



2020

VITAL CONVERSATIONS

STUDY GUIDE

In 2020, Interfaith Ministries wanted to respond to the murder of George Floyd through creating opportunities for people to learn more about the people and projects in our community seeking to make our world a more just one. One way we chose to do this work was by leaning into our mission of “dialogue, collaboration, and service” and “the strength of shared beliefs” through the creation of the “Vital Conversations” series. Because of the incredible variety of essential work that we do in the community with Meals on Wheels, Refugee Services, Volunteer Houston, and Interfaith Relations & Community Partnerships, we have a unique platform from which we can invite a wide variety of speakers and share their messages with the larger community.

THE THREE AMIGOS

The series began in June 2020 with a dialogue with the “Three Amigos:” Archbishop Joseph A. Fiorenza, The Rev. William A. Lawson, and Rabbi Samuel E. Karff. Interfaith Ministries often turns to these three leaders for their counsel, wisdom, and moral guidance. This dialogue was the last time that these three men, friends for over 50 years, were formally together before Rabbi Karff died in August 2020.

Our overall goal of the project is to host conversations that both highlight key issues in our community and the organizations that are doing the work to fight against the forces of systemic racism and injustice. We try to find “vital people doing vital work.” And you’ll see from our 2020 interviews that our topics and people were varied and fascinating; our five Vital Conversations of 2020 have over 4,000 views on both Facebook and YouTube.

We’ve developed study guides so that you can use these five videos, each about an hour long, as resources for dialogue in your community. The team at Interfaith Ministries hopes this study guide will make these videos useful far beyond their original recording. We think that these guides could be of interest for:

- Faith community study groups
- Middle, high school, and college students
- Corporate employee resource groups
- Non-profits seeking continuing education opportunities
- Anyone looking to think more critically about the needs of the Greater Houston community.

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS & CONTRIBUTORS

We are grateful to our Series Sponsor, Bridgeway Capital Management, as well as to the Conversation Sponsor with the Houston Education Research Consortium, CITGO Petroleum. Thank you as well to our IRCP Committee and members of the Multi-Faith Council, particularly Rabbi David Lyon, Rev. Tamla Wilson, Rabbi Dan Gordon, and the Rev. Dr. Becky Edmiston-Lange, for contributing to this study guide.

LAUNCH VIDEO: “FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE, EQUALITY, AND RESPECT” FEATURING THE “THREE AMIGOS”

Featuring Archbishop Joseph A. Fiorenza, Rabbi Samuel E. Karff, and Rev. William A. Lawson



WATCH HERE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the value of friendship/relationship?
- Similar to Rabbi Karff and Archbishop Fiorenza coming to that first meeting, or Archbishop Fiorenza marching in Selma, think of a time that you “showed up” for others, or that someone “showed up” for you. Why was it important?
- Who are your heroes? Why are heroes important?
- Rabbi Karff talks about our individual stories, the “confines” of our communities, and being part of a larger story. How much do you know about Houston’s civil rights story?
- Where have “we” made progress? Where does progress need to be made? Please be as specific as possible.
- IMGH often relies on the “Three Amigos” because of their lived commitment to work across religious lines. Where do you see religion pulling people apart? Where do you see religion bringing people together?
- Rev. Lawson notes that it’s not just about police brutality, but about outrage against an unjust system that needs to be changed. What are other components of our country that need changing?
- Rabbi Karff shared about how, at a young age, the dignity of people was important to him, and also finding the best ways to fight for people’s dignity. When did you first understand the importance of human dignity, and that fighting for and with those whose dignity is being challenged was important?
- What role do you see people of faith and faith communities in working to fight racism?
- This video was released June 2020. Think about the point in time that you are viewing this video; what has changed between then and when you are viewing this video?
- Thinking about Rabbi Karff’s comments on education: who taught you about the values of caring for others?

WATCH HERE:

[www.youtube.com/
watch?v=8hTi-DsF70Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hTi-DsF70Q)

VIDEO 2: “THE IMPORTANCE OF ALLYSHIP”



WATCH HERE

Featuring the Rev. Dr. Cleve Tinsley and the Rev. Dr. Matthew Russell, Project Curate

