



Building an Inclusive Church

A Welcoming Toolkit 2.0

Helping Your Congregation Become a Community
that Openly Welcomes People of All Sexual
Orientations and Gender Identities



National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

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Building an Inclusive Church: A Welcoming Toolkit

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From the 2009 Edition:

This Toolkit would not have been possible without the years of work, experience and support of the leaders of the Welcoming Church Programs with whom we partner:

Dr. Michael Adee – *More Light Presbyterians in the Presbyterian Church (USA)*

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Introduction

“Welcome, we are so glad you are here!”

These words of welcome and the accompanying atmosphere of support, understanding and love are what we all long for as we enter our churches, live as members, or experience important life-cycle events (falling in love, marrying, having children, baptism, confirmation, coming out, transitioning, etc.). This experience of God’s Extravagant Welcome and the justice and societal witness that go with it are the heart of what we hope to facilitate with ***Building an Inclusive Church: A Welcoming Toolkit 2.0.*** Embodying God’s Extravagant Welcome is both a critical goal of this Toolkit, for it calls upon the very core of the Christian gospel, and it is a goal that requires prayerful, conscious, faithful action.

A Welcoming Process is an officially recognized path that includes relational organizing, education, some kind of public vote and a public statement of Welcome for persons of ALL sexual orientations and gender identities. Additionally, we have sought to use “general” language in this Toolkit. For instance, we use “Welcoming,” but within the Lutheran and Methodist traditions, it is known as “Reconciling” and, within the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), “Open and Affirming.”

Thank you for joining with us. And may God bless and guide us in the endeavor.

This Toolkit is designed as a guide for a small group of congregants who wish to facilitate a Welcoming Process in their local congregation.

As we compile it, we make four important assumptions:

1. A Welcoming Process needs to be well-thought out, planned and drawing upon wisdom from other congregations that have done a process of their own.
2. A Welcoming Process needs to be grounded in the culture and “personality” of the congregation.
3. A Welcoming Process needs to be based in relationship-building with the pastor, the formal lay leadership (councils, boards, sessions, etc.) and the informal lay leadership (“pillars of the church,” “matriarchs,” “patriarchs,” etc.) and the rest of the congregation. This is known as “relational organizing,” and one of its key components is listening deeply to what God is saying and doing – in the individual and in the congregation. Relational organizing is very different from debate, which should be avoided.
4. A Welcoming Process is a spiritual opportunity for the congregation to grow in membership, stewardship and vitality.¹
As such, it should always be presented in the context of the life of faith of the congregation.

Again a Welcoming Process is rooted in relational organizing. Relational organizing strives to take seriously our role as the Body of Christ, and building and strengthening relationships within the congregation is central to the work. These relationships include those amongst leadership, within key areas of ministry, across ideological and affinity-group lines and across generational and cultural groupings.

A Welcoming Process has key parts that are somewhat linear. We strongly encourage you to follow the wisdom presented in this Toolkit. However, in the end, crafting a Welcoming Process is more of an art than a science. Therefore, the assessment of your congregation – its culture and personality, its theological roots, its likely pace with Welcoming issues – is vital.

¹For the positive impact welcoming processes can have on stewardship and membership numbers, see Heckles, Rev. Dr. Jane, *Stewardship Trends in Open & Affirming Churches of the United Church of Christ*, [Doctor of Ministry Thesis, Andover-Newton Theological Seminary: Newton Centre, MA, 1997]. For the positive impact welcoming processes can have on vitality see Voelkel, Rev. Dr. Rebecca, *To Do Justice: A Study of Welcoming Congregations*, [National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2009]. For these and many other resources to support a Welcoming Process, visit www.WelcomingResources.org

Part A of this Toolkit is designed to help you lay all the groundwork you need before you begin a public educational process. We cannot overemphasize the importance of this groundwork. Please read through this entire guide to get a sense of the order and flow of things before you begin your process. In particular, don't miss the appendices. They offer worksheets, preparatory materials and background information on relationship-building, storytelling, conflict, assessment tools and the Welcoming Process outline.

In addition, we suggest you read:

A La Familia: A Conversation About Our Families, The Bible, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

by Rev. Dr. Miguel De La Torre. This bilingual guide is available for free download from www.WelcomingResources.org

Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing

by Dennis A Jacobsen. This book, available online for about \$14, will enable you to understand more quickly the organizing concepts used in your Welcoming Process.

"Living Openly In Your Place of Worship"

Available for free download from the Human Rights Campaign's Religion and Faith Program at www.hrc.org/issues/religion/7163.htm.

To Do Justice: A Study of Welcoming Congregations

by Rev. Dr. Rebecca Voelkel. This resource is published by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and available for free download from www.WelcomingResources.org.

Umoja: Christian Education for African-American Faith Communities

by Rev. Roland Stringfellow. This resource is published by the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry at Pacific School of Religion and is available for free download at www.clgs.org/Umoja.

In-Person Trainings

We strongly encourage you to attend a ***Building an Inclusive Church*** training which will teach you in depth the relational organizing skills you need to become an advocate for a Welcoming Process in your congregation. All the tools and techniques suggested in this Toolkit are covered at length at these trainings.

For more details and a current calendar of trainings, please visit: www.WelcomingResources.org/communityorg.htm

Online Training

An online version of the ***Building an Inclusive Church*** training is being uploaded, piece by piece, on the Task Force's Online Organizing Academy. You may access this important resource by going to www.thetaskforce.org/onlineacademy. The online version offers more time to work in-depth with many of the concepts of the Toolkit, broken down and explained in a step-by-step process including videos, exercises, interviews and charts. This online resource can be especially helpful as a complement both to an in-person training and to reading this guide. Additionally, it can stand on its own if it is difficult for members of your team to get to a Building an Inclusive Church training. New modules are being added all the time.

PART A

The Welcoming Process: Laying the Groundwork

THE WELCOMING PROCESS

We have divided our description of the Welcoming Process into Steps and Tools. The Steps are more or less sequential (remembering that this is more art than science). The Tools, however, are intended to be used throughout your entire Welcoming Process and beyond. Within this Toolkit they appear interspersed amongst the Steps at the point when they can first be utilized. However, unlike the Steps, the Tools are not to be used only once and then crossed off your To Do List. For more guidance about how to use them throughout, consult the Welcoming Process Outline in **Appendix Three**.



STEPS

- One: Leading the Process
- Two: Gathering Information
- Three: Outlining the Process
- Four: Building Relationships
- Five: Making It Official
- Six: Setting the Frame and Providing Educational Opportunities
- Seven: Writing Your Welcoming Statement
- Eight: Conducting an Exploratory Survey
- Nine: Holding the Vote
- Ten: Celebrating and Publicizing
- Eleven: We're Welcoming... Now What?



TOOLS

- Graceful Engagement
- One-to-One Visits
- Framing
- Public Storytelling



TOOL: GRACEFUL ENGAGEMENT

The “spirit” with which a congregation does a Welcoming Process can make all the difference. It requires deep listening, seeking “that of God” in the people with whom you engage and finding the ways in which God is revealed to you through them. So must the Welcoming Process carry a similar spirit. We call this spirit “Graceful Engagement.”

Graceful Engagement is a way of practicing holy conversation, where each person is treated as a loved child of God. It is about listening, sharing one’s own story, hearing one another’s perspective, finding commonalities and shared experiences. It is about building relationships around values that bring us together as opposed to things that polarize us.

Through Graceful Engagement, we strive to reach out to others in Love and Grace, listening to their stories and telling our own so that we may come to a renewed understanding together as the Body of Christ, overcoming estrangement and discord no matter what their sources may be.

We are committed to accompanying others in respect and mutuality, walking alongside those who both agree and disagree with us as we discern future directions for shared mission. We avoid and do not value divisive rhetoric or actions. We begin and return to prayer for guidance and renewal.

As we read the Scripture, we see that Jesus engaged everyone with whom he ministered with a deep sense of God’s Grace. Each person is a beloved child of God. Every individual is God’s creation. Even those whom the world would call enemies, Jesus engaged with Grace-filled love and commands us to do likewise. Encouraged by Jesus’ example, prayer can lead us back again and again to an awareness of God’s Grace.

Such a posture is what discipleship is all about. And because we understand the Welcoming Process to be an opportunity to practice discipleship and help the Church to be the Church, the Welcoming Process is a perfect place to practice Graceful Engagement.

Graceful Engagement is not a separate step. Instead, we recommend that it be woven throughout every aspect of the Welcoming Process. **Appendix One** contains more information on Graceful Engagement. You will use this Appendix beginning in **Step One** below.



STEP ONE: LEADING THE PROCESS

The first step in a Welcoming Process is to gather a group of five to ten people who share your passion for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in the life of your congregation. These people will form your Core Team, and will work together to advocate for, design and shepherd the Welcoming Process.

To begin, using the Tool of One-to-One Visits (see below), meet with a few folks in your congregation whom you believe might be interested in joining you in this work. As you meet with them, listen deeply, ask their passions, interests, history, etc. If you hear that welcoming fits with their passions, vocation or sense of discipleship, invite them to join you as part of your Core Team. Ask each of them to read this Toolkit and other resources you have consulted.

Ensuring LGBT People are at the Table

A Welcoming Process can be a difficult time for LGBT members of your congregation. They may not be supportive of the process at all, fearing that a negative outcome will mean a loss of their sense of community. They may be concerned that this process will put them under a spotlight. They may be supportive of the process but not feel called to a leadership role. They may also be excited about the process, awaiting an invitation to participate. As a Core Team, check in with the known LGBT members of your congregation. Determine their preferred role in the Welcoming Process, and their willingness and ability to be publicly identified in their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Assure them that you will check in with them periodically throughout the Welcoming Process.

Once you have gathered your Core Team and they have looked over this Toolkit, complete **Appendix One** together. This will help ground you in a shared understanding of Graceful Engagement and will build relationships among the members of the Core Team.

For denominational-specific guidance as you begin your Process, contact your denominational Welcoming Church Program (see **Back Page**).



TOOL: ONE-TO-ONE VISITS

In the same way that Graceful Engagement flows throughout the Welcoming Process, relationship-building is another tool that you will use throughout. We do so because we understand that the core of Jesus' ministry was about gathering people and bringing people in relationship together. He felt so strongly about this that he declared, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." (Matthew 18:20 NRSV) We believe that a Welcoming Process rooted in relationship-building is another act of faithful discipleship.

To prepare for and to conduct these visits, read and follow **Appendix Two**. Another fine resource is the Task Force's Online Organizing Academy modules on 1-on-1's (to utilize this free resource, visit www.thetaskforce.org/onlineacademy). When the tool of One-to-One Visits is used within communities of faith, many find this to be spiritual practice. When you invite someone into a One-to-One Visit, thinking of that person as your guest (with you as the host) can tap into the traditions surrounding hospitality as a faith practice. This "guest and host" mindset can also help keep this conversation from devolving into debate.



STEP TWO: GATHERING INFORMATION

In order to begin this work in your congregation, it is helpful for your Core Team to spend some time looking at how your congregation handles change, how it talks about difficult topics, how it responds to social issues, and how it handles other justice issues. Step Two: Gathering Information is a key part of any Welcoming Process. Below are three avenues of collecting data (Congregational Assessment, Conflict History, and Power Analysis) which will be invaluable as you begin to craft your Process.

1. Congregational Assessment

The Congregational Assessment (**Appendix Three**) is a tool to help you more clearly understand how your congregation operates and how ready it is to engage in this work.

Have all the members of your Core Team individually complete the Congregational Assessment and then, together, complete the Group Scoring. Gather the Core Team to discuss the results.

Some Ideas for Discussion:

- Was anyone in the group surprised by the average score your congregation has? Were the results encouraging or discouraging? Why?
- Were there any questions that received a very low average score? A very high average score? What are the possible reasons that these conditions or measures are out of line with the overall assessment?
- Are there any questions for which the circumstances or conditions are likely to change in the next six months? One year?
- Are there any factors or indicators that might change as a result of proactive work or intervention on the part of a few interested persons?
- Did any individuals doing the assessment misunderstand any questions? (If so, discuss the question, and feel free to re-score the Worksheet, and re-tabulate results. Did it make a difference in the final score?)
- Take the answers and wisdom you gained from the Congregational Assessment and choose a pace (cautious, moderate, or adventurous) from the Welcoming Process Outline that follows the Assessment and estimate the length of time you hope your Welcoming Process will take. Although those of us who want our congregation to become Welcoming want it to become so today, it is very important that we not rush the process. It is also very important that, even if we choose a “cautious” pace, we keep moving and not allow the fears of some to paralyze the Welcoming Process.
- What are the next steps the Core Team might take to plan your congregation’s Welcoming Process?

NOTE: If your congregation has had a history of sexual misconduct by its clergy or staff, it is important and useful to do the Congregational Assessment in order to collect data. HOWEVER, we recommend that any congregation with such a history of abuse choose the “St. Cautious” pace and path.

2. Conflict History

In addition, have the Core Team talk about the history of conflict or splits in your congregation. What were the issues? In particular, has your congregation ever had an experience of sexual misconduct by clergy or staff? How did the congregation deal with it at the time? How does it continue to deal with it?

How does your congregation deal with conflict in general?

Read **Congregations and Conflict (Appendix Four)** and **How Does Change Happen in Churches or Any Organization (Appendix Five)** and make a determination about your congregation’s culture around conflict. Taking seriously the role of conflict, make a plan for how you will guide the congregation through the Welcoming Process. For instance, will you explicitly do a session on conflict during the educational phase of the Process? Will you utilize the **Tips for Handling Conflict** and **Communication Strategies** (both in **Appendix Four**) for your discussions about LGBT issues? How will you utilize this information?

3. Power Analysis

With your Core Team, map out the power structures – both formal and informal – within your congregation.

What are the formal decision processes?

- Who’s on the church council, session, or governing body?

- Who is the moderator, council chair, or congregational president?
- Who writes the budget?
- Who signs the checks?
- Who is the treasurer?
- What are the procedures for introducing resolutions or proposals to the governing body?

What are the informal decision processes?

- Who are the opinion leaders?
- Who are the “pillars” of the congregation?
- Who holds the long-term memory of the congregation?
- Who are your storytellers?
- Who are the people whose opinion you need to know?

What does your clergy think about Welcoming?

Based on these answers, determine a plan for members of the Core Team to meet with these persons. Using the One-to-One Visit technique (**Appendix Two**), assess what are the concerns and where are potential sources of conflict and make a plan for relationship-building throughout the process.

NOTE: If your clergy is against the process, it is very difficult for it to proceed. They do not have to be ardent supporters, but active opposition to a Welcoming Process on the part of clergy makes it very difficult for the Welcoming Process to succeed. If you do have clergy opposition to a Welcoming Process, stay in the “Core Team” phase of your work and focus on relationship-building with the clergy and informally work within the congregation. We recommend working only through Step Four of this Toolkit until the clergy are no longer opposed.



