

House Group based

Conversation and Cuisine

By Dennis McCallum & Doug Patch

What is Conversation and Cuisine? C&C is an outreach ministry format pioneered by Xenos Christian Fellowship in <http://www.xenos.org/ministries/justforfun/cc1.htm>. The following material is excerpted from training materials developed by Xenos by their ministry staff.

“Judgmental,” “dogmatic” and “narrow-minded” are common adjectives applied to Christians by non-Christians. Sadly, they are too often deserved. Conversation and Cuisine (C&C) is an accredited Xenos ministry team committed to providing an environment that can go a long way in reversing this perspective.

Exquisite food and enjoyable, stimulating discussion describes the evening in a nutshell. C&C was formed out of the conviction and burden that adults today are becoming harder to engage in substantive conversation and relationships. This might be due to busy lifestyles, material pursuits that take priority over spiritual inquiry, or perhaps negative experiences with the church or Christians in the past.

Yet, we know that these same adults gratefully accept God's message when they get their questions answered and where they see Christians living out community as God defines it in his word. They see God's perspective of marriage and parenting relationships, work relationships, and friendships and realize that they have always wanted these. Sometimes though, the difficulty is helping them look past their barriers and honestly investigate the truth claims of Christianity.

This is where C&C fits in. What God depicts in his word is Christians who respectfully listen to many views, though not necessarily agreeing, who are hospitable and other-centered, and in general who are able to have and host a great time! That certainly describes Jesus Christ's presence at various parties narrated in scripture. This demeanor would go a long way in distinguishing us from possible past negative experiences with Christians who may have pounded God's message without dialoguing respectfully about different views. The C&C discussion is therefore purposefully NOT oriented toward the Christian worldview and purposefully most interested in drawing out and listening to all views. The facilitator has invested considerable time into preparing for just such a discussion. if you have more questions,

“Why a dinner-discussion party?”

We believe the C&C event provides a warm environment to invite non-Christian friends where they can enjoy fine and often unique food. The discussion which follows is often more stimulating and meaningful than is typical in today's relationships. This is a perfect opportunity for them to begin to experience what it is like to be around people committed to God's love and hopefully develop a more trusting friendship with the home group member who invited them. This trust provides a context in which future discussions about spiritual matters take place; our friend knows that although we might disagree with their view, we are not judging them. And they are more likely to be intellectually honest in their pursuit of *why* we believe what we believe, therefore seeing that we are not “narrow-minded” but actually have a substantial basis of evidence for believing what we do. This might even strike them in contrast to their own beliefs and their evidence for them.

“What kind of dinner party would you like to go to if invited?”

If there is something special about the evening, it would make it more attractive. If the food was going to be exotic and unusual, this would be intriguing; high quality standards are important. We stay away from commonplace or simple menus for this reason. A discussion after dinner on an interesting topic might add to the evening. Knowing the atmosphere will be relaxed and the conversation would be planned over a lively topic of public interest would appeal to some as well. A Conversation and Cuisine event normally involves a

weekend-evening dinner party where home group members invite their non-Christian friends and family to socialize, dine and join in a discussion afterward. Naturally there is no cost to the guest.

A facilitator is present to lead a discussion on an interesting, yet not highly controversial topic. Sometimes the facilitator is from that home group, often not. Regardless, they have researched and are knowledgeable about the topic. They will help keep the discussion moving forward, bring to light facts that are interesting to everyone, and hopefully have helped demonstrate that Christians can be respectful of all views.

One "touch" that helps set the evening apart is the written invitation that is designed and used. This visually communicates the evening is worth coming to, and describes the food and discussion succinctly, yet attractively. **We should ALWAYS verbalize to our guest as we invite them, that "our home Bible study hosts the event, although the evening is not in the least a Bible study; all views are welcomed."** Not acknowledging the connection between the C&C and your home group would be a "bait & switch."

Menus, facilitators and invitation designs are shared between the various home groups who host C&Cs. This significantly minimizes "reinventing the wheel" and even more, adds to the quality and enjoyment of events as we share ideas.

"How often does a home group host a Conversation & Cuisine?"

Every three or four months is typical. The reason for the infrequent schedule is to make it possible for parents to get a baby sitter without feeling they are neglecting their children. Most adults will be willing to get a baby sitter if the events are only once per quarter. Consequently, we have the adults' full attention and their entire night available. (Contrast this to evenings when guests bring their children and spend the whole evening preoccupied with them.)

This ministry began in 1992 for the reasons described at the beginning of this document. Churchwide, home groups are hosting 40-75 events per year since then. It is fairly common to see a dozen guests or more at an event and they typically are very appreciative of the hospitality and openness during the discussion. It is not unusual to hear that their exposure to Christians in this enjoyable, relaxed and non-threatening environment enabled them, in the weeks and months following, to engage their Christian friend in more spiritually oriented discussions and to ask them questions.

