

Try Deliberative Democracy Antidote to Citizen Dissatisfaction and Public Disengagement

Politician Turns Toxic; Google Tracks Movement, Like it or Not; Norway to Test Free Heroin for Drug Addicts; NYC Entering Transit Apocalypse; Kids Trained to Commit School Shooting; Toxins Turning Up In Dozens of Public Water Systems

Disturbing headlines. Seems as though a second doesn't go by that we don't hear about broken cities, failing schools, escalating crime, falling civility, or another serious global issue. Too often, unsettling and adversarial issues and events appear to define our lives and influence our actions.

As responsible citizens, we know we can do something. But what, where, how? A good answer might well be found in Gregg Kaufman's OLLI class, *Deliberative Democracy*. Gregg's class offers us both a modicum of optimism and a way to get actively involved. Deliberative democracy aims at achieving a convergence of opinion and community engagement about critical public issues through dialogue, deliberation, and reasoning. Its core premise: More heads are better than one.

As Gregg states, "The course is designed to actively engage people in a method of civil discourse. I moderate a weekly two-hour dialogue on issues of mutual interest." Topics have included issues concerning America's role in the world, immigration, health care, the opioid crisis, and the wealth gap in America. A simple question launches class discussion: "What makes this issue real for you?"

Deliberative democracy is gaining recognition. At the University of Dayton, deliberative democracy classes are very successful. In fact, OLLI Director Jeanette Toohey and her counterpart at Dayton proposed a presentation on the subject for this year's OLLI National Conference (October, Scottsdale, Arizona). Gregg will attend and moderate a mini-forum called, "Coming to America. Who Should We Welcome? What Should We Do?"

Shortly after Gregg started teaching at OLLI, he worked with the UNF Hicks Honor College faculty helping to incorporate deliberative forums into their program. In 2017, 16 forums were held among local faith communities, UNF, OLLI members, and other community venues. The topic of interest was the National Issues Forum Institute's (NIFI) key issue, "Safety and Justice: How Should Communities Reduce Violence?"

In early 2018, another community effort materialized. Several non-profit organizations, including the Jessie Ball du Pont Fund and Leadership Jacksonville, collaborated on a series of forums called "How Should We Convey the History of Jacksonville? Monuments, Parks and People," that attracted more than 200 citizens and addressed the sensitive issue of Confederate monuments in public parks.

A native Pennsylvanian, Gregg's studied in Sweden as a Rotary exchange student, spent undergraduate years in Waterloo, Ontario, and attended theological seminaries in Berkeley, California, and Princeton, New Jersey. He served four congregations as pastor over thirty years and later became a faculty member at Georgia College & State University. Participation there in several research exchange projects with the Kettering Foundation and the NIFI led Gregg to deliberative dialogue training.

After retiring from Georgia College, Gregg and his wife moved to Orange Park. Gregg continued his affiliation with the Kettering Foundation, always looking for ways to plant seeds of deliberative democracy. When Gregg read Sam Hart's editorial about OLLI in the Florida Times-Union, he was hooked. After contacting Jeanette Toohey, Gregg taught his first course in 2015, Deliberative Democracy: Civil Discourse About Critical Public Issues.

Solutions to serious issues confronting us are not predetermined. We can impact our future, once we begin the dialogue. Gregg teaches for OLLI every fall and winter. Look for his course in the Winter Catalog. I plan on signing up. Will you?

Contributed by Julie Guiliani. Photograph by Gary Whiting.