

## **Creating a Culture of Trust: Rules of Ethical Engagement and Direct Address in ACT**

Douglas W. Schoeninger, Ph.D. and Joseph Scerbo, S.A., Ph.D.

Following are principles for engaging each other with mutual consideration, especially, but not exclusively, when disagreements arise. These principles, of course, are not complete and everyone's input is needed. This document and the understandings pointed to will always be in development. Such is the nature of our attempts to find ways of understanding and speaking about how we want to relate to each other.

In the relational ethics work that I (Doug) have been doing with the Dialogue Group (a group meeting to work on applications of relational ethics), we have been working to call forth "direct address" in situations where persons feel the need or desire to "confront", recognizing that "confrontation" is the word commonly used these days for "telling the other directly how I am responding, what I think, etc." The reason for this refocusing is that the word confrontation seems to connote "against the other" while direct address seems to connote "across to the other", although the dictionary definitions are somewhat equivalent.

The relational ethic of direct address (or one might say of the human covenant) requires that all parties to a dialogue both speak their side and "imagine the Real", the sides of the others whom they are addressing (the other persons' realities in their contexts - Martin Buber's concept). The others whom one is addressing are always owed consideration, that they are persons living and struggling in their particular contexts which include their legacies, as well, which of course one may know little about. In ACT we can commit to intending and practicing direct address including imagining the good intentions in each others' actions, especially with those with whom we may disagree or need to address with a corrective.

Especially when we address each other with differences or disagreements, we could commit to each imagining and communicating to each other the awareness that we are each in our own way trying to do good for ACT in whatever we have done or said, with whatever limitations our doing and speaking manifests and whatever other motives are at play as well. For example, if someone in leadership does something that one finds offensive or seems to violate an agreement or ignore an agreed upon procedure, in sharing one's displeasure with the other, one would also assume that the other had his/her own good reasons for doing what he/she did, given the context in which he/she is working and his/her way of seeing things. One would express one's concerns and ask for the other's side including what made this a necessary or beneficial option from his/her point of view.

To expand the context of this discussion, we could extend to ourselves and others the grace of assuming that when any of us promote certain ideas or vision or procedures that we are not simply trying to get our own way and making a power play, but rather are trying to forward what we think is faithful to God and most faithful to the vision and mission given to ACT. Further, if someone is excluded from a particular discussion whom one ought to have included, then one would like to be made aware of that without the assumption that one is consciously manipulating

by exclusion.

In the past we have heard people and their ideas reduced to impressions of narrow self interest or in some other way discounted, "can't trust him because", "she's just \_\_\_\_\_", "what's this, the old boys club?", "that's your Protestant position", "he discerns, she doesn't". We are sure that we all find ourselves doing this kind of reducing of others and their positions too often.

We would like ACT to join together to help each other open up our perceptions of each other, credit each others good intentions, ask for each others views and guard against judgmental, prejudicial categories.

As a help to further defining the intentions and behaviors that express *direct address* and *ethical engagement*, we have created the following list. These can serve as a vehicle for discussion and as guidelines for organizational processes and members' responses to each other.

#### Aspects of ethical engagement within ACT

A willingness and commitment of each member,

1. To actively pursue his/her own prayer life.
2. To respect and search out the integrity of each other with humility not assuming full knowledge of the others' motives or imputing primarily self-serving, power seeking motives to the others' words and deeds.
3. To acknowledge and respect that there probably always will be dissenting views;
4. To search for merit in views that differ from one's own and good intentions in persons whose views differ from one's own;
5. To imagine the Real for the other, their side in their context, their concerns from their perspective;
6. To nurture in self and others a spirit of consideration for all points of view;
7. To accept that entitlement to fair consideration requires due consideration of others;
8. To continue to express one's view effectively and to listen attentively to the views of the others, directly addressing others with differing views;
9. To invest in the good of the whole organization at any particular time;
10. To suffer the cost of time in finding ways to better any given situation;
11. To keep the Vision, Mission and Purposes of ACT as governing ideas informing one's proposals and views;
11. To be willing to have ones views written down so that others may view the complexity of the issues the organization faces;
12. To take all listed pro's and cons to a time of discernment personally and/or communally;
13. To being open to everyone having some of the wisdom and no one having all of the wisdom;
14. To support members exercising appropriate delegated authority in implementing plans and decisions.