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Similar to the “Three Amigos,” Project Curate also emerged not only out of a need but also expanded out of a friendship. How is the work based out of their friendship similar to the friendship and work of the Three Amigos?
- “Building bridges across divides.” What does it mean to build bridges? What are the divides that you see needing the strongest bridges?
- Both of our guests speak about the importance of churches, of the work of theologically informed communities (not just churches) to work as bridge-builders. Rev. Tinsley also says that Rev. Russell “yielded to something larger than him.” Later in the dialogue, Rev. Russell uses words such as “social transformation,” “prophetic,” and “kenosis.” Some of these terms are deeply Christian, but not unique to Christianity. Later in the dialogue, they attended to specifically how religion can both promote and hinder the work of allyship. What is within your own faith/spiritual tradition that speaks to this bridge-building and transformation?
- “We need to listen.” In your own experience, think about a time when you felt truly “heard.” Being specific, what was happening in the conversation that demonstrated the other person was really listening to you?
- What does allyship mean to you? And, in the context of this Vital Conversation: what does allyship in fighting anti-Black racism mean to you?
- Both of our guests also offer some important critiques as well as affiliated terms for allyship. Take a moment to discuss these critiques.
- Do you consider yourself an ally? Do any of the impediments discussed resonate with you? Reflect in particular about the danger of self-identifying vs. being invited into the work.
- Think about the time between your watching of this video and July 2020. What is the “follow-up” you think needs to happen after the “pretty words” are spoken?
- What gives you hope?
- The dialogue concludes with conversation about practical approaches; many stories were shared. What, for you, has worked most effectively in being a bridge-builder, a community-builder, an “ally?”

www.projectcurate.org

WATCH HERE:

[www.youtube.com/
watch?v=d8RHhO7pjZg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8RHhO7pjZg)

VIDEO 3: “YOUNG LEADERS REINVENTING SOCIAL CHANGE”

Featuring Sam Dike, Trishna Narula, Victoria Hart, and Raj Salhotra



WATCH HERE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is your experience of community in Houston/the Greater Houston area/wherever you are?
 - One of our speakers described Houston's diversity as a strength. What is your definition of "diversity?" In what ways can a diverse community be a strength? In what ways can a diverse community encounter conflict?
 - In this conversation we learned a great deal about our speakers' backgrounds. In what ways have your background and histories influenced your own personal values?
 - A question that was asked of the speakers is an important one for you to consider: "What do you see as the greatest obstacles to achieving equity and justice in our community?" Reflect on the responses and formulate your own response referring to at least two observations from the speakers.
 - Another question was about the use of technology and social media in engagement. What is one way that social media has benefitted your social engagement? What is one way that social media and technology has been a detriment to engagement? What are your thoughts about each person on social media being a "micro-influencer?" What are your thoughts of people having conversations virtually that are different than conversation people are willing to have face-to-face?
 - These four young leaders spoke a great deal about change, and how change happens. Think about an experience in your own life when you were part of important change, even if the change was small. What made that change happen?
 - Look up a definition of empathy. Why is empathy so important?
 - One of the major themes of this Vital Conversation is the differences between generations. Review at least one of the following websites:
 - www.pewresearch.org/topics/generations-and-age/
 - www.beresfordresearch.com/age-range-by-generation/
 - www.purdueglobal.edu/education-partnerships/generational-workforce-differences-infographic/
- What is one way you think that generational differences create conflict? What is one way you think that these differences could be positive in solving problems?

WATCH HERE:

[www.youtube.com/
watch?v=uSwXRYBHibs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSwXRYBHibs)

VIDEO 4: “TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES, TRANSFORMING LIVES”

Featuring Kathy Payton, President & CEO; Zarana Sanghani, Chief Program Officer
Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation, Center for Urban Transformation



WATCH HERE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Much of the opening introduction is also an introduction to systemic issues in Houston. Take some time and learn more about how highways built in Houston cut through neighborhoods, particularly communities of color. Learn more about the history of Houston housing policies that in particular have discriminated against communities of color. Learn more about the Center's work with juvenile justice diversion and the disparities across race regarding incarceration. Learn more about what restorative justice is.
- Kathy Payton stated that the core purpose of the Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation is "Creating a Community of Choice." What does "choice" mean in relation to the Corporation's work? Why do you think choice is so important to the people of the Fifth Ward?
- What did you find was the most significant challenge facing our guests?
- The speakers referred to the way in which the development of highways "sliced and diced" the Fifth Ward. The routing of interstates is but one example of lessons that contributed to the disintegration of communities of color. What other policy decisions and demographic forces do you know of that have contributed to decline in urban neighborhoods?
- Do an internet search about your neighborhood or zip code. Learn more about its history and its demographics. Did it always "look" like it does now? Learn more about average home prices, businesses, and schools. Learn if it is part of a super-neighborhood and if it has a neighborhood association. Find out who your government representatives are at the local, regional, state, and national level.
- Now, choose another neighborhood that is in another part of Houston and do the same research. Learn more about another neighborhood (or even more!) and its history. The Kinder Institute was referred to: Please see <https://kinder.rice.edu/kinder-houston-area-survey> to learn more about overall trends in the greater Houston area.
- Sometimes needs are just around the corner. Continue your search and learn more about service agencies in your neighborhood or zip code. It may be affiliated with a faith community or a free-standing non-profit. What organizations are working in your area? What are the needs in your area? How could you help within your own neighborhood? How could you get more involved in your neighborhood?
- Imagine creating a non-profit; what need would you meet and how would you address an unmet need?