Sample Topics

Alternative Medicine

People today want more control over their health than ever before. We want to not only avoid illness, but also extend our lifespan. But it seems that modern medicine can not always get the job done for us. As a result, interest and research into alternative forms of medicine, both physical and spiritual are growing daily.

[Handout in PDF format.](#)

Animal Rights and Human Responsibility

Do animals have rights? If so, what are they? If not, why not? The animal rights movement is radical and according to many, extreme. The movement raises fascinating questions about cruelty, the nature of life, and whether humans should be viewed as any different than other species. If so, why?

Art and Beauty

Art is arguably one of the best ways to understand what is happening in the culture. The capacity to appreciate beauty is transcendent and yet "tastes" are relative and very personal. Our attitudes and values about beauty often correspond to our views about the nature of truth. What is it that drives humans to create, yet not the animals?

Challenges Facing America's Youth

The last ten years have seen alarming trends amongst America's youth. Many experts agree that addressing growing levels of violence and despair among our teenage population should be our highest priority. However, the difficulty consists in developing consensus as to the sources and solutions to these complicated issues.

Guest facilitator, Tim Lipovsky, has been studying these trends and will lead a discussion that will prove challenging, enlightening, and motivating.

Cloning

Now that sheep have been cloned, will humans be next? What are the ethical and legal implications of our ability to clone?

[Handout in PDF format.](#)

Commitment and Relationships

Recent studies show that a lifelong committed relationship is considered a top priority by an overwhelming number of people living in Western culture. And yet, most of those surveyed are very pessimistic about maintaining their own relationships due to the perceived constraints placed on the individual by those same commitments. Is the obvious need for commitment incompatible with the value we place on individualism in our culture? Guest facilitator, Tim Lipovsky, will lead us in this thought provoking discussion.

Dying to be Well

What is health anyway? When is enough, enough? Is wellness a purely physiological process? Dave Merker, D.D.S., will lead our discussion as we think through the wellness movement. We'll survey some modern and ancient views on these and related questions.

Evolution and Biblical Christianity

Though reportedly in direct opposition, could it be possible that they are both true? Or is biblical Christianity even believable in light of the scientific evidence that has been found? What if these two do contradict each other? What would the implication be to my life? Or does any of it matter?

Fatherhood in the New Millenium

Jim Leffel, MA and Adjunct Professor of Philosophy will lead us in a discussion on "Fatherhood in the New Millenium." We will explore such questions as: Why has so much public and political attention been given to fatherhood? What does it mean to be a dad in a rapidly changing culture?

Forgiveness in the Age of Rage

One authority says, "A particularly pernicious myth is that 'healing requires forgiveness' of the abuser. Victims lose some percentage of capacity and that capacity remains lost so long as the victim is stuck in the cycle of 'understanding and forgiveness'." Another says, "I will not live with purpose and joy unless I love. I will not be able to love unless I forgive." Which of these is right? Author and lecturer, Dennis McCallum, will be our facilitator as we exchange views on this confusing but interesting subject.

Forgiveness in Relationships

Why should I forgive? Isn't that a sign of weakness? Won't it leave me open to be victimized again? I wish I could "let things go" but I can't. Should we only forgive when the person wants us to forgive them or would it be better to forgive unconditionally?

Guilt & Shame

Why do I feel guilty? Why do I think something is wrong with me? Are these feelings good or harmful? What should I do about them? We will survey some modern and ancient views on these and related questions.

In the Eye of the Beholder (Art & Beauty)

Have society's ideas about beauty changed? Does art imitate life or does life imitate art? Where do we draw the line between art and obscenity? How do we determine what is beautiful? And why do humans have the capacity to appreciate beauty?

Internet and Relationships

How is the Internet affecting our culture and the way we form relationships?

Do you use voice mail or e-mail to avoid people? Is the Internet the place to find a date? Are we closer as members of society or are we drifting farther apart as a result of the Internet?

Jack Kevorkian: Man of Mercy or Doctor of Death?

More and more people seem to view assistance in suicide or active euthanasia as a legitimate way to deal with pain, suffering or terminal illness. Why are more people coming to this conclusion? Many view assisted suicide as an act of mercy. Why do others disagree? What would be the possible implications of making it legal for physicians (or others) to directly cause people's death? When terminally ill people request help in suicide, is death really what they need? Is this desire to die significantly different from a rejected lover's desire to die or from suicide due to depression? If so, why is it different? Rather than legalizing assisted suicide, are there other things the health care system could change to address the perceived need for assisted suicide?