TOOL: FRAMING

The tenor, spirit, and feel of a Welcoming Process are key. Utilizing the relational approach of Graceful Engagement, the goal is to present your Welcoming Process in a way that resonates with your congregation’s core values and faith, using language and images that call on the best in the church’s life. This is called “framing.”

As a Core Team, spend an entire meeting going through **Appendix Six: Framing Worksheet**.



STEP THREE: OUTLINING YOUR PROCESS

Too often congregations underestimate the importance of a planful process that reflects the values, culture and history of their congregation. We cannot overstate our experience and belief that intentionality in the Welcoming Process increases its success and decreases the potential for problems.

Therefore, meet as a Core Team to design a Process that best fits your congregation using everything you’ve learned from PART A and the possible elements from PART B. Plan for your Core Team to meet regularly to assess how your Process is going, and to make adjustments accordingly.

PART B

The Welcoming Process: Taking it Public



STEP FOUR: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Building and deepening relationships within your congregation – particularly across sub-groups and different ways of thinking – is vital throughout the entire Welcoming Process. When people know they are being approached through Graceful Engagement and being seen and heard for who they are, they will be more likely to respond positively. It is these heart connections that allow people to move forward in support of LGBT people and it is what makes a congregation stronger for having done the process.

Using the One-to-One Visit techniques (**Appendix Two**), members of the Core Team should expand the scope of their visit, listening and talking beyond the clergy and formal leadership to include the entire congregation. For smaller congregations, this may mean you speak with every member; for larger congregations, it may mean you speak with a selected sample of the membership. It is important to get buy-in and official support for the Welcoming Process from all segments of the congregation.



TOOL: PUBLIC STORYTELLING

The opportunity to listen deeply to one another through a Welcoming Process is one of the characteristics that mark it as sacred and filled with Graceful Engagement. Another skill which can help mark the process as sacred is that of Public Storytelling. Much like Graceful Engagement and the One-to-One Visit, this is a tool that we recommend you use throughout the Process.

As Christians, we follow the life and ministry of Jesus as an example of what a faithful life looks like. And Jesus was a storyteller. Most of his preaching is encapsulated in stories or parables throughout the Gospels.

We know that connecting the stories we hear from members of our congregation with the Gospel stories of inclusion and with our own stories of the blessedness of LGBT persons and families is how hearts are opened and new information can be received.

As a Core Team read **Telling Your Public Story: Self, Us, Now (Appendix Seven)** and complete the **Public Storytelling and the Welcoming Church Movement Worksheet (Appendix Eight)**.

As you go along in the Process, it might be helpful to schedule times when others in the congregation may learn this Public Storytelling technique. For information about in-person Building an Inclusive Church trainings and other trainings which include Public Storytelling, visit www.WelcomingResources.org/communityorg.htm.



STEP FIVE: MAKING IT OFFICIAL

The Core Team, which until now has been operating as an ad hoc body, is now replaced by an officially recognized committee of the congregation, often called the Welcoming Task Force. How this actually looks will vary, of course, depending upon your congregational and denominational culture and structure. The membership of the Welcoming Task Force will most likely include the Core Team, but it should also have representatives from a wider variety of constituencies or “stake-holders” within the congregation. It is important to note, however, that these representatives should not be opponents to the Welcoming Process, but rather supporters and proponents.

This change in the labeling or identity of the Core Team to a Welcoming Task Force helps the membership of the congregation see that the congregational leadership has sanctioned a process of study and discernment. It signals that the work of Welcoming is not just the action of a “fringe group” within the congregation.

Preparation for **Step Five** has been taking place in the previous steps. In **Step Two: Gathering Information**, your Core Team examined how decisions are made in your congregation. Review the information you gathered – especially the processes to introduce a resolution or proposal. In your One-to-One Visits with the congregational leadership, you will continue to discover who has a strong interest in furthering the Welcoming Process and would be able and willing to bring a proposal before the governing body. You will also have had One-to-One Visits with the potential members of the Welcoming Task Force to know who would be good additions to this team.

After you've reviewed this information (processes, congregational leadership with interest in Welcoming, and potential members of the Welcoming Task Force) make plans to bring this to your governing body in a strategic and thoughtful way.



STEP SIX: SETTING THE FRAME AND PROVIDING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

When thinking about helping their congregation become a place of intentional, public welcome, many people begin by contemplating what educational opportunities (such as panels, film presentations, and Bible studies) they could provide. We believe your educational opportunities will have a much greater impact when they are placed within the context of a well-planned Welcoming Process. Through your One-to-One Visits, you will hear from key leaders of the congregation what concerns they have about the Welcoming Process. These One-to-One Visits will give your Core Team and Welcoming Task Force the opportunity to tell your stories about why the Welcoming Process matters to you. Your chosen frame will help you tell these stories in ways that reinforce your congregation's understanding about who you are and what your mission and ministry is at this time. These conversations will help you design educational opportunities that meet the needs of your community, that rely on and deepen the relationships within your congregation, and that lead to a shared commitment to live out your Welcoming Statement.

Before beginning an educational process, it is important to check in with the LGBT people and their family members within your congregation to find out their preferred role(s) in the process and to listen to any concerns they might have. Given the pace of your process, you may not want initial sessions to focus on sexuality or gender at all. You may begin by focusing on your frame, exploring the more general themes that relate to it, such as hospitality, welcome, and reconciliation. These programs can then move gradually into more focused attention on welcome to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.

Below are some ideas of different types of educational opportunities you might provide. For a list of specific resources, please see **Appendix Eleven**.

Panels

Panels are a time-tested way of ensuring that you hear the stories of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. Parents and other family members of LGBT people can also have very powerful stories to tell. Panels show that the Welcoming Process is about real people and not simply about abstract issues. As noted in **Step One**, LGBT people within your congregation may or may not feel able to serve on a panel. To find potential panelists in your area, contact other Welcoming congregations (see the map at www.welcomingresources.org/directory.htm), your Welcoming Church Program (see **Back Page**), or local LGBT community organizations. Having a One-to-One Visit with each panelist prior to the scheduled event will help them understand your congregation and how the panel fits in your Welcoming Process, as well as to learn what stories from the panelists would be most helpful for them to share.

Bible

Bible studies are another successful element in many a Welcoming Process. However, when we only discuss the eight "clobber passages" (the Bible verses most often cited to condemn same-gender-loving people), we inadvertently set up a negative frame around scripture. Scripture is full of texts that speak a word of promise to LGBT people. Asking people for their favorite Bible verse or story is a great way to elicit themes that support your ministry of welcome and hospitality. Your chosen frame may be another source for a Bible study focus. Exploring the texts that can be read as condemnation, if that is needed in your community, will be more fruitful when done in the context of the broader message of scripture. As a Bible study tool, we strongly recommend *Hearts Unbound: Exploring Biblical Texts of God's Radical Welcome through Reader's Theater* by David R. Weiss, available for free download at www.WelcomingResources.org. While there, also check out our resource page on Biblical interpretation.

The Arts

Films, books, theater, music, and other forms of artistic expression are another great resource in your Welcoming Process. Documentary films can be especially helpful if you are unable to locate any panelists who can tell their own stories. Inviting LGBT community arts groups (such as choral groups, authors, or theater presentations) is a great way to begin to practice the hospitality you are building.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Information

Early in the history of many Welcoming Church Programs, being Welcoming only referred to gay and lesbian people and did not include those who are bisexual or transgender. It is important in this process to include people on a broad spectrum of sexual orientations and gender identities. This means you may have to spend some extra time in providing education for your congregation in understanding what **bisexual**, **gender non-conforming** and **transgender** mean. One helpful approach is to explore how sexual orientation and gender are not binary categories (either/or, gay/straight, male/female). Instead, these aspects of our identities can be understood as occurring on several continua. For more information, see **Appendix Nine**. As we place ourselves on these continua, we can see that at any point in time we all have a sexual orientation and a gender. This discussion helps us see connections between us.

Intersections

We know from research that issues related to LGBT persons and the work of Welcoming are deeply related to other issues of inclusion and justice. We also know that LGBT people are of every race, class, ability, and age. However, we sometimes perpetuate the myth that all LGBT people are white, wealthy, able-bodied, young, and anti-religious; this myth also holds that all people of color, poor, disabled, old, and religious are straight. These myths have had very real life and death consequences.

In order to avoid this painful and sometimes fatal mistake, we recommend doing educational work about the ways in which LGBT inclusion and justice are woven into and connected to other issues of justice and inclusion. We recommend **One Spirit, One Body, Many Members: A Curriculum for Welcoming Congregations on the Intersections of Justice Issues** available from www.WelcomingResources.org. We also recommend visiting www.welcomingresources.org/intersectionality.xml.

Communication

Another educational resource available to your Welcoming Task Force is already present in your congregation. Think of all the ways that communication happens in your community, from the newsletter and email alerts to the worship bulletins to the posters on the walls! These are all potential resources for sharing the Welcoming Process with your congregation in ways that reflect your chosen frame. Sermons are another ready resource, whether that is from your own clergy or an invited guest. Your liturgy, prayers, and hymns can also support your Welcoming Process. The options are many!

SUMMARY

One common challenge with providing educational opportunities is ensuring that the right people are in the room. This is another reason the One-to-One Visits are so important. Building and strengthening relationships within your congregation allows you to make specific invitations to individuals to attend Welcoming Process events. Listening to people's hopes and fears allows your Welcoming Task Force to ensure that your programs are addressing the actual needs of your community. Review the information you gathered in Step Two. Are you reaching every segment of your congregation? How are the youth and young adults being invited into these conversations? Are there service activities that would fit within your chosen frame? Pay attention to who attends and who is missing from the educational opportunities. One-to-One Visits are a great way to check in with those who have been absent to find out what their absence means for your Welcoming Process. Perhaps events have not met their concerns; perhaps they did not feel welcome to attend for some reason; perhaps they feel ready to commit to a Welcoming Statement and do not see the importance in attending the events. Your Welcoming Process may be enriched by seeking out this type of feedback.



STEP SEVEN: WRITING YOUR WELCOMING STATEMENT

It is important to develop a Welcoming Statement to show others that you are a church that has committed to living as a Welcoming church. This statement becomes a great tool to show visitors as well as members what you believe. Each congregation will develop a statement that fits their community. **Appendix Ten** includes a few sample Welcoming Statements that you can look at to get an idea of what other congregations have written. These Welcoming Statements can be great conversation starters to help your Welcoming Task Force decide what elements are important to include in your Welcoming Statement. You may find that some statements resonate more strongly with your chosen frame. Once you have a draft prepared, it can be helpful to share that with key congregational leaders. Strong negative reactions can be a sign that additional relationship building through One-to-One Visits is needed to hear the concerns and fears within the congregation. You may need to expand your statement, adding other groups or individuals.

Each denominational Welcoming Church Program has its own set of standards and rules for how a congregation can be rostered or listed as Welcoming. These standards include criteria for a Welcoming Statement, how the Welcoming Statement is adopted, how it is publicized and what ongoing work is required. Consult the [Back Page](#) for the contact information for your denominational Welcoming Church Program.



STEP EIGHT: CONDUCTING AN EXPLORATORY SURVEY

While you may be tempted to skip this step, this is a vital one. Remember that one of the goals of the Welcoming Process is to help people experience the fullness of the Body of Christ, not to divide us against one another. If you skip this step and go directly to the formal vote, and if the results of that vote are close and people are divided, the Process will have failed even if the vote passes.

Conducting an Exploratory Survey is an important way of caring for the health of your congregation. Have you heard from all constituencies? Have you addressed people's fears and objections to the degree possible?

Once you have completed the previous steps and feel that you have done the relationship-building and educational work you need to, it's time to hear from the congregation. Send out an anonymous online survey (they are free and easy to create) or a postcard, including your proposed Welcoming Statement, and ask:

"If the vote were held today, would you vote in favor or against formally adopting this Welcoming Statement?"

If you receive less than 75-85% in favor, take this as a sign that a vote at this point will create division and not achieve the goal of a truly welcoming community. We recommend going back and further the work of relationship-building through the tools of Graceful Engagement and One-to-One Visits. You may also need additional educational opportunities, including newsletter articles or other forms of communication.

If you receive 75-85% or higher, it is a sign that your Welcoming Process is ready for the formal vote.



STEP NINE: HOLDING THE VOTE

The vote is the opportunity for your congregation to publicly affirm your commitment to live as a Welcoming Congregation. How this vote actually happens will vary from church to church, and from denomination to denomination. Sometimes votes are held by the entire membership, sometimes by a governing body, and sometimes by proclamation of a pastor. Some congregations only require a simple majority for a motion to pass, others require two-thirds. Consult with your church leadership and with your congregation's constitution or by-laws so that you are clear about how this culminating step will occur.



STEP TEN: CELEBRATING AND PUBLICIZING

Notify your denominational Welcoming Church Program (see [Back Page](#)) of your successful vote. They will add you to their formal roster, and help you in celebrating and publicizing this major step in the life of your congregation.

Hold a worship service, reception or party and invite all who have been involved in the Welcoming Process. There is so much to celebrate and thank God for... the process and faithfulness of the congregation... your strengthening commitment to justice and inclusion... the conclusion of a long process and the moving into a new phase... the personal and congregational transformation that has taken place... and for so much more.

In addition to celebrating, you will want to let the world know of your new status. Ensure that your Welcoming Statement is public. Many churches include it each week in their bulletin, so that first-time visitors can see your commitment and to feel your welcome in a real way. Research shows that most people these days find new churches through the internet; make sure that your Welcoming Statement is as easy to find on your website as your street address. Add something to your church's sign, and send out a press release to local mainstream and LGBT publications.



STEP ELEVEN: WE'RE WELCOMING... NOW WHAT?

Becoming a Welcoming Congregation doesn't mean you can stick the label on and it is over. Ongoing education and relationship-building are important as we continue to learn and discover what it means to be a Welcoming Congregation for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. This specific welcome can and will hopefully lead to a growing awareness of other forms of oppression and specific welcomes that need to be extended.

Use **Appendix Eleven** and consult with your Welcoming Church Program (**Back Page**), which may have denominational-specific resources to help you in this process. Additionally, there is an excellent list of suggestions for action within your community and denomination that can be found starting on page 101 of **A La Familia: A Conversation About Our Families, the Bible, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity** (www.welcomingresources.org/a_la_familia.pdf).

APPENDIX ONE

Graceful Engagement Worksheet

We recommend that one of your first gatherings as a Core Team should be spent completing this worksheet. We suggest you take between thirty minutes and an hour to complete it together before you go further in the Welcoming Process.

Opening Meditation

We invite you to begin in silence and prayer. Sit together for two or three minutes in silence, breathing deeply and inviting God's presence to be fully felt by all in the room. Then, invite each person to reflect upon what it means or how it feels to be filled with GRACE....

