks burnout and diminished pastoral care.

G — Get ready by getting calm

What might be triggering my stress or defensiveness here? What do I need to do to arrive calm and grounded? What is my intention for this conversation?

*I notice anxiety about being seen as failing or not coping.
I will pause, breathe, and remind myself this is about capacity, not worth. My intention is clarity and sustainability. I want to be clear and focus on being able to do long-term ministry well, rather than become overwhelmed by this chapter of it.*

R — Respect the person, challenge the problem

How can I clearly separate the person from the issue? What dignity or value do I want to communicate to them? What is the problem we need to look at together?

I want to honour the archdeacon's oversight role. The problem is workload volume and timing, not commitment or ability. I will keep the focus on sustainability, not unhelpful dead-ends such as permission-seeking, role comparison or diminishing phrases such as “Everybody's busy.”

A — Ask and listen to understand

What do I need to understand about their experience? What assumptions might I be holding lightly? What would good listening look like here?

*I want to understand diocesan pressures and priorities.
I will listen for constraints I may not see.
I will avoid jumping to solutions too early.*

C — Check we mean the same thing

What words or ideas might we define differently? What outcome words need clarifying (e.g. “fair”, “possible”, “resolved”)? How will I check shared understanding?

*We may mean different things by “pause”, “delay”, or “essential”.
I will check what “shelving” looks like in practice and for how long.*

E — Explore options, agree the next step

What small, realistic options might exist? What would “better” look like in the short term? What clear next step would help us leave with clarity?

Options may include pausing, sharing leadership, or rescoping. A clear next step might be a 3 month pause with review. We will agree how this is communicated and revisited.

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Example 2

Before the conversation

What is the situation I need to address - the “Why” of having the conversation in the first place?

A parishioner is angry and distressed that a close family friend cannot easily be buried in the churchyard due to residency rules.

G — Get ready by getting calm

What might be triggering my stress or defensiveness here? What do I need to do to arrive calm and grounded? What is my intention for this conversation?

*I expect strong emotion and possible accusation.
I will slow my breathing and remind myself this is about grief, not attack.
My intention is compassion and clarity.*

R — Respect the person, challenge the problem

How can I clearly separate the person from the issue? What dignity or value do I want to communicate to them? What is the problem we need to look at together?

*I will acknowledge the depth of loss and relationship.
The problem is the churchyard regulations, not their love or loyalty.
I will avoid defending rules before listening.*

A — Ask and listen to understand

What do I need to understand about their experience? What assumptions might I be holding lightly? What would good listening look like here?

*I want to understand who this person was and why this matters so deeply.
I will listen without interrupting or correcting.
I will allow space for emotion before explanation.*

C — Check we mean the same thing

What words or ideas might we define differently? What outcome words need clarifying (e.g. “fair”, “possible”, “resolved”)? How will I check shared understanding?

*Words like “allowed”, “fair”, and “church family” may carry weight.
I will check what outcome they are hoping for, not assume.*

E — Explore options, agree the next step

What small, realistic options might exist? What would “better” look like in the short term? What clear next step would help us leave with clarity?

Options may include memorials, alternative burial locations, or petitions. A next step might be checking diocesan guidance together. We will agree what I will explore and when I will come back to them.