[Handout in PDF format](#)

Love

What is love, and how can we keep ourselves in it? Is it a fleeting feeling, or can it be sustained? Why can't we have satisfying, lasting love relationships?

Men and Women

What is gender? Are there differences between men and women that go beyond the physical? Is it possible to generalize at all? Should we focus only on sameness between sexes, or is there value in recognizing difference?

Money

Why do we love it so much? Join us in a discussion of the widespread materialism of our American culture as we question the emphasis and value we place on financial security and comfort.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a movement designed to facilitate awareness and appreciation of diverse cultures. In some circles, it teaches that all cultures should be empowered to preserve, unchanged, their unique cultural reality. What impact has Multiculturalism had on society so far? What other areas of society have been effected? Where is the movement headed?

Parenting: Does it Really Matter?

Why do kids turn out the way they do? How much of it is parenting? How have our parents affected us? This issue impacts all of us, parents and non-parents alike, so come and discuss the diverse and contradictory views on this question: "Do parents matter?"

Self Esteem

We all need it — but where do we get it? Do we determine our own self-esteem, or is it determined for us? Does our self-esteem determine our performance, or does our performance determine our self-esteem?

Simplify Your Life

Stressed out?! We'll look at what social scientists, popular authors, and the Bible have to say about managing our hectic schedules, reducing clutter and living with more meaning, depth, and purpose. Does your life need to be simplified? Take this short quiz.

I'm too busy right now to take this quiz. T/F

My house is overflowing with things I don't need and can't keep track of. T/F

My to-do list is longer than one page. T/F

I can't find my to-do list! T/F

I schedule appointments with myself. T/F

I never spend enough time on what matters most. T/F

If you answered TRUE to three or more of these, WATCH OUT your gonna blow a gasket!!

Sports: A Window Onto American Values

The esteem we place on professional athletes, the amount of time and money we spend as spectators and fans, to the increased involvement in youth athletics reflect our love for sports. But have we gone too far? Has the value of sports become an obsession? When does competitiveness become ruthlessness? When does commitment become obsession? When does "doing your best" become "win at all costs"?

[Handout in PDF format.](#) [Facilitator notes in PDF format.](#)

The Blame Game

Have we become a nation of victims? Is anyone ever responsible for anything? How much of my future is determined by my past? As legislation ratifies more and more rights, must there be more and more violations? Should we try or is it even possible to control "rights inflation?" Join us as we discuss what one noted sociologist has called "the most pervasive trend in the last three decades."

The Impact of Computer Technology on Today's Culture

Without exception, technology affects each and every one of us. Experts point out that the impact of computer technology on our culture has surpassed that of the industrial revolution. We'll explore the social implications of technology on community and personal relationships and, more importantly, our views as individuals.

The Problem of Evil

We will address such questions as "How can there be a loving God when we see such horrific displays of evil around us?" "Is there really such a thing as evil?" As we discuss these questions we will also look at how different world-views address these questions.

To Judge or not to judge

People who are judgmental can be annoying. Tolerance is an important feature of any free society. Who am I to say another's personal faith is wrong or that other's tastes in fashion are somehow inferior? Yet, most of us would condemn groups like the KKK without hesitation. Also, when we face a city and country racked by

rampant crime we often hear the call for stricter law enforcement and longer sentences. Why do we instinctively know that judgments are right in some cases, but not in others?

Today's Values

Where will they take us? What are values? How do our values impact our day to day decisions? What values are currently driving our culture? How might those values effect our future? Were the 'good old days' values all that good? Are there universal values that would work well for all of us?

[Views of the AfterLife](#)

Does life continue after death? How do different cultures and people view this interesting subject?

What do you want from Your Doctor?

What is our doctor's role in making decisions about our lives and health? What do we expect from our doctors? Can (and should) they fulfill these expectations?

[Handout in PDF format. Facilitator notes in PDF format.](#)

Why evil?

We will explore such questions as: why is there evil in the world? How do you deal with evil? Come and share your views as we attempt to understand evil in the world today from various perspectives.

Workplace Ethics

What determines what is ethical in the workplace? How can we resolve different-views of what is ethical? Come and share your views about this current and controversial topic.

While some controversy is fine, subjects should generally **avoid extremely controversial topics**, such as abortion or politics. Such issues often have no middle ground on which agreement, friendship or understanding can be based. Therefore, these topics are poor pre-evangelistic topics.

The discussion is **not** intended to preach the Gospel. Neither is there an effort to "win" a debate. The main point is to be interested in understanding other people's views, respectfully sharing our own, and to enjoy getting to know one another.