Invite folks to call out the words that come to them and let these resonate in the air. Then, close the time with a spoken prayer led by one person.

Exercise

After the opening meditation, invite the team to collectively complete this phrase:

GRACE is....

If folks are having difficulty, some words that other Core Teams have used include: loving, powerful, hopeful, centered, peaceful, free, content, calm, whole, open, forgiving, grounded, holy, loved, spiritual. (Put these on a flip chart or project them on a screen.)

Scriptural Reflection

With these understandings on a flip chart or screen, take some time to read aloud and discuss several of the following Scriptural passages: the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), the Woman at the Well (John 4:4-26), the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:35-40), Peter cutting off the ear of Malchus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:51-52), and Jesus on the Cross (Luke 23:34).

In each of these contexts, Jesus models a radical form of discipleship. Each person with whom he interacts—those who genuinely seek him out as a teacher and those who seek to destroy him—Jesus treats as a beloved child of God. He engages them filled with Grace. And we, who would call ourselves his followers, are challenged to do likewise.

Defining Graceful Engagement

After you've created your list of words associated with Grace and reflected on examples of Jesus' ministry, put these definitions on a flip chart or screen:

Graceful Engagement IS:

- Living together in relationship and compassion
- Fully valuing other people and their beliefs, even when they differ from our own
- Listening more than speaking
- Meeting people where they are, not where we want them to be

Graceful Engagement IS NOT:

- Debate
- Forcing our opinions on others through argument
- Exclusion or outright condemning those with whom we do not agree
- Leaving the church to find a place “where everyone agrees”

Making It Personal

Although we may wish to always be models of Graceful Engagement, it can be a challenge to maintain this perspective. You may need the support of your Core Team in the days to come. Knowing our own “triggers” (those things that we know are likely to pull us away from being able to Gracefully Engage) can help us be ready when those situations arise. Lead a discussion about situations or conversations that might come up that may be difficult for each member of the Core Team. You might want to role-play specific scenarios to prepare possible responses. Remember that sometimes the most graceful option is to end a conversation rather than listening to abusive or hurtful comments. After pondering potential challenges, have each member share a time when they most clearly experienced Grace. Remembering these Grace-filled moments can also help in the more difficult times.

Closing Meditation

Return to silence for two or three minutes, breathing deeply and pondering the stories of Grace that were shared. Close the time with spoken prayer. Invite each Core Team member to share their prayer for this Welcoming Process.

APPENDIX TWO

Sustainable Action: Planting the Seeds of Relational Organizing

By Rev. Louise Green

We owe it to our congregants and colleagues in social justice action to create a culture in the church or organization that is dynamic, life-giving, and fulfilling for all participants. Voluntary groups are an elective choice that people make in order to add something positive to their lives. Many people eventually elect out as they become tired and de-energized working in repetitive ways. This article is about another approach to organizational life, a way that seeks to find new leadership and encourage new campaigns: relational organizing.

Relational organizing is working with and beyond the bureaucratic culture of a congregation or organization. What is a bureau, literally? The word “bureaucracy” comes from a chest of drawers, where everybody has a proper compartment and place. This kind of organization is necessary in a large group, but it often works against close relationships between people. Sometimes there is very little communication between or within the drawers and no change in the overall structure for very long periods of time.

The idea of organizing relationally does not preclude the standard mechanisms we need to function in large groups--rather, it adds a dimension that can transform the culture of bureaucracy. Instead of a bureaucratic culture dominated by fixed activities that endlessly repeat, a relational culture is flexible, dynamic, and responsive to growing or changing needs.

In most congregations, bureaucracy reigns. We are so accustomed to group meetings, collective agendas, and task-oriented activities that it is easy to perpetuate a system that creates only very minimal relationships between people. Communication happens via worship bulletins, newsletters, email and phone calls, and we rarely meet with someone individually unless we have a job to do or crisis to address. Talented leaders are recruited for many tasks, and attend multiple group meetings until they risk burnout and loss of interest. Congregants may meet for months or even years, and never have a conversation about anything but what is on the agenda page for their committee night.

How can congregations and organizations break out of this constraining, de-energizing, and often depressing situation? The solution is to create a culture of relationships that is served by the bureaucratic apparatus rather than dominated by it.

The primary tool of relational organizing is the individual meeting, an encounter with a person that is rare in our culture. Individual, or One-to-One Visits are critical to create bonds between existing teams, find new talent, identify new issues, or develop a new constituency. There is no short-cut around them, and they produce results that nothing else can. Very simply, doing individual meetings is the strategy that is essential in order to create a relational culture over time.

What are the hazards of operating in a bureaucracy that has no relationship-building initiative? The same people do the same things in an unexamined way. New talent and energy is not discovered or engaged. Group meetings get certain tasks done, but only use the skills of folks which apply to the set agenda. Leaders and followers grow fatigued over time and echo the perennial complaint: why do the same people do everything around here?

Rev. Louise Green has been a minister and community organizer for over 20 years. She most recently served 8 years at All Souls Unitarian D.C. as Minister of Social Justice and Leadership Development. Louise is affiliated with the UCC and UUA, and is a consulting minister on social change and spiritual practice. Her contract work in 2012-2013 includes preaching, congregational organizing for the DREAM law campaign with Maryland IAF, organizational development retreats, spiritual direction, and teaching yoga.

ONE-TO-ONE VISITS

What a One-to-One Visit IS:

- A 30-45 minute meeting of face-to-face conversation with one person.
- Getting to know the other person and being known
- An inquiry into what matters to a person and why.

- A chance to go outside of the repeating tasks and small group activities that dominate congregational and organizational life.
- An opportunity to know the private motivations each person has for doing public action such as congregational volunteerism or social justice work.
- A search for leaders and participants with the talent, motivation, initiative, energy, or anger to change a situation.
- A way to identify issues that need to be addressed and are not on the current action plan.

What a One-to-One Visit IS NOT:

- An interview of non-stop questions or survey.
- Going through the whole life story or resume of an individual.
- A recruitment device that fits someone into a set agenda or committee.
- An intellectual conversation about policy or strategy on issues in the congregation, neighborhood or city.
- Search for personal friendship or a social encounter.

What do you need to do a One-to-One Visit?

- A firm decision that you will make the time to engage in this important leadership task. You must invest time and energy for this to succeed.
- A clear context for your introduction on the phone and in person, and a reason for doing this that you can explain to others simply.
- Regular phone call time set aside to ask for and schedule visits.
- Patience and persistence to work with people's availability and possible resistance.
- Curiosity about other people and an ability to listen.
- Willingness to practice this skill over and over again, in multiple settings.

How do you do a One-to-One Visit?

- Have a clear introduction and ending: the middle is improvisation that is particular to the person with whom you are talking.
- Talk more deeply about a few things instead of covering 20 topics.
- Ask "why?" much more often than "what?"
- Ask the person to tell stories and personal history, talk about important incidents, time periods, or mentors—not just recite facts and dates.
- Offer back conversation and dialogue: it's not just for the purpose of the other person answering your questions.
- Close by asking the person who else they think you should be visiting with, and what questions they have for you.

How do you use One-to-One Visits?

When you decide to do a One-to-One Visit campaign, it is important to establish a context: Are you the only one doing visits, and for what reason (i.e. committee chair, task force/study leader, leading on developing a new project)? Is a team going to agree to do them with a particular list (i.e. new members, youth, seniors, religious education teachers)? Is staff preparing to do them with a certain constituency (i.e. people of color in the congregation, young adults, worship associates)?

Keep track of each visit by making notes on each individual, deciding ahead of time what kinds of things you want to remember. Just write down important items, not everything you heard. However, don't ever take notes while you are having the visit itself: this makes you a surveyor or interviewer, which is not the right purpose or tone for the conversation.

Create a process for evaluating what you learn once you have a significant number accumulated. This may be your individual work, or involve a meeting with the team that is working on the campaign. It's important to go into the visits with an open mind: you can test for certain interests or issues, but if you have one specific purpose in mind (need to recruit teachers, for example) you won't be finding out what you need to know. Your goal is to ask questions and listen, without fitting the person into any

fixed spot. One-to-One Visits are an exchange about what is important to each of you, not a session where you work to get the person to do something.

After you have met your goal for a certain number of visits, either individually or as part of a team, evaluate what you learned. This may lead to various choices:

- additional visits with new people,
- some kind of different group action,
- second visits with especially interesting or strong leaders,
- a new project or event,
- revising how you have been operating based on what you heard,
- asking people to take some sort of new initiative based on what you discovered about them.

The entire process is improvised and created out of what you actually hear and how you decide to respond. You can't plan this response until you have a number of One-to-One Visits.

What are the benefits of building a relational culture of organizing?

- Leaders who come to know each other beyond a task-oriented agenda and can do new things in new ways.
- New people who can be engaged around their own interests, not an existing plan.
- The capability to do a new project or campaign based on people's real energy and motivation, not an annual or monthly repetition of activity.
- A network of people who know and trust each other, able to take action in a variety of ways over time.
- A stronger, more dynamic, more creative congregational or organizational life.

Ways to do better One-to-One Visits:

- Have a clear beginning and end: the middle is improvisation.
- Ask people to tell stories and history, not recite facts.
- Ask "why?" much more often than "what?"
- Talk more deeply about 4 things instead of covering 20 things.
- Offer back conversation and dialogue – it's not just about the other person answering your questions.

Use the One-to-One Reflection Form (next page) as a place to write notes after visiting with someone. This will help you remember key details and stories that were shared in the visit.

APPENDIX THREE

Congregational Assessment & Welcoming Process Outline

This congregational self-assessment tool is designed to help you select an appropriate Welcoming curriculum from the cautious to the adventuresome. These questions are not to be seen as sure-fire predictors, but they may serve as helpful guides to both the pace a Welcoming Process should take and your congregation's overall temperament when considering controversial subjects.

Scoring is from 1 to a possible 5 points and is question-specific. Each person participating in the assessment process should have a separate Worksheet. Each person should total the score on the Worksheet. See further scoring instructions at the end of this Worksheet.

There is no perfect template for how to do this Welcoming Process "correctly" in a congregation. Each congregational team is encouraged to adapt or develop its own curriculum. Building the most suitable process for your situation takes careful attention. Remember, as always, the building of solid relationships across ideological and affinity group lines, along with real engagement in the process by a significant percentage of active congregants are the best predictors of probable success.

Be critical and honest when you complete this Congregational Assessment tool. It will not help you or your congregation to characterize the congregation differently than it really is.

The best use of this Assessment Worksheet is as a springboard for discussion and development of your own insights.

Note: Any question which does not seem applicable should be scored with a “3.”

NOTE: If your congregation has had a history of sexual misconduct by its clergy or staff, it is important and useful to do the Congregational Assessment in order to collect data. HOWEVER, we recommend that any congregation with such a history of abuse choose the “St. Cautious” pace (for more information on this, see pages 20-22).

CONGREGATIONAL ASSESSMENT	SCORE
1. Does the congregation already have a mission or welcoming statement which explicitly includes people of all sexual orientations and gender identities? 1 No mission or welcoming statement 2 Mission or welcoming statement with no diversity mentioned 3 Mission or welcoming statement embracing diversity 4 Mission or welcoming statement with gay and lesbian folk included 5 Yes, inclusive of gay, lesbian, bisexual AND transgender people	
2. Are your clergy in favor of explicitly welcoming and including people of all sexual orientations and gender identities? 1 Vocally against 2 Privately against 3 Undecided/unknown 4 Personally, but not publicly, in favor 5 Strongly and publicly in favor	
3. Are you aware of parents or family members of LGBT persons in the congregation? 1 No 2 Yes, but they do not accept their LGBT children or family members 3 Yes, and they accept their LGBT children or family members, but are in the closet in the congregation 4 Yes, and they are out of the closet about their LGBT children or family members 5 Yes, and they are visible advocates	

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CONGREGATIONAL ASSESSMENT	SCORE
<p>4. Are you aware of LGBT persons in the congregation?</p> <p>1 No 2 Yes, but they are in the closet 3 Yes, and some are out of the closet to a few members in the congregation 4 Yes, and individuals and/or couples are visible, but not active in leadership 5 Yes, and several individuals and couples are visible and active in leadership of the congregation</p>	
<p>5. Has the congregation already done or participated in blessings of same-gender relationships?</p> <p>1 No, never 2 No, but pastor participated in such a service at another church 3 No, but two members did have a service which was private and not at the church 4 Yes, but the service was private and at the church. The congregation knew. 5 Yes, and the congregation participated</p>	
<p>6. How does the congregation receive and include new people?</p> <p>1 Outsiders are not included easily in the congregation 2 New members are encouraged to join but not actively integrated in the life of the church 3 New members are welcomed and are actively integrated in the life of the church 4 Visitors of all kinds are vigorously pursued, welcomed and encouraged to join and integrate in the life of the congregation 5 New members are quickly invited to consider positions of leadership in the congregation</p>	
<p>7. Does the congregation welcome/include a diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities?</p> <p>Choose from 1 to 5, with 1 being completely homogenous and 5 being overwhelmingly diverse.</p>	
<p>8. Is the congregation presently very homogeneous or quite diverse (ethnicity, class, language, etc.)?</p> <p>Choose from 1 to 5, with 1 being completely homogeneous and 5 being overwhelmingly diverse.</p>	
<p>9. How does the congregation handle disagreement, conflict or controversy?</p> <p>Choose from 1 (avoids conflict) to 5 (faces conflict head-on and keeps on loving each other!)</p>	
<p>10. Who comes up with new ideas for ministry? (Score the highest number that applies)</p> <p>1 Clergy 2 Council/Session/Governing board 3 Various lay leaders, not all are elected to an office 4 Ideas of lay members are valued and pursued 5 Ideas are solicited from members who think outside the “everyday church” box</p>	
<p>11. Does your congregation have an openly LGBT pastor?</p> <p>1 Not currently, but a previous LGBT pastor was fired/asked to resign/left under conflict or accusations 2 Not currently but has in the past and is not open to an LGBT pastor in the future 3 No 4 Not currently but has in the past and is open to an LGBT pastor in the future 5 Yes</p>	

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CONGREGATIONAL ASSESSMENT**SCORE**

12. Is the congregation educated about and currently working on other justice issues?

- 1 No, not really
- 2 No, but they have from time to time
- 3 Yes, but only a few congregants are involved
- 4 Yes, and the congregation actively supports this work
- 5 Yes, and the congregation actively seeks new issues for education and action

13. What is the prevailing congregational understanding of the message of scripture?

- 1 The book of rules to avoid eternal condemnation
- 2 The way to achieve personal salvation
- 3 No overall view
- 4 The message that God is Love
- 5 Full of examples of God's radical inclusivity

14. Is the lay leadership of the congregation predominantly male or female?

Choose from 1 to 5 with 1 being completely male to 5 being completely female

15. Does the congregation use inclusive language in worship?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Inclusive language for human beings but not for God
- 3 Inclusive language for human beings and God in sermons
- 4 Inclusive language for human beings and God in sermons, hymnody and liturgy
- 5 Inclusive language for human beings and God in sermons, hymnody, liturgy and Scripture readings

16. Relationships within the congregation:

- 1 Isolated individuals and families
- 2 Small groups of close friends (cliques)
- 3 Friendly within affinity groups (i.e. age, gender, class, race, language, education, orientation)
- 4 Friendly across affinity group lines
- 5 A community of faith embracing relationships across affinity and ideological lines

17. Assess the political temperament of the congregation.

Score from 1 completely conservative to 5 completely liberal/progressive

18. Has your congregation engaged studies on sexuality?

- 1 No, never; the subject is taboo
- 2 Yes, and we'll never do it again
- 3 Yes, in confirmation and adult Sunday School but only a few people participated
- 4 Yes, in confirmation and adult Sunday School and we had a good turn out
- 5 Yes, there was lots of interest and we plan to extend our studies of sexuality

19. What percentage of adults who attend worship typically come to an adult forum or other adult educational opportunities?