WATCH HERE:

[www.youtube.com/
watch?v=k352_sOMo6w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k352_sOMo6w)

VIDEO 5: “EDUCATION AND EQUITY”

Featuring Dr. Ruth Lopez Turley, Houston Education Research Consortium Director; Dr. Erin Baumgartner, HERC Associate Director of HISD Research and Relations; Dr. Dan Potter, HERC Associate Director of Regional Research



WATCH HERE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Think about your own experiences with education. How has education made a difference in your life? What do you wish was different about your educational experience?
- Using the internet, explore how, in particular, public schools in Texas are funded. See <https://tea.texas.gov/finance-and-grants/state-funding> and <https://www.texastribune.org/2019/02/15/texas-school-funding-how-it-works/> as examples. What are the strengths and weaknesses to the Texas system?
- What do you think are the effects of a family that moves a great deal (and thus potentially moves schools or school districts) on a student's learning?
- Even if you don't know a lot about education, you all have some sort of experience in an education system. What, in your mind, would be the elements of an equitable education? If education was going to be a way of giving individuals a way of learning, of going to college or some sort of post high school training, of being ready to compete in the future employment market, what do you think should be part of all students' educational experiences, up through 12th grade?
- As this dialogue was recorded during COVID, remote learning was commonplace throughout the pandemic. Dr. Potter mentioned many issues about the “digital divide” and student engagement along with many issues about students not needing to enroll in school due to familial pressures due to COVID. What were the major effects of COVID on education?
- What did you hear Dr. Turley say about the pressing short-term and long-term needs? Which one do you think are the highest priority?
- 45% of Black and Hispanic students attend high-poverty schools (schools with 75% of the student families below the poverty line) compared to 8% of white students. Why do you think that so many educational disparities affect poor communities as well as communities of color? What are the overall social forces that allow this to happen? What are the potential long-term effects of this reality?
- What can you do to help address these educational inequities? What were the ideas that the HERC team offered? Which solutions do you think you could be a part of?

ALSO SEE:

<https://www.uh.edu/education/research/institutes-centers/erc/>
<https://www.prounitas.org>
<https://www.cishouston.org/>
<https://goodreasonhouston.org/>
<https://lovinghouston.net/>
<https://herc.rice.edu>

WATCH HERE:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_R8qTgrlE

2020 VITAL CONVERSATIONS STUDY GUIDE

FEEDBACK FORM

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Date: _____ Contact Email: _____

Contact Phone: _____

Which program did you watch?

- ☐ Video 1: *Fighting for Justice, Equality, and Respect*
- ☐ Video 2: *The Importance of Allyship*
- ☐ Video 3: *Young Leaders Reinventing Social Change*
- ☐ Video 4: *Transforming Communities, Transforming Lives*
- ☐ Video 5: *Education and Equity*

How did you use the video? _____

In what setting was it shared? _____

What was your group's reaction to the video? _____

How were the dialogue discussion questions helpful? _____

What did your group learn from the discussion? _____

Please list anything you would like to share with us. _____

How many people were in your group (class size, etc.)? _____

What were some of the comments shared? _____

**ONLINE
FEEDBACK FORM:**

If you would like to complete and submit this feedback online, visit:
www.imgh.org/vital-conversations-with-our-community

Thank you for taking the time to engage in the Vital Conversations Study Guide! Please submit your completed feedback form to gphillips@img.org

OUR MISSION

Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston (IM) brings people of diverse faith traditions together for dialogue, collaboration, and service, as a demonstration of our shared beliefs.

OUR VISION

IM envisions a community working and acting together in response to the needs of a Greater Houston to create a more respectful, connected, and caring society.

CONTACT US

For more information about the educational programs and services we provide to support a greater understanding of our diverse community please contact the Department of Interfaith Relations and Community Partnerships at Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston.

Please visit imgh.org/donate/interfaith to support the work of Interfaith Relations & Community Partnerships.



Department of Interfaith Relations and Community Partnerships
3303 Main Street, Houston, TX 77002
713-533-4926

For more information, contact **Gevetta Phillips** at gphillips@imgh.org or
visit our website at www.imgh.org/ircp/services

The Strength of Shared Beliefs