

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE:

The Pocket Guide For Facing Down A Civil War

This discussion guide is available to help you connect with your peers and community members and gain a deeper understanding of the ideas John Paul Lederach presents in *The Pocket Guide*. You are invited to think intentionally about your goals for the conversation and engage with people who might bring different perspectives to the table. In *The Pocket Guide*, Dr. Lederach encourages us to cultivate respect, dignity, curiosity, and courage in our relationships. As you move through the discussion guide, remember to cultivate these qualities in your conversations.



Building Unlikely Bridges

In Chapter 1, Dr. Lederach writes about the Women of Wajir, who faced decades of clan-based violence in the border areas of Somalia and Kenya. Though the women were from different clans, they all shared the need to make the local market safe in order to protect their food and basic livelihood.

What is one shared need that you believe your local community could rally around, regardless of identities or beliefs? Who do you know that you could connect with to start thinking about the first step to address this need?

PAGES 11–14

When faced with persistent conflict, people sometimes choose to leave the situation, avoid confrontation, and stay silent.

In your daily life, where do you find yourself avoiding uncomfortable conversations when you're out in your community? Perhaps it's at work, the gym, school meetings, etc. What impact does this have on you and your community?

PAGES 34–35

In Chapter 5, Dr. Lederach shares the story of how a group of people across the political, social, and cultural spectrum in the Department of Cesar in Colombia regularly gathered for what they called “Diálogos Improbables,” or Improbable Dialogues.

Which community leaders do you wish could engage in Improbable Dialogues together, and what do you hope would be the outcome?

PAGES 42–47

In Chapter 5, Dr. Lederach encourages the reader to ask the question, “This week, did 90% of my conversations only stay within my circle of friends that I find safe and we all agree?”

If you answered ‘yes,’ how do you think this influences your understanding of what is happening in your community and in the country?

If you answered ‘no,’ how do you maintain relationships with those you disagree with?

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One of the patterns present in settings where toxic polarization and violence mix is the strong emergence of dehumanization. When polarization intensifies, community members often begin to lose sight of the humanity in people “on the other side.”

What might you say to a friend who uses dehumanizing language to speak about an individual or community that holds different political or moral beliefs?

PAGES 82–83



Expanding Our Understanding

The concept of curiosity is highlighted throughout *The Pocket Guide* as a powerful tool to lessen toxic polarization and deepen the quality of our conversations and our relationships. Think about meaningful conversations you’ve had recently.

How did curiosity and a desire to learn play a role in the quality of the conversation?

PAGES 29–30
PAGES 44–47

Chapter 8 explores the importance of shared truth and transparency in communities.

What are ways to confront disinformation and encourage transparency among members of your community?

PAGES 60–68

In the United States, people tend to associate civil war with something from the distant past.

How did the stories throughout The Pocket Guide reframe how you think about civil wars, politically driven polarization, and community violence in the contemporary context of the United States?

PAGE 3 AND THROUGHOUT THE POCKET GUIDE



Nurturing a More Peaceful Future

A primary theme throughout *The Pocket Guide* is how everyday people can take small steps to bridge divides, expand their social circles, and reach a common goal.

What is a small step you can take today to reach beyond your current circle of relationships and connect with someone who holds a different worldview from yours?

PAGES 87–89

Dr. Lederach shares anecdotes of how everyday people across the world have shifted cycles of violence, from Ballu Chaudhary in Nepal to Brendan McAllister in Northern Ireland to the people who formed the Association of Workers and Campesinos (ATCC) in Medio Magdalena, to name a few.

Which story resonated with you most and why? What did you learn from the anecdote, and how might you apply this learning to your own life?

THROUGHOUT THE POCKET GUIDE

EXAMPLES:

The Association of Workers and Campesinos (ATCC)	PAGES 19–21, 34–37
Brendan McAllister	PAGES 27–28
Improbable Dialogues	PAGES 42–46
NRCTC-Nepal	PAGES 50–53
Konkomba man	PAGES 57–59
Ballu Chaudhary	PAGES 72–73

In Chapter 7, Dr. Lederach writes, “I have never seen change in the patterns of repeated violence emerge and cohere without hope.”

Where do you find hope about the future of your community and your country, even when it feels challenging?

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