- 1 5% to 10% or less
- 2 10% to 20%
- 3 20% to 30%
- 4 30% to 50%
- 5 More than 50%

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CONGREGATIONAL ASSESSMENT**SCORE**

20. Is your congregation a member of a denominational region that has declared itself Welcoming?

- 1 No, the matter has never come up in our region
- 2 No, it was discussed at the regional level and defeated
- 3 Yes, but we never hear anything about it in the region
- 4 Yes, and the region has a committee charged with encouraging congregations to consider becoming part of the Welcoming program
- 5 Yes, and the congregation is open to educational efforts provided by the region

21. Do you have a female pastor?

- 1 No, and we never considered one
- 2 No, but we have considered calling one
- 3 Not at present, but we did in the past
- 4 Yes, as part of a multiple-clergy team
- 5 Yes, solo or senior pastor is female

22. Does your town/city/state have a non-discrimination policy for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities?

- 1 No, and it has never come up
- 2 No, it came up and never made it to a vote, the congregation gave no opinion
- 3 No, it was brought to a vote and defeated, the congregation had mixed views
- 4 Yes, it was brought to a vote and passed, the congregation had mixed views
- 5 Yes, it was brought to a vote and passed, the congregation largely supported the measure

23. Does your pastor use examples including people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in sermons?

- 1 No, never
- 2 Maybe once or twice but it caused a problem in the congregation
- 3 Yes, without comment from the congregation
- 4 Regularly, without comment from the congregation
- 5 Often, with positive comment from the congregation

24. Have the youth of your congregation expressed an opinion on becoming Welcoming? (If no youth group, select 3.)

- 1 Yes, and they are solidly against
- 2 No, have not heard a thing
- 3 Yes, their view is positive but the adults of the congregation have mixed views of this
- 4 Yes, their view is positive and the adults are listening
- 5 Yes, they supported the Welcoming agenda at denominational youth events and have returned with an interest in the Welcoming Process for this congregation

25. Size/type of church?

- 1 Corporate church with average worship attendance over 800
- 2 Corporate church with average worship attendance 400 to 749
- 3 Program church with average worship attendance 200 to 399
- 4 Pastoral church with average worship attendance 76-199
- 5 Family-sized church with average worship attendance 75 or less

TOTAL

CONGREGATIONAL ASSESSMENT – GROUP SCORING

Use this Scorecard with the Congregational Assessment Worksheet for your Core Team. Enter the scores from each person's Worksheet in columns A-F. In the next column, enter the total from columns A-F, then in the final column, find the average by dividing the total by the number of people.

1. Does the congregation already have a mission statement which explicitly includes people of all sexual orientations and gender identities?
 2. Are your clergy in favor of explicitly welcoming and including people of all sexual orientations and gender identities?
 3. Are you aware of parents or family members of LGBT persons in the congregation?
 4. Are you aware of LGBT persons in the congregation?
 5. Has the congregation already done or participated in blessings of same-gender relationships?
 6. How does the congregation receive and include new people?
 7. Does the congregation welcome/include a diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities?
 8. Is the congregation presently very homogeneous or quite diverse (ethnicity, class, language, etc.)?
 9. How does the congregation handle disagreement, conflict or controversy?
 10. Who comes up with new ideas for ministry?
 11. Does your congregation have an openly LGBT pastor?
 12. Is the congregation educated about and currently working on other justice issues?
 13. What is the prevailing congregational understanding of the message of scripture?
 14. Is the lay leadership of the congregation predominantly male or female?
 15. Does the congregation use inclusive language in worship?
 16. Relationships within the congregation:
 17. Assess the political temperament of the congregation.
 18. Has your congregation engaged studies on sexuality?
 19. What percentage of adults who attend worship typically come to an adult forum or other adult educational opportunities?
 20. Is your congregation a member of a denominational region that has declared itself Welcoming?
 21. Do you have a female pastor?
 22. Does your town/city/state have a non-discrimination policy for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities?
 23. Does your pastor use examples including people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in sermons?
 24. Have the youth of your congregation expressed an opinion on becoming Welcoming?
 25. Size/type of church?

WHAT DOES THE AVERAGE SCORE MEAN?

Your score is a good indication for the pace at which you should conduct your congregation's Welcoming Process.

We suggest: 25–75: the **St. Cautious** pace
76–100: the **St. Moderatus** pace
101+: the **St. Adventurous** pace

WELCOMING PROCESS OUTLINE

(Based on Congregational Assessment Score)

NOTE: Some of these steps happen concurrently. The suggested pace is exactly that – a suggestion. This is more art than science. This must be tailored for your particular setting.

STEP ONE: LEADING THE PROCESS

	Suggested Pace
Tasks:	Conduct One-to-One Visits and gather a Core Team. Check in with LGBT people in congregation to determine their preferred level of involvement in the Welcoming Process. Contact your denominational Welcoming Church Program (Back Page) for additional guidance.
Tools:	Graceful Engagement (Appendix One), One-to-One Visits (Appendix Two)
People Involved:	Core Team, LGBT People and Welcoming Church Program

STEP TWO: GATHERING INFORMATION

	Suggested Pace
Tasks:	Examine your congregation's history, conduct a power analysis, and examine your congregation's culture to gain a better understanding of how it deals with change and conflict. Choose a pace for your process.
Tools:	Graceful Engagement (Appendix One), One-to-One Visits (Appendix Two), Congregational Assessment (Appendix Three), Congregations and Conflict (Appendix Four), How Does Change Happen in Churches or Any Organization (Appendix Five).
People Involved:	Core Team, Formal and Informal Leadership of Congregation

STEP THREE: OUTLINING THE PROCESS

	Suggested Pace
Tasks:	Outline each step of the Welcoming Process for your congregation based on the pace and frame you've chosen.
Tools:	Graceful Engagement (Appendix One), Framing (Appendix Six), Part B of this Toolkit, plus the information you've gathered up to this point
People Involved:	Core Team

STEP FOUR: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

	Suggested Pace
Tasks:	Conduct One-to-One Visits with formal and informal leadership and church members.
Tools:	Graceful Engagement (Appendix One), One-to-One Visits (Appendix Two), Public Storytelling (Appendices Seven and Eight)
People Involved:	Core Team, formal and informal leadership, church members

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STEP FIVE: MAKING IT OFFICIAL

	Suggested Pace
Tasks:	The Core Team transitions into a formally-recognized committee of the congregation, often called the Welcoming Task Force.
Tools:	Consult your congregation's policies, One-to-One Visits (Appendix Two), Framing (Appendix Six)
People Involved:	Core Team/Welcoming Task Force, congregational governing body

STEP SIX: SETTING THE FRAME AND PROVIDING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

	Suggested Pace
Tasks:	Set up a series of educational opportunities for the congregation.
Tools:	Graceful Engagement (Appendix One), One-to-One Visits (Appendix Two), Framing (Appendix Six), Public Storytelling (Appendices Seven and Eight), Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (Appendix Nine), Bible studies, films, panels, newsletter articles, etc.
People Involved:	Welcoming Task Force, clergy, educators, congregation

STEP SEVEN: WRITING YOUR WELCOMING STATEMENT

	Suggested Pace
Tasks:	Create a draft Welcoming Statement (that meets the requirements of your denominational Welcoming Church Program) and present it to the formal congregational leadership. Revise statement as needed based on feedback.
Tools:	Sample Welcoming Statements (Appendix Ten), your chosen frame (Appendix Six)
People Involved:	Welcoming Task Force, formal leadership, Welcoming Church Programs (Back Page)

STEP EIGHT: CONDUCTING AN EXPLORATORY SURVEY

	Suggested Pace
Tasks:	Send out post cards or develop anonymous online survey for the entire congregation.
Tools:	Postcards and postage or free online survey service

People Involved: Welcoming Task Force

STEP NINE: HOLDING THE VOTE

	Suggested Pace
Tasks:	Schedule and hold a vote according to your congregation's policies and procedures.
Tools:	Congregational policies and procedures

People Involved: Task Force, Council, and all members, Welcoming Church Programs (Back Page)

When exploratory survey shows at least 75-85% support

continued on next page

STEP TEN: CELEBRATING AND PUBLICIZING**Suggested Pace**

Tasks: Notify your denominational Welcoming Church Program. Hold a worship service or celebration, and publicize your new Welcoming status to the greater community.

Soon after successful vote

Tools: Special liturgy, bulletin inserts, church website, church sign

People Involved: Welcoming Task Force, clergy and staff

STEP ELEVEN: WE'RE WELCOMING... NOW WHAT?**Suggested Pace**

Tasks: Ensure church policies are LGBT-inclusive. Provide ongoing educational opportunities. Provide opportunities for church members to take action on LGBT social issues beyond the church doors.

Ongoing

Tools: Church policies

People Involved: Welcoming Task Force, clergy, educators, Social Justice committee, greater LGBT community

APPENDIX FOUR

Congregations and Conflict

By Rev. Dr. Anita Bradshaw

Though often spoken of in whispers, conflict is a common characteristic of congregations in every denomination throughout the United States. Rather than being hidden in the hushed tones of parking lot planning and telephone gossip, if conflict is recognized as inevitable—and potentially even healthy—it can become an opportunity for focus, affirmation, and renewal. Conflict expresses the human side of congregational life—that real people are different, and see the world differently. Conflict also reflects the religious challenge of voluntary communities of faith that are trying to understand, articulate, and live by their highest beliefs and ideals. Conflict can arise when there is a potential for change. Certainly exploring being an inclusive LGBT congregation may cause conflict in a congregation.

- Acknowledge that conflict is a reality in the church and sometimes an overwhelming reality.
- Story: A congregation hired a consultant to deal with some terrible conflict. A quick review of the congregation's 90 year history revealed that pastors had been fired, chased off or quit every seven years. The latest pastoral departure was in the midst of extreme fighting over many issues but the most prominent was the decision to become Welcoming prior to the most recent pastor's arrival. After individual interviews with over 50 members of this 120 member congregation, The Committee was charged with figuring out what to do that a definition of church had emerged from the interviews. On the poster board was written: **Happy + Nice = Church; therefore, Conflict ≠ Church.**
- What we often fear is not really the conflict itself, but the bad behavior that often accompanies it.

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Scripture Reflection:

1. Invite participants into a time of Scripture reflection. Ask a participant to read the Philippians passage and ask participants to listen for a word or phrase that catch their attention or a question that is raised for them.

Philippians 1:27, 2:5-11 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

²⁷Conduct yourselves, then, in a way worthy of the Gospel of Christ. If you do, whether I come and see you myself or hear about your behavior from a distance, it will be clear that you're standing firm in unity of spirit, and exerting yourselves with one accord for the faith of the Gospel.

⁵Your attitude must be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶Christ, though in the image of God, didn't deem equality with God something to be clung to – ⁷ but instead became completely empty and took on the image of oppressed humankind: born into the human condition, found in the likeness of a human being. ⁸Jesus was thus humbled – ⁹obediently accepting death, even death on a cross! Because of this, God highly exalted Christ and gave to Jesus the name above every other name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God: Jesus Christ reigns supreme!

2. After the reading, invite people to turn to one other person and, in these diads, share the word, phrase or question that came up for each.
3. Invite participants back into the large group and ask for some participants to share their observations.
4. As the leader, share the following reflections, which are based on the passage from Philippians above:
 - The model for the church is the Greek polis or city-state.

- At the heart of the polis was the debate of free persons to determine the future of the city.
 - Paul frequently uses this model for the church.
 - Not “Happy + Nice = Church”
 - Jesus as a model of self-emptying & humility
 - Did you notice what God is doing in the text?
 - Approving of Jesus opening the door for the whole world.
5. Invite participants to offer ideas about what conflict in the church is. Write: WHAT IS CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH? on a flip-chart, and record participants' answers.
6. Then, write: WHAT ARE SOME POSITIVE ASPECTS OF CONFLICT?
- Point out that conflict could be other things that are more positive.
- Opportunity
 - Leading of the Holy Spirit
 - Key to discerning God's mission in your context
7. After you have discussed the possible positive aspects of conflict, and discuss the following:

Speed Leas' Levels Of Conflict

- Level Zero We avoid conflict
- Level One Problem to solve
- Level Two Some lack of agreement
- Level Three Taking sides
- Level Four Fight or leave
- Level Five Call in the lawyers

Point out:

- Most people tend to think about conflict in either/or terms.
- From Level 3.5 on, the congregation needs outside intervention.
- Good strategies for a Welcoming Process seek to keep the conflict level at the lower end.
- Science has shown us that all of life is part of a system.
- Two types of systems: open and closed.
- Churches often function as closed systems, but the Gospel calls for an open system.

Church as a System

- Conflict can occur in both closed and open systems, but there is a qualitative difference to the reasons for the conflict.
- Closed systems focus on belonging, loyalty, and “guarding” and “protecting” the system. Congregations often call themselves “families,” but families are, by nature, closed systems.
- Conflict in closed systems focuses on maintaining the status quo or keeping the system closed.
- Open systems are focused on bringing new members into the system. They are open to new people and to change. They value trust and are often willing to be more creative and imaginative.
- Conflict in open systems focuses more on discerning the future God is calling the congregation into and how to live into that future.

Things to Watch Out For

- Fear masquerading as love
- Recognize bullying as exactly that – bullying
- Name calling
- “Lots of people”
- “Your tolerance for rudeness is way too high”
- Often the average person in the pew deals with the issues at stake better than the pastor
- Silence is tacit approval

Tips on Handling Conflict

How do you solve such conflicts? Here are 10 suggestions:

1. Admit you need each other. Far too many congregations splinter when elders insist that their way is the only way. For congregations to grow, youth need the wisdom and stability of age, and age needs the energy—and future—of youth.
2. Face the conflict. Congregations often ignore conflicts, hoping they'll disappear. Even though conflict resolution is hard work, it must be done. Clarify the real problem, then resolve to work on it.
3. Listen to others. Allow people to express their opinions. Listen carefully to what they say, even if that runs counter to your own opinion.
4. Know your audience. Young adults who join churches today have the kind of consumer identity that asks, “How can this church help me?” If the church can’t manage its own problems, much less help people with theirs, the young folks may leave. Do you want the future walking out the door?
5. Recognize the effect of change. Consider how your congregation will be affected before you try something new. If, for example, you want to start a program to bring in more young people, consider what changes they might request before their presence disrupts the rest of the congregation.
6. Be alert to emotional involvement. When people say, “It’s only the principle of the thing,” that’s a tip that their ego is at stake. If you find that you are emotionally enmeshed in an issue, ask someone more detached from the issue to supervise.
7. Keep issues separate. When people are troubled by one thing, they can confuse it with something else. For example, you may be peeved by the new youth leader’s failure to clean up after an event, but are you also bothered because of all of the new kids he’s bringing in? Deal with one of those issues at a time.
8. Empower all parties in a conflict. If people are at odds with each other, they should all be part of the resolution process. It may be difficult to give each a say, but that’s what’s necessary for everyone to take ownership of the problem and its solution.
9. Stay objective. Undermining one side of a dispute and siding with another won’t help matters. Manage the discussion wisely, remembering that this is your family of believers.
10. If necessary, bring in a mediator. Sometimes the only way out of a conflict is to bring in a neutral party. But mediation only works when both parties accept the process. If your church is part of a denomination, ask for help from a church official.

Communication Strategies

From ***Notes on Communication: Strategies for Addressing Conflict in Congregations*** by W. Craig Gilliam

- **Listening authentically.** Listening is an art and a sacred act. You can be taught what to say and how to say it and even how to sit when you're saying it, but the heart of good listening is authenticity. People read not only your words, but what's going on inside you. If your stance isn't genuine, the words won't matter.
- **Questioning.** Questions are powerful communication tools. The way they are used can change both the direction and outcome of a leader. Therefore, questions should be used with intention. The questions we ask determine the information we get and the role we will play in the situation we are encountering — conflict or impasse.
- **Summarizing.** Summarizing what has been said can be very effective when used immediately after the parties have spoken. It can be used periodically throughout a conversation to clarify issues and help all parties know and feel they are heard.
- **Acknowledging.** Acknowledging is a skill in which the listener hears and feeds back the emotion and content of the speaker's message.
- **Reframing.** "Framing" is how one defines, describes or conceptualizes a conflict. "Reframing" means taking the essence of what the other person says and translating it into concepts that are more helpful. It involves walking down a new path and inviting the other person or persons to join you — to look at and think differently about the subject at hand.
- **Silence.** Intentionally allow a moment of silence when emotions are high or someone says something that may require thought or a pause. Intentional silence is more powerful than just taking a breath or thinking about where to go next.

Finally, as suggested above, communication, like community, cannot be faked. It's not something you can do just because you are supposed to. When people are really communicating, they are listening and speaking because they are curious about what the other has to say. They genuinely want to know and, even more important, they care about the other's perspective.

Dr. W. Craig Gilliam is director of The Center for Pastoral Effectiveness for the Louisiana Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. This article, which appeared in the Nov. 5 Leading Ideas e-newsletter, originally appeared in the September 2008 Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Newsletter and is used with the author's permission.

APPENDIX FIVE

How Does Change Happen in Churches or Any Organization

By Rev. Dr. Anita L. Bradshaw

Researcher, teacher and author Everett Rogers' in his groundbreaking book, ***Diffusion of Innovation***, argues that whenever human persons make changes or whenever an organization makes changes, it rarely follows the conventional wisdom about change. It is a process, which different people respond differently and at different speeds.

The conventional way people think change happens is to assume that one starts at Point A and makes a leap to Point B. Often referred to as the “gap model of change,” this is in fact nowhere close to how change truly comes about. People will see a change and assume that a person or an organization jumps across the gap; but, what they fail to see is all the steps and processes which people take in the organization or their personal lives to get from A to B.

In fact, change can be better viewed as the way one sails a boat. If one wants to go from the pier or the shore to a point on the horizon, one does not aim the boat at the far-distant point and just take off. Such a strategy is sure to get the sailor off-course and even in danger if one is trying to sail into the wind. Rather, the sailor engages in what is known as tacking. One tacks to a nearer point and then tacks to another point and so forth. It is a zigzag course to be sure, but it gets you where you want to go.

Rogers identifies five stages people go through to make a change or an innovation, in his terminology. People must first become aware of the possibility of change through knowledge and then they must be persuaded to take an interest in even exploring this new possibility. People will then evaluate the old ways and the new possibility and decide whether they are interested in going further. If they are convinced to move forward, there is usually a trial period of implementation, which includes on-going evaluation before acceptance or confirmation of the change comes about. Gap models of change say you go from awareness to acceptance and that is just not possible or wise.

It is important, Rogers says, to keep in mind that different people go through this process in different ways and at different rates. He lists five categories of persons and the usual percentage of the whole group, which each category encompasses. They are:

- Innovators or “The Brave” — These are the folks who are always out there with new ideas and they make up about 2.5% of the total group.
- Early Adopters or “The Respectable” — These are people who make change fairly quickly being able to assess possibilities and evaluate them in short order. They are also well respected in the organization and make up about 13.5% of the whole group.
- Early Majority or “The Thoughtful” — These are individuals who listen carefully to the Early Adopters but take a bit more time to decide, but not a great deal and they make up about 34% of an organization.
- Late Majority or “The Skeptical” — These are people who are, as the name suggests, very skeptical of change. They will eventually go along, but not until it is proven to be a success. They make up about 34% of the organization, as well.
- Laggards or “The Traditional” — These are the people who are not going to change. Period. It is an unfortunate term, but it is accurate. They make up about 16% of the organization.

This is all very important when approaching the welcoming discernment process in a congregation. Here are some tips:

- Don’t design for the Laggards or the Late Adopters, which is what is usually done. They are not going to change and focusing on convincing them will only slow the process down or end it all together.
- Recognize that you are looking for Innovators to get your process moving and to influence the Early Adopters.
- Once you have the Innovators and Early Adopters on board, change will happen if you attend to it. The tipping point for change is usually about 20%. Together these two groups make up 16% and all they need to do is move a few of the Early Majority and change is well on its way.

- The Early Adopters will sway the Middles and from there you are able to make change even against the resistance of the Laggards or even some of the Late Adopters.
- Laggards can be resilient, but do not give them more energy than they deserve. They are a small percentage that will sound like they are the majority. They are not. You should hear them, but do not let them control the process.

Below is a rather tongue-in-cheek, but helpful chart of how this plays out in congregations discerning becoming welcoming.

CATEGORIES OF INNOVATION IN THE WELCOMING MOVEMENT

	VALUES	PACE	COMFORTABLE LEVEL OF FINANCIAL RISK	AFTER WATCHING "FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO"	APPEAL
INNOVATORS	Creativity Novelty Venturesome	Fast	Commodities	"Let's vote to become publicly affirming."	Imagination "Rightness" Justice
EARLY ADOPTERS	Open-mindedness Dialogue Information Respect	Quick	Individual Stocks	"Let's talk about this and see how many of us agree."	Fairness
EARLY MAJORITY	Unity Willingness to listen	Deliberate	Balanced Mutual Funds	"Let's begin a process of study."	Fairness
LATE MAJORITY	Skeptical Proven support in majority of the congregation	Very slow and careful	CDs	"Let's consult with the conference or the region or the mission district or..."	Traditions of the church
LAGGARDS	Traditional Predictability Constancy	Crawl	Mattress	"Let's go home."	Civility

Prepared by Rev. Carol Wise and Rev. Dr. Anita L. Bradshaw based on Everett M. Rogers' *Diffusion of Innovations*

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APPENDIX SIX

Framing Worksheet

PRAYER

Spend a few minutes in prayer, asking for guidance and clarity as you embark on this important journey in the life of your community of faith.

EXERCISE ONE

Take a few minutes to think and write about what makes our congregation unique.

- What drew you in?
- What keeps you here?
- Why is this a special place?

After a few minutes for reflection, ask folks to look at what they have written, and talk about what themes emerge? What rises to the top?

With that in mind, let's begin to talk about framing. At its most basic, a frame is simply the way you think about something. Words matter, so the words we use to think about something – whatever that something is – affect our thoughts about it. Think about the way a state's tourism slogan tells the story of a state in very few words. For example, Missouri is known as "The Show-Me State." What different images come to mind with the state slogans "Close to Home. Far from ordinary." or "Where The Rivers Run"? Similarly, how we think and talk about the Welcoming Process will affect both how members of your congregation will view it, and their ability to join in the work.

In some ways, framing is harder to define and easier to experience. So, let's begin with the world of art... with none other than the Mona Lisa.

First, we see it as we rarely do – unadorned – simply the painting itself with no frame:



Now, if we were at the Louvre, this is how we would see it framed and hanging on display:



Look back to the original image. What is different? How does the frame (or the lack of one) affect how you see the painting itself?

And what if, heaven help us, it was framed like this:



How do you see the painting now?

Of course, this is a literal presentation of what is really a concept, but it is a concrete illustration of our point. What surrounds the THING – whatever that THING is – affects how we see that THING. This is the power of a frame.

In our context of a Welcoming Process, a frame is made up of the words or concepts we use to talk about the Welcoming Process.



Context matters. The Process doesn't just happen in a vacuum. It happens within the context of your congregation's history and culture. A good frame takes that context into account. And if you have chosen well, a really good frame gives you a powerful way to talk about your Welcoming Process in a way that resonates with your congregation's history, culture, and its most deeply held Biblical and theological values.

EXERCISE TWO

Now invite folks to think of themselves as a generic congregation (not yours). One by one, give them a few images – ways that the Church has thought about itself in the past. Ask them to imagine how they would see themselves – their "congregation-selves" – and their mission in the world with each of these images.

What if you saw yourself as...

- ...a ship on a stormy sea?
- ...a fortress?
- ...a hospital for wounded souls?

Give them time to reflect and talk about each image that what surrounds the THING effects how we see that THING.

Here is a concrete example of how one congregation identified their frame.

A Simple Cup of Coffee

A Lutheran church in the Midwest was not an official Welcoming Congregation, but they were very clear that they highly valued hospitality. They wanted a concrete way to demonstrate that hospitality, something that went beyond just words, a handshake, and "here's a bulletin." So they set up a barista stand in the narthex. The first thing you encountered as you walked into their building was a friendly face offering to make you a free cup of whatever you'd like.

The congregation was playing host to a fundraising concert, and among the performers was the local Gay Men's Chorus. One Chorus member was a man who had been deeply traumatized from his time in the church; an experience all-too common within the LGBT community. After taking the courageous step to leave the church years before, he vowed, in an act of self-protection, that he would never set foot in a church again.

However, because of this upcoming concert, he was now being placed in an impossible bind, torn between that vow he'd made years earlier and his commitments as a member of the Chorus. But somehow, he found the courage to show up at the church for rehearsal. But think about the emotional state that he must have been in – the mix of fear and courage, defensiveness and vulnerability – as he walked up those stairs, approached the door, and paused for a moment before finally pushing the door open and walking inside.

The first thing he encountered was that friendly face behind the counter saying, "Welcome. Can I make you a latte?" That simple act of hospitality reached through that painful jumble of emotions and so deeply touched his heart that he started to cry. The person behind the counter, a bit puzzled by these tears, had no idea about the emotional journey that man was on, nor the healing power of that simple offer of coffee.

When the congregation later learned of this story, they quickly decided to embark upon a Welcoming Process. And it was abundantly clear that "hospitality" would be their frame. This was such a successful frame for them because – *in a single word* – it succinctly summed up their most deeply-held values and who they saw themselves to be.

Remember what we've learned about Graceful Engagement. All of this work is about bringing people together, not pulling them apart. So choose a frame that, from the very beginning of your Process, has complete buy-in from the congregation. It needs to be a description of present reality, an accurate description of who they see themselves to be right now. It cannot be an aspirational goal. Because you cannot ask them, with their first step, to take a leap. If you do, you risk losing people from the very beginning, and you may never get them back.

Climbing Up the Mountain

Growing up, David loved to go camping. His dad, a Lutheran pastor, got a month off every summer, and his family would spend that time camping in the wilds of northern Minnesota. Living on a pastor's salary, they never ventured very far from home. But one year, his folks had saved up enough to take an epic road trip from the plains of Minnesota west to the mountains of western Canada. However, his mom was afraid of heights, had never been in the mountains before, and was looking forward to this trip with a good deal of trepidation. So to make this as painless as possible for her, his dad got ahold of topographical maps (decades, mind you, before Google Maps!) and spent hours plotting the most gradual route up the mountains. Once the family and all their camping gear was loaded into their '67 Chevy, they made their way west. The route was rarely the most direct and never the quickest, but bit by bit they climbed. When they finally reached the first stunning scenic overlook, his mom cried out with dumbfounded delight. "Oh...! How did we...? This is beautiful! How did we get so high?!" For David's Mom – fears conquered. And for his Dad – mission accomplished!

This is the kind of experience you are hoping for as you guide your congregation through a well-framed Welcoming Process. You start them off on firm ground, and guide them with care and patience. And when the time comes to bring LGBT inclusion into the conversation, it will be understood as a natural extension to the mission of your church.

So to summarize, framing is the spiritual practice in which we *name succinctly in a word or phrase* the values of the Welcoming Process. Framing is the lens through which we look at every aspect of the Welcoming Process; framing is the vessel which holds every other part of the Welcoming Process. Framing allows us to *describe* the WHY of our Welcoming Process, but to do so in ways that could be written in a banner or on the church's sign. Articulating a frame grounded in your deepest theological and Biblical values invites your congregation to experience the Welcoming Process as an act of faithful discipleship. With a well-chosen frame, your Welcoming Process will give you a way to discuss why being a place of intentional welcome to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities is important to your congregation.

Putting Your Frame into Action

The frame you choose for your Welcoming Process should be used in all aspects of the work you do. For instance:

- when you do a worship service around your Welcoming Process, the frame you have chosen should be the theme of that service;
- it should be the language that is at the top of whatever publicity you do regarding educational programs; and
- it should provide the focus for discussion and conversation in all aspects of your process.

EXERCISE THREE

Now invite folks to reflect back on your own congregation. The first exercise asked you to think about your personal relationship with the congregation. Now, reflect on your congregation as a whole, with particular attention to its history and culture.

How does your congregation speak of itself? What images do members use to describe your church and its mission?

How is it viewed in the wider community?

What biblical and theological themes are most resonant?

What scripture passages or Bible stories are most resonant?

Does your congregation have a favorite hymn that it sings every Founder's Day... and is there a phrase or image in the words that could inspire a frame?

Is there art in your sanctuary? Stained glass images, etc.?

Some Things to Keep in Mind

1. We cannot overemphasize the importance of finding the right frame for your congregation. Do not feel rushed to identify what will work best in your setting. For a few congregations it will be pretty clear right away what your frame should be. But for most, the process will take time – filled with deep conversation and prayer – to arrive at your frame.
2. A Welcoming Process, which calls the Church back to its core values of hospitality, justice and genuine love, is an opportunity for the Church to be the Church. Therefore, it involves the whole congregation (straight and LGBT) discerning the core of their faith and their actions together. Becoming a Welcoming Congregation is not about straight people doing something in a paternalistic way for “them.” The right frame will unite us in our common values.
3. Any frame that puts the congregation in debate mode is to be avoided.
4. While doing a study in human sexuality (like the ***Our Whole Lives*** curriculum²) is a very important opportunity in the life of the congregation, we recommend that this kind of educational opportunity precede a Welcoming Process. This allows congregants to do their own work and reflection on sexuality and not use the Welcoming Process to “work through” their own issues at the expense of the LGBT members of the congregation. Given this, we recommend that sexuality not be the theme or frame for a Welcoming Process. The same is true for gender and marriage issues. While all of these topics will naturally arise in a Welcoming Process, they should not be the frame around which you organize.

² United Church of Christ and Unitarian Universalist Association, *Our Whole Lives: Lifespan Sexuality Education Curricula and Sexuality and Our Faith: A Companion to Our Whole Lives* [Cleveland: United Church of Christ and Universalist Association, 2000].

APPENDIX SEVEN

Telling Your Public Story: Self, Us, Now

By Marshall Ganz

Stories not only teach us how to act—they inspire us to act. Stories communicate our values through the language of the heart, our emotions. And it is what we feel—our hopes, our cares, our obligations—not simply what we know that can inspire us with the courage to act.

A plot is structured with:

- a beginning,
- movement toward a desired goal,
- an unexpected event,
- a crisis that engages our curiosity,
- choices made in response to the crisis,
- and an outcome.

Our ability to empathetically identify with a protagonist allows us to enter into the story, feel what s/he feels, see things through his or her eyes. And the moral, revealed through the resolution, brings understanding. From stories, we learn how to manage ourselves, how to face difficult choices, unfamiliar situations, and uncertain outcomes because each of us is the protagonist in our own life story, facing everyday challenges, authoring our own choices, and learning from the outcomes.

By telling our personal stories of challenges we have faced, choices we have made, and what we learned from the outcomes we can inspire others and share our own wisdom about how they can face their challenges as well. Because we can express our values through stories not as abstract principles, but as lived experience, they have the power to move others.

Stories are specific—they evoke a very particular time, place, setting, mood, color, sound, texture, taste. The better able to communicate this specificity, the more power your story will have to engage others. This may seem like a paradox, but like a poem or a painting or a piece of music, it is the specificity of the experience that can give us access to the universal sentiment or insight they contain.

You may think that your story doesn't matter, that people aren't interested, that you shouldn't be talking about yourself. But when you do public work, you have a responsibility to offer a public account of who you are, why you do what you do, and where you hope to lead. The thing about it is that if you don't author your public story, others will, and they may not tell it in the way that you like—as many recent examples show.

A good public story is drawn from the series of choice points that have structured the “plot” of your life—the **challenges** you have faced, **choices** you made, and **outcomes you experienced**.

Challenge: Why did you feel it was a challenge? What was so challenging about it? Why was it your challenge?

Choice: Why did you make the choice you did? Where did you get the courage—or not? Where did you get the hope—or not? How did it feel?

Outcome: How did the outcome feel? Why did it feel that way? What did it teach you? What do you want to teach us? How do you want us to feel?

The story you tell of how you came to serve as a leader offers others insight into your values, why you have chosen to act on them in this way, what they can expect from you, what they can learn from you, and what you might expect of them as well.

A public story consists of three parts:

- **A Story of Self:** how you came to be the person you are.
- **A Story of Us:** how your constituency, community, organization, came to be the people they are; and
- **A Story of Now:** the challenge this community now faces, the choices it must make and the outcomes to which “we” can aspire.

In this worksheet, we focus primarily on the “story of self,” the place to begin, but we also offer some suggestions on getting to a story of us and a story of now. Remember the art of storytelling is in the telling, not in the writing. In other words, storytelling is interactive, a form of social transaction, and can therefore only be learned by telling, and listening, and telling and listening.

Story of Self

Take time to reflect on your own public story, beginning with your story of self. Grab a notebook, a tape (or digital) recorder, or a friend who will listen, and describe the milestones and experiences that have brought you to this moment. Go back as far as you can remember. Focus on challenges you had to face, the choices you made about how to deal with them, and the satisfactions—or frustrations—you experienced. What did you learn from the outcomes and how you feel about them today? What did they teach you about yourself, about your family, about your peers, about your community, about your nation, about the world around you, about people—about what really matters to you? What about these stories was so intriguing? Which elements offered real perspective into your own life.

If you’re having trouble, here are some questions to get you started. These questions are NOT meant to be answered individually. They are intended to help to inspire you and get your memory gears rolling so you can reflect on your public story and tell it with brevity and intentionality. Don’t expect to include the answers to all these questions each time you tell your story. They are the building blocks of many potential stories, and the object right now is to lay them out in a row and see what inspires you.

What memories do you have as a child that link to the people, places, events that you value? What are your favorite memories? What images, sounds or smells in particular come up for you when you recall these memories?

List every job or project that you have ever been involved with connected with these values, or not. Be expansive; include things like camping in the wild, serving in a youth group, going to a political rally, organizing a cultural club, experiencing a moment of transcendence. List classes you have taken that connect with your values. Name the last five books or articles that you have read (by choice). What do you see as a connection or theme that you can see in all of the selections? What did you enjoy about these articles? What does your reading say about you?

Some of the moments you recall may be painful as well as hopeful. You may have felt excluded, put down or powerless, as well as courageous, recognized, and inspired. Be sure to attend to these moments of “challenge” as well as to your moments of “hope”—and to learn to be able to articulate these moments in ways that can enable others to understand who you are. It is the combination of “criticality” and “hopefulness” that creates energy for change.

What was the last time you spent a day doing what you love doing? What in particular made you want to use that day in that way? What was memorable about the day? Is there a specific sight, sound or smell that you think of when you recall this day?

What factors were behind your decision to pursue a career in public work? Was there pressure to make different choices? How did you deal with conflicting influences?

Who in your life was the person to introduced you to your “calling” or who encouraged you to become active? Why do you think that they did this? What did your parents model? What was the role, if any, of a community of faith? Who did you admire?

Whom do you credit the most with your involvement now in work for your cause? What about their involvement in your life made a difference? Why do you think it was important to then to do so?

Story of Us

What community, organization, movement, culture, nation or other constituency do you consider yourself to be part of, connected with? Do you share in a common past? Do you share in a common future? Do you participate in this community as a result of

"fate," "choice," or both? How like or unlike the experience of others do you believe your own experience to be?

What do you know about the origins of this community? What stories are connected with it? Do you know what challenges the "founders" were responding to, what went into the choices that they made, how they felt about the outcomes? Do any of these stories inspire or challenge you?

What do you know about the critical challenges it faced as a community? What choices did it make at the time? Who were some of the key people involved? What challenges were they responding to? What were the outcomes? What were the lessons? Do any of these stories inspire or challenge you?

What celebrations, rituals, holidays, songs, poems, symbols, prayers, sayings, colors, sounds or smells are associated with these critical moments in the life of this community? What does it mean if there are none? What does it mean if people are "just going through the motions?"

What was the most significant decision you have made relating to your role as a participant, activist, or leader of this community? What was at stake for you and for others? Was there a lot of deliberation? If so, what influenced you to make the choice you made?

What are you working to achieve? What are the specific goals you have for your work? What barriers have you faced in trying to attain them? Were there ever moments of desperation? What have you done to overcome these difficult times?

When was the last time you felt very proud of your work? If you were to receive an award for your accomplishment, what values and virtues would you attribute it to? Who would you thank?

Story of Now

What is the biggest challenge this community faces now? Why is this a challenge? What is at stake? Why should anyone care? Why do you care? Can you tell a personal story about why you care about this challenge now, at this moment, in this place?

What are the choices that this community faces now? Why is it a choice? What if they don't choose? What if they do? How can they make a choice? What's your role in this? What's at stake for you?

What can they hope for? If the challenge is so great, why is there hope of success? And even if hope of success is remote, why is action still required?

Copyrighted in 2006 by Marshall Ganz who teaches at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. It draws on his experience working in several different movements for justice.

APPENDIX EIGHT

Public Storytelling and the Welcoming Church Movement

While Marshall Ganz's article (Appendix Seven) on Public Storytelling is not solely focused on leading within churches, its message is one that resonates strongly within church settings. Jesus was first and foremost a storyteller. As the Gospel of Matthew says in chapter thirteen, "Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing." And Jesus' stories are ones that are woven into our bones as Christians.

The Christian Church is also knit together by stories. Every Sunday morning (and perhaps Wednesday night and Sunday evening), we hear the stories from the Older Testament, we hear sermons filled with narratives, we hear songs that tell stories. We ask each other to share testimony about why we give to the church during stewardship season. We testify about the lives of our loved ones during funerals. We read our children Biblical and other stories during children's time and in Sunday School. Stories form us as people of faith because they teach us about the values of our community. Stories help us know how to apply those values in the actions we take.

As you will see in the rest of this Toolkit, we have grounded the entire Welcoming Church process in the Gospel, the story of the Good News. The reason we do the work of Welcoming is because Jesus told stories about welcoming, and inviting in and reaching out. Because Jesus told stories to teach us gospel values, we need to tell stories about how our lives and the ministry of welcoming are rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus.

But, as Marshall Ganz points out, we need to learn how to do this in effective ways. One of those ways is through a technique called Public Storytelling which Ganz has written about and taught in many contexts. Many of our Welcoming Church Movement colleagues have found that Public Storytelling is a very effective tool as part of a Welcoming Process and so we share it with you here.

STORY OF SELF	STORY OF US	STORY OF NOW
C H A L L E N G E C H O I C E O U T C O M E	C H A L L E N G E C H O I C E O U T C O M E	C H A L L E N G E C H O I C E O U T C O M E
Two Minutes	Two Minutes	Two Minutes

Guidelines for Telling Our Stories

Stories should...

- **Be under 2 minutes:** Good stories are focused and well-organized. Remember you are telling the story of one moment in time. Focus on one challenge, one choice and one outcome.
- **Be specific—use details:** Take the listener to the moment you are describing. What are the sights, sounds, smells, and emotions of that moment? Use present tense. Try telling the story without using the word “and.”
- **Tap into emotion:** Stories should pull at the heartstrings of the listener. Help the listener understand the values you are describing through the language of emotion.

- **Include a challenge, a choice and an outcome:** Make sure these three points are clear and well-articulated.
- **Offer hope:** Stories should be inspirational. End on a positive note. Offer the good news through your story.
- **Communicate values:** Stories have a point and that point is a value that you want to inspire and cultivate in the listener.

Remembering these guidelines, take a few minutes and write some notes

Story of Self

- This is the story of who you are and why you are called to do what you are called to do.
- Think about a specific moment in time that embodies your call
- Make sure your story is in the first person

Why are you part of your particular welcoming movement?

Story of Us

- This is the story of your congregation. Who are we together as the Welcoming Church Movement?
- Think about a specific moment that embodies the identity of your own congregation.

What does it mean to be part of your particular welcoming movement (Reconciling in Christ, Open and Affirming, etc.) or what does it mean that your congregation is not part of these movements in your denomination?

Story of Now

- This is the story of the current challenge to your denomination or congregation.
- It is the story of the Church as it is and the Church as it could be.
- Paint the picture of the vision of a fully inclusive church and lead your listener to take action.... "We need you to...."

What is the challenge we face together as First Baptist Church or as Presbyterians?

As you craft your stories, here are two examples that might help you start.

An Example

Gloria was in her eighties, and was asked to speak at a church meeting as they considered whether or not to become a Welcoming Congregation.

"When I was eight years old, I was helping my mom, who served on the Altar Guild. One of her roles was to clean the sanctuary every week. She had taken the Communion cup and plate off the Table and placed them on the front pew. Now the church where I grew up didn't allow lay people – let alone women – to serve Communion. But despite that, I was pretending to be the minister with the elements. Just as I raised up the cup and was whispering the words I'd heard so many times, I felt two strong hands on my shoulders.

"It was the pastor, and I had been caught. I froze. As he leaned down to speak in my ear, I knew that I was in deep trouble. But what he said to me was this: 'It's a joy, isn't it, to invite people to Christ's table? I hope you'll remember that everyone is always welcome.'

"I'm eighty-two years old and I don't completely understand what lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people experience. But I do know that my church is a church where everyone is welcome at the communion table and in the pulpit and in every aspect of church life. So I'm voting in favor of becoming a welcoming congregation."

Now in this example, the person facing the challenge, choice, and outcome is actually the pastor, not the storyteller.

Challenge: Finding someone who was not allowed to serve Communion pretending to do so.

Choice: He could either chastise her or affirm her instincts.

Outcome: He taught a life-long lesson that everyone is welcome at the Table.

APPENDIX NINE

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

How practiced is your congregation at having conversations with and about bisexual and transgender people? If you are like most, these conversations, if they happen at all, are very few and far between. The silence, the complexity, and the mystery of the issues surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity can make us feel inadequate and discourage us from engaging in public conversation.

As we have stated elsewhere, it is so important to avoid a paternalistic approach in your Welcoming Process. This can happen when well-intentioned people enter into the Process in order to do something for “those poor homosexuals.” This attitude does not bring people together. It only helps to further divide; reinforcing the idea that one group is “other” and the object of pity. Your Welcoming Process is not a mission of mercy. Rather, it is the pursuit of justice. And that distinction in intent is crucial.

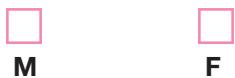
There is a similar attitude to be avoided when dealing with bisexual and transgender issues. If handled clumsily, bisexual and transgender people can feel put on display as curiosities. Instead, we recommend that the Welcoming Process strive to create a space where bisexual and transgender people are empowered to share their stories as full and equal children of God.

If this conversation is fraught with such danger, why include it in your Welcoming Process? We choose to include it because this conversation is not about “them.” Instead, these conversations are about US! We ALL have sexual orientation and gender identity. Our society’s very rigid categories of “either/or,” “male/female,” and “gay/straight” simply do not serve any of us. The understandings to be gained by this conversation can be a huge gift to the Church. They can lead to a world where all of us – not just bisexual and transgender people – are free to more fully become the “fearfully and wonderfully made” human-beings God created us to be.

In this appendix, we will provide a basic level of understanding of the binary system of sexual orientation and gender identity, explore how that system has hurt people over time, and look at a more expansive view. With this background, you will be better equipped to assist your congregation in starting these conversations. There are SO MANY resources out there, but not all of them are of equal value. The information in this appendix can also assist you in evaluating potential resources for use in your Welcoming Process.

LIFE'S FIRST QUESTION

At the moment of birth, there is a mother, a new-born, a doctor, and a question: “Is it a boy or a girl?” The birth certificate has two boxes, and only one can be checked.



This is an example of the gender binary system, where there are two, and only two, very distinct options. It is one or the other, male or female. And the way the medical professional (such as doctor or midwife) answers that question – “Is it a boy or a girl?” – has ramifications throughout one’s entire life. Future options, expectations, and opportunities all hinge on which box is checked. And interestingly, notice that the very question – “Is it...?” – withholds personhood until a gender is assigned.

Let’s look at some of the implications of the gender binary system when “F” is checked on the birth certificate.

SEX is determined on the basis of physical characteristics. If the baby appears to have female external genitalia, then the sex is FEMALE.

GENDER IDENTITY is one’s internal sense of self as a gendered person. If the sex is female, then the assumed gender identity is WOMAN.

GENDER EXPRESSION is how we perform our gender. This includes the complex set of societal roles, behaviors, and appearance. If the sex is female, then the assumed gender expression is FEMININE.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: In the gender binary system, even the person to whom one is attracted is determined by one’s sex. If the sex is female, then the attraction will be toward MEN.

And when “M” is checked...

SEX: If the baby appears to have male external genitalia, then the sex is MALE.

GENDER IDENTITY: If the sex is male, then the assumed gender identity is MAN.

GENDER EXPRESSION: If the sex is male, then the assumed gender expression is MASCULINE.

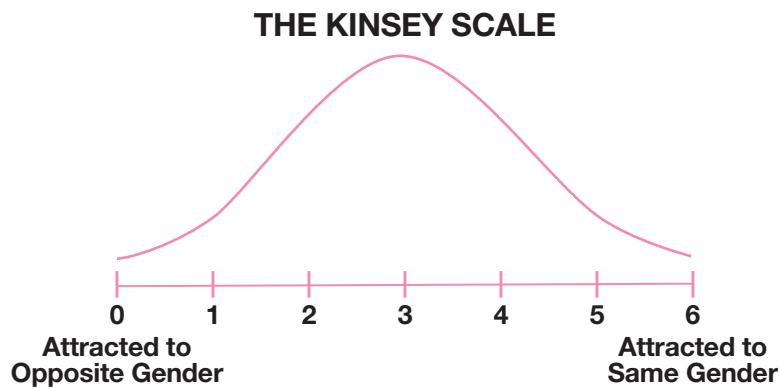
SEXUAL ORIENTATION: In the gender binary system, if the sex is male, then the attraction will be toward WOMEN.

THE GENDER BINARY SYSTEM

SEX	Female	Male
GENDER IDENTITY	Woman	Man
GENDER EXPRESSION	Feminine	Masculine
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	Attracted to Men	Attracted to Women

Public Discourse

In our public conversations, we began to hear the voices of those for whom the gender binary system was not working. For example, “Just because I am a woman does not mean that I am attracted to men.” One of the earlier systems to present a more complex understanding of sexual orientation was the Kinsey Scale, developed in the 1940’s and 50’s by Dr. Alfred Kinsey. Instead of people falling into one or the other of the gender binary system’s only two choices, he proposed that people actually fell on a continuum – a spectrum or range from zero to six, where zero represented being solely attracted to the opposite gender and six represented being solely attracted to the same gender.



Based on his extensive research, Kinsey further proposed that very few people fell on either end of that continuum. Most, his research found, fell somewhere in the middle. People having a mix of attractions to both opposite and same genders may identify as bisexual.

While our understanding of sexual orientation has become more complex, so too have our understandings of sex and gender. Like sexual orientation, we have learned that none of these components - sex, gender identity or gender expression – are distinct either/or categories. Each can be placed on a continuum. So as time has progressed, we have learned that the artificial confines of the gender binary system have failed to include everyone.

Sex is determined not only by external genitalia, but by reproductive organs, chromosomes, and hormones. And these four factors can appear in any one person in an infinite number of variations. People with ambiguous genitalia or other biological complexities (such as an unusual chromosomal pattern or hormonal shifts) may identify as Intersex. Until very recently, it was

common medical practice for doctors to respond to intersex babies by simply choosing a sex and making surgical modifications to the child's genitalia to "resolve" the ambiguity. The parents may or may not have even been consulted or informed. As these children developed, they often experienced great emotional trauma when the sex chosen for them did not align with their own sense of gender identity.

Gender identity is one's own sense of self. For most people, our sense of our own gender aligns with the category originally marked on our birth certificate. This is referred to as cisgender. For transgender people, our self-experienced gender is in some way different from the category marked on our birth certificate. For example, a child is raised as a boy but insists "I am a girl." In the same way that sex is not an either/or category, gender identity can also be experienced on a continuum. Gender identity can be experienced as a combination of woman AND man. Gender identity can also be experienced as NEITHER woman NOR man. Some people in the middle of the gender identity spectrum identify as gender-queer to honor their experience of not fitting completely in the category of woman or man.

Gender expression is how we live as a gendered person, including our behaviors, clothing choices, careers, and hobbies. In the gender binary system, gender expression is guided by a complex set of rules of behavior and presentation about what is appropriate for women and for men. These rules can be unspoken, or they can be taught specifically: "A lady does not speak until spoken to." "Boys don't cry." "A woman's place is in the kitchen." "A real man provides for his family." Because these rules are culturally defined, they can shift from place to place or over time. The rules for gender expression are reinforced through punishments, ranging in severity from a withering glance to being beaten and left for dead. When we think about our own experiences as a child, most of us can remember a time when we were punished in some way for behaving in ways that did not fit society's expectations for our gender. Transgender people can be at daily risk for the most severe of these punishments when they are visible in their transgender status. People whose gender presentation does not fit the rigid confines of the binary system may identify as gender non-conforming. People whose gender expression is a nearly-equal combination of masculine and feminine may identify as androgynous.

To summarize, sex, gender identity and gender expression can be experienced on a continuum, creating a nearly infinite combination of the three components. The binary gender system says that there are only two genders. Here, we can see that gender is truly far more complex than that. How does this complex understanding of gender affect our understanding of sexual orientation?

Remember in the graph of the Kinsey scale, the ends of the scale refer to same and opposite gender. How can there be a same or opposite with gender in such a mix? This is why some people who are attracted to people of a variety of genders identify not as bisexual (which still implies that there are only two genders) but as pansexual or queer. For them, these words better reflect their experience of falling in love with a person rather than a gender.

SEX, GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION:A MORE NUANCED VIEW

SEX	Female	Intersex	Male
GENDER IDENTITY	Woman	Gender-Queer	Man
GENDER EXPRESSION	Feminine	Androgynous	Masculine
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	Attracted to Men	Bisexual Pansexual Queer	Attracted to Women

Because most of us have been so steeped in the binary gender system, some of these concepts can seem very foreign to us. This can be a lot of information to take in. So, let's pause and remember why we are exploring these ideas. In the Welcoming Process, we want to deepen and expand our ability to welcome people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Too often, we continue to hear the stories of people who have been told that God does not love them as they are. Faith communities struggle to respond with hospitality and true welcome to people who are different, particularly differences in gender identity or expression.

If, during the course of your educational opportunities, you include a panel with transgender people, we urge you to invite everyone present to ask themselves a few questions before asking personal questions of any of the panelists. “Why am I asking?” “Will this question help me to know this person more deeply as a fellow human being?” “Would this question be appropriate to ask of different people and in a different setting?”

THE CURIOSITY CONTINUUM



Hospitable | Lurid

Always keep in mind that the goal of this work is to break down the walls that divide us, and reinforcing the perception that transgender people are exotic oddities does not serve that goal. Questions about a person’s genitalia, whether or not they have had “the surgery,” their sex lives, etc., are deeply personal. If questions like these arise, we urge you to gently intervene so that the panelist isn’t forced into an awkward situation. For these touchier questions, there are answers aplenty on the internet.

Know that it is so easy for the conversation to get lost down the rabbit hole of definitions... “Now what exactly is the difference between transgender and transsexual?” The goal for both you as a facilitator and for your congregation is not to make you experts. Rather, the goal is to give you a basic understanding in order to allow you to extend a more meaningful welcome to transgender and bisexual people. If you are hungry for more information, there are a lot of good resources out there. *transACTION*, published by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force’s Institute for Welcoming Resources is an excellent three-session congregational curriculum on transgender issues. It is available as a free download at www.WelcomingResources.org. See Appendix Twelve for suggestions on where to find more resources.

EXERCISE

After presenting the information on this more complex view of sex, gender, and sexual orientation, handout copies of the ***Complex Identities worksheet***.

In order to do this exercise while maintaining a sense of personal safety, here are some things to ask everyone present to consider.

- Practice self-care. These are personal questions, and you may be surprised by what feelings arise. You may be in a group you’ve known for quite some time and trust, or this group could be mostly acquaintances or strangers. During times of open discussion, you can reveal as much or as little as you care to.
- At the same time, recognize that transgender folks are our teachers. Every single day that they are seen in public is a courageous act of self-revelation. Invite folks to be inspired by their courage and to push themselves a bit.

People may be concerned about others being able to see their worksheets as they fill them out. So invite folks to spread throughout the room if they’d like to do this exercise more on their own.

Ask people to plot themselves on each of the four continua. Where do they fall today, right now, right here. Give them a few minutes to reflect and put their marks on the page.

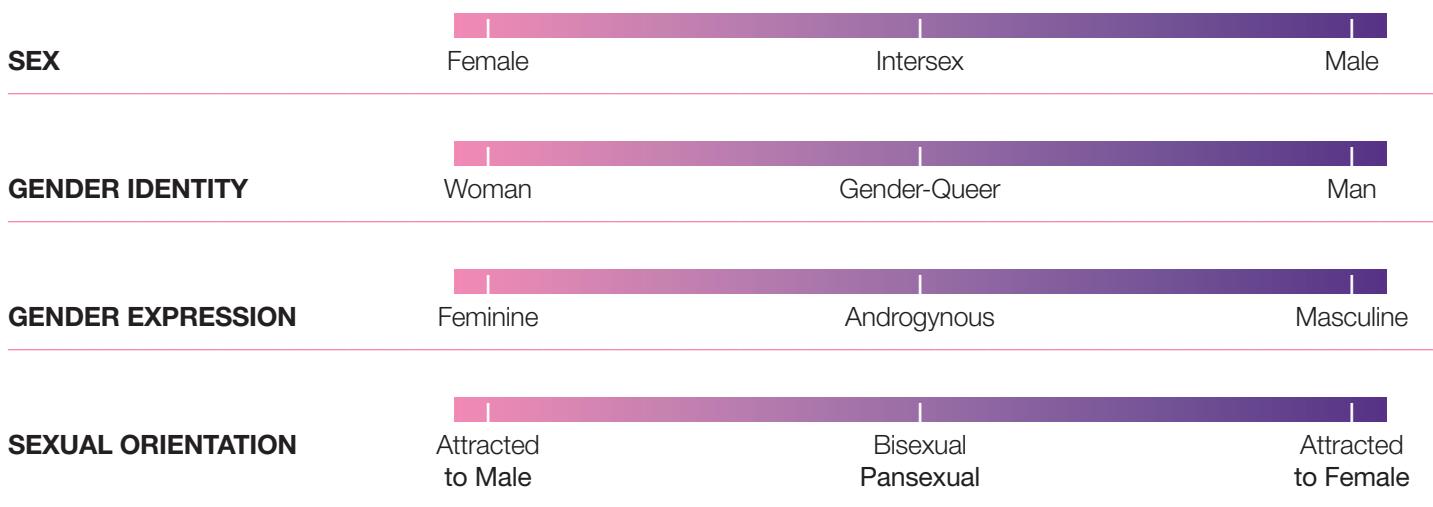
Next, hand out crayons to everyone and ask them to now think about themselves as a kindergarten-age child (or the earliest self they can remember). How did you think of yourself? What were your favorite clothes to wear? Did you have to learn lessons about how a girl or a boy was expected to act? Ask them now to plot their childhood self on each of the continua on the worksheet.

As a facilitator of this exercise, you now have a few options.

1. If folks have spread out around the room, ask them to return to their seats. Invite people, as they are comfortable, to share what that experience was like. Did you learn anything new about yourself? Any insights?
2. As people are returning to their seats, collect everyone’s worksheets. After shuffling them, hand them back out so that no one has their own original worksheet. Form a continuum on the floor, identify what each end signifies, and ask everyone to stand on the spot indicated on the worksheet they are now holding. Invite the group to discuss what they observe. Now ask them to move to their crayon-marked spot. What has changed?

We are all part of the Body of Christ. And for far too long, contrary to the instructions of scripture, the Church has said to many of its members, “I have no need for you.” The Church is weakened with every person shut out. We are all better when we are whole. God loves diversity – just look at creation! A sincere and open welcome from your congregation fosters diversity, and with that growing diversity you will not lose who you are – you will grow more closely into the Church that God calls us all to be.

GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION: COMPLEX IDENTITIES WORKSHEET



APPENDIX TEN

Sample Welcoming Statements

Additional statements can be found at
www.welcomingresources.org/welcoming.xml#welcoming.

Prince of Peace Lutheran Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Who is welcome here?

If you are Asian, Hispanic, Black, or White...

If you are male or female or transgender...

If you are three days old, 30 years old, or 103 years old...

If you've never stepped foot in a church; or if you are Buddhist, Roman Catholic, agnostic or are a life-long Lutheran...

If you are single, married, divorced, separated, or partnered...

If you are straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual...

If you are a Republican, Democrat, Independent, Socialist, or not registered to vote...

If you have, or had, addictions, phobias, abortions, or a criminal record...

If you own your home, rent, live with your parents, or are homeless...

If you are fully-abled, disabled, or a person of differing abilities...

You are welcome here!

This congregation is committed to being a radically loving and Welcoming community of faith, centered in the Good News of Jesus Christ. Therefore, in faithfulness to the Gospel and our Lutheran heritage, and to the best of our ability, we promise to provide programs, ministries, and pastoral care to all who seek God in this place.

Old South Church, United Church of Christ Boston, Massachusetts

The Old South Church in Boston, in the name of its host, Jesus Christ, and in the spirit of Christ's invitation carved into the stone of this church's portico, "Behold I Set Before You an Open Door," welcomes all who seek to know God.

Following the One who we believe is Sovereign and Savior, we affirm that each individual is a child of God, and recognize that we are called to be like one body with many members, seeking with others of every race, ethnicity, creed, class, age, gender, marital status, physical or mental ability, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression to journey together toward the promised realm of God.

We invite everyone to join in the common life and mission of our reconciling community through participation and leadership in this congregation, and by fully sharing in the worship, rites and sacraments of this church.

As we all move forward with the work of this church, we commit ourselves to making justice and inclusivity a reality in this congregation and in the world. On the threshold of Christ's open door, we rely upon the healing, unconditional nature of God's Love and Grace to be our help and guide.

Capitol Hill United Methodist Church Washington, D.C.

Capitol Hill United Methodist Church is called to the ministry of reconciliation. We embrace as a gift the diversity of our neighborhood and the world. We celebrate our human family's diversity of sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, age, faith history, economic status, marital status, physical and mental ability, and education.

We affirm that all people are created in the image of God and as beloved children of God, all are worthy of God's love and grace. We welcome the full inclusion of all people in the life and ministries of Capitol Hill United Methodist Church as we journey toward reconciliation through Christ.

We recognize that there are differences among us, but believe that we can love alike even though we may not think alike. We proclaim this statement of welcome to all who have known the pain of exclusion or discrimination in the church and society. We invite all people to join us in our faith journey toward greater love, understanding, and mutual respect.

Church of the Beatitudes United Church of Christ Phoenix, Arizona

We acknowledge that throughout history the Christian church has often condemned and excluded people because of race, culture, age, gender, economic status, disability or sexual orientation. While the church has made progress in being open and affirming to many groups, there continues to be condemnation of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons from the community of faith, or at least, a tolerance of such condemnation and exclusion through silence. We believe such actions are inconsistent with Christ's teachings. Church of the Beatitudes is a community of faith-keeping and faith-seeking people who affirm that every person has worth as a unique creation made in the image of God. We recognize, celebrate and give thanks for the many diverse gifts of God among us. We declare ourselves to be an Open and Affirming congregation, welcoming into the full life and ministry of the church persons of every race, culture, age, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and economic status. We commit to model a community of faith and spirit that works toward openness and understanding, offering justice, healing and wholeness of life for all people. We believe that through our diversity, all can grow and practice a unity of faith that transcends our differences.

All Saints Lutheran Church Aurora, Colorado

We extend a special welcome to those who are single, married, divorced, queer, filthy rich, dirt poor, or no hablo Inglés. We extend a special welcome to those who are crying new-borns, skinny as a rail or could afford to lose a few pounds.

We welcome you if you can sing like Andrea Bocelli or like our pastor who can't carry a note in a bucket. You're welcome here if you're "just browsing," just woke up or just got out of jail. We don't care if you're more Catholic than the Pope, or haven't been in church since little Joey's Baptism.

We extend a special welcome to those who are over 60 but not grown up yet, and to teenagers who are growing up too fast. We welcome soccer moms, NASCAR dads, starving artists, tree-huggers, latte-sippers, vegetarians, junk-food eaters. We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted. We welcome you if you're having problems or you're down in the dumps or if you don't like "organized religion," we've been there too.

If you blew all your offering money at the dog track, you're welcome here. We offer a special welcome to those who think the earth is flat, work too hard, don't work, can't spell, or because grandma is in town and wanted to go to church.

We welcome those who are inked, pierced or both. We offer a special welcome to those who could use a prayer right now, had religion shoved down your throat as a kid or got lost in traffic and wound up here by mistake. We welcome tourists, seekers and doubters, bleeding hearts ... and you!

APPENDIX ELEVEN

We're Welcoming... Now What?

Below are two examples of checklists that can help your congregation ensure that the Welcoming Process remains a living and vibrant aspect of your ministry. We suggest that you review both and adapt them as needed for your congregational context.

Example One:

Overall Impression

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being hardly at all and 10 being very) how active is your congregation in its Welcoming witness?

Leadership

- Does your congregation have or has it had an openly lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) pastor?
- Does your congregation have or has it had an openly LGBT music director, director of Christian Education, Youth leader or other paid staff?
- Does your congregation have or has it had openly LGBT moderators, treasurers, council members or other elected lay positions?

Adult Education

- Does your congregation offer adult forums on issues relating to LGBT inclusion and welcome? How often? Are they well attended?
- Does your congregation offer outside speakers or films on LGBT inclusion and welcome? How often? Are they well attended?

Children's Education

- Does your congregation offer curriculum for elementary aged children on LGBT inclusion?
- Does your congregation offer curriculum for junior high aged children on LGBT inclusion?
- Does your congregation include LGBT inclusion as part of your Confirmation curriculum?
- Does your congregation offer curriculum for high school aged people on LGBT inclusion?
- Does your congregation offer Sunday School registration forms that list "parent(s)" instead of "Mother and Father?"

Worship

- Does your congregation have LGBT persons serving as liturgists, communion servers, acolytes or other worship leaders?
- Does your congregation offer prayers (pastoral, written, open) that explicitly name LGBT persons and inclusion?
- Does your congregation sing hymns of welcome and inclusion of LGBT persons?
- Does your congregation offer weddings and blessings ceremonies for its same-sex couples?
- Does your congregation offer religious rituals for its LGBT members around coming out, gender transitioning, and other life-cycle events?

Mission Outreach

- Does your congregation offer mission trips for its youth group (and adults) that address specific LGBT issues?
- Does your congregation offer letter writing, legislative visits and other forms of public witnessing on behalf of LGBT persons and families?
- Does your congregation work with your denominational LGBT advocacy group to engage within your denomination on behalf of LGBT persons?
- Does your congregation work with organizations like the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force on LGBT issues?

Facilities

- Does your congregation offer gender-neutral bathrooms?
- Does your congregation have a sign on its building that declares it Welcoming?

Example Two (from ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation)

How do you proclaim a welcome to visitors and members?

Such as:

- Continue to build and strengthen individual relationships through the practice of intentional One-to-One Visits, particularly across ideological and affinity group lines within your congregation.
- Mention LGBT people and families with LGBT members in sermons and congregational newsletter articles in a positive context.
- Gather a discussion group to examine the gendered language in your bulletin, newsletter, sermons, liturgies, and hymns. Talk about the assumptions these language choices imply and who might feel constricted or excluded by the gendered wording. Explore creative ways to avoid exclusively binary-gendered language, such as “men and women,” “sisters and brothers,” and “mothers and fathers.”
- Provide training for your greeters and ushers on welcoming people of all gender identities and expressions and sexual orientations.
- Include the text “A Reconciling in Christ Congregation” as part of your bulletin masthead below the church name or add a shortened version of the welcome so it is explicit. For example: “We welcome people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. _____ (name of church) is a Reconciling in Christ congregation.” Be sure to explain what Reconciling In Christ means somewhere within the bulletin.
- Include openly LGBT people in visible worship and other leadership roles.
- Celebrate a re-naming ceremony in worship for transgender members who transition to a name reflective of their gender self-identity.
- If your congregation has not done significant education about transgender people and the issues they face, invite a member of the transgender community to facilitate a workshop, invite transgender people to serve on a panel for discussion, show a film or plan a film series dealing with transgender people and conduct discussion about the films, etc.
- Discuss local, statewide, or federal laws and their impact on the LGBT community in an educational forum.
- Include information on what RIC is about in your new member classes.
- Honor anniversaries of all couples in the same way, i.e. bulletin or newsletter listings or by mention in the prayers of the church. Ask each couple for permission prior to listing.
- Put both people’s names on the same envelope when sending mailings from the church as you would for a heterosexual couple.
- Perform baptisms of children of parents of all sexual orientations and gender identities.
- Before your congregation is in a call process, facilitate discussion (perhaps among the congregational council) about the ways that your congregation has been prepared to accept the gifts of an openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender pastor.

How does your building proclaim a welcome?

Such as:

- Display your RIC Certificate in a prominent location like the narthex, perhaps above the guest book. Professionally framed, it becomes a permanent part of the church décor.
- Look for opportunities to visibly display your congregation’s welcome—especially on your outdoor sign(s), street-facing windows, and entryways.
- Encourage the local ReconcilingWorks chapter and other LGBT organizations to hold worship, events, and regular meetings in your church building.
- Ensure that a gender-neutral, single-stall bathroom is available in all areas of your building.

- Take a tour of your property, paying attention to what messages your pictures and other art send. Will visitors see individuals and families like themselves in the photos and artwork on display?

How do you proclaim a welcome to your neighbors?

Such as:

- Continue to build and strengthen individual relationships through the practice of intentional One-to-One Visits, particularly with members of the LGBT communities in your area.
- Commission a group within the congregation to specifically identify ways to reach out to the LGBT community. (There may be other groups who intentionally reach out to other populations—families with children of varying ages, divorced families, retired people, etc.)
- Prepare a web page that easily identifies your welcome to the LGBT community.
- In your advertisements in the local LGBT, secular and/or church press, highlight your congregation's welcome.
- Tell your congregation's story of hospitality and reconciliation in a letter to the editor or an article in the local LGBT, secular and/or church press.
- Sponsor cultural events in LGBT communities, such as including an ad in the program for a gay men's or women's choir.
- List your congregation as a referral for worship services or pastoral care with the local LGBT hotline or community center.
- Observe the Transgender Day of Remembrance (November 20) by celebrating and memorializing the lives of transgender people who have been murdered in the past year as a consequence of fear and hate.
- Have a visible presence at annual LGBT Pride events.
- Have a visible presence at LGBT rallies and events, with clergy in clerical garb and lay members in congregational t-shirts.

How do you shepherd other faith communities in expanding their welcome?

Such as:

- Continue to build and strengthen individual relationships through the practice of intentional One-to-One Visits, particularly with members of other faith communities in your area and throughout your synod.
- Sponsor a resolution at your Synod Assembly for the synod to adopt an affirmation of welcome.
- Help to promote the RIC Program in your area.
 - Organize or join a local RIC Leadership Team to most effectively work towards a welcome for all.
 - Attend a Building an Inclusive Church (BIC) training to gain valuable new tools and skills. The schedule of trainings can be found on the ReconcilingWorks website (www.reconcilingworks.org/news/training-events/building-an-inclusive-church).
 - Host a BIC training and invite local Lutheran and ecumenical partner congregations.
 - Serve as a mentor congregation to other congregations in your area who want to become RIC.
- Include the RIC program of ReconcilingWorks in your annual budget to promote the growth of the RIC program.

APPENDIX TWELVE

Resources, Resources, Resources...

Specific questions may arise during your Welcoming Process, or you may wish to focus on specific issues. The Institute for Welcoming Resources maintains a wealth of information on its website to help you. You will find extensive bibliographic listings on a number of issues:

Biblical Interpretation

www.welcomingresources.org/bible.xml

Bisexuality

www.welcomingresources.org/bisexuality.xml

Coming Out

www.welcomingresources.org/comingout.xml

Denominational Policies

www.welcomingresources.org/policies.xml

Education

www.welcomingresources.org/education.xml

“Ex-Gay” and Anti-LGBT

www.welcomingresources.org/antilgbt.xml

Families & Children

www.welcomingresources.org/families.xml

HIV & AIDS

www.welcomingresources.org/hivaids.xml

How to Become a Welcoming Church

www.welcomingresources.org/welcoming.xml

Intersectionality

www.welcomingresources.org/intersectionality.xml

Marriage Equality

www.welcomingresources.org/marriage.xml

Medicine & Psychology

www.welcomingresources.org/medpsych.xml

Multi-Faith

www.welcomingresources.org/interfaith.xml

Ordination

www.welcomingresources.org/ordination.xml

Pastoral Care

www.welcomingresources.org/pastoral.xml

Secular Involvement

www.welcomingresources.org/secular.xml

Sexuality and Spirituality

www.welcomingresources.org/spirituality.xml

Spanish Language Resources

www.welcomingresources.org/espanol.xml

Theology

www.welcomingresources.org/theology.xml

Transgender

www.welcomingresources.org/transgender.xml

Worship & Arts

www.welcomingresources.org/worship.xml

Youth & Young Adults

www.welcomingresources.org/youth.xml

In particular, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force’s Institute for Welcoming Resources and its ecumenical partners have produced a number of resources that you might find helpful during your Welcoming Process (and more are in the pipeline all the time!).

WRITTEN RESOURCES:

A La Familia: A Conversation About Our Families, the Bible, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

This bilingual, six-chapter resource is an effort to foster a dialogue with Latino/a families and churches on the unique challenges faced by LGBT people in Latino/a families and churches. Available for free download at www.WelcomingResources.org

A Place in God’s Heart, A Place at Christ’s Table

Worship resources – prayers, responsive readings, liturgies, and music – for the Welcoming Church Movement from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force’s Institute for Welcoming Resources. Available for free download at www.WelcomingResources.org

APPENDIX TWELVE

All God's Children

Teaching children about sexual orientation and gender diversity by Ann Thompson Cook. Available for purchase at www.manyvoices.org

All in God's Family: Creating Allies for Our LGBT Families

A three-session curriculum from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Institute for Welcoming Resources designed to help congregations fully welcome LGBT families in their midst and to advocate for LGBT families in civil society. Available for purchase at www.WelcomingResources.org

And God Loves Each One

A resource for dialogue about sexual orientation by Ann Thompson Cook. Available for purchase at www.manyvoices.org

Hearts Unbound: Engaging Biblical Texts of God's Radical Love through Reader's Theater

A ten-session small-group Bible Study examining ten stories of radical love and welcome. Available for free download at www.WelcomingResources.org

Made in God's Image

A Resource for Dialogue about the church and gender differences by Ann Thompson Cook. Available for purchase at www.manyvoices.org

Shaping Sanctuary: Proclaiming God's Grace in an Inclusive Church

Essays, sermons, liturgies and hymns for the Welcoming Movement. Available for purchase at www.welcomingresources.org

To Do Justice: A Study of Welcoming Congregations

This groundbreaking study shows the positive effects possible when a congregation goes through a well-designed and successful welcoming process. Available for free download at www.WelcomingResources.org

transACTION: A Transgender Curriculum For Churches and Religious Institutions

A three session educational program designed to help congregations and religious institutions learn more about the issues of gender identity and gender presentation as part of their process to becoming welcoming places for transgender Christians to worship and find community. There is both a leader's and a participant's version. Both are available as a free download from www.WelcomingResources.org

VIDEO/DVD RESOURCES

The Bible and Human Sexuality: A Theological Journey through Covenant and Scripture

Designed to create a safe environment to discuss how the Bible addresses the issues of sexuality. The richness of Scripture fills our lives, challenges us and makes us whole. Today, not only in the United Church of Christ but across this land, some of the critical issues of our day revolve around human sexuality; and before we take our stand on this issue, before we fall into the trap of erroneous preconceived notions that so often devastate and continue to impact our communities, we need to know our sources. In September 2005 the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries invited African American UCC pastors from across the Church to gather in conversation about how we view human sexuality in our communities. The DVD you will see is the pastor's meeting with approximately 150 in attendance. www.ucc.org/justice/advocacy_resources/pdfs/human-sexuality/The-Bible-and-Human-Sexuality-Flyer-NEW.pdf

Bullied: A Student, a School and a Cast that Made History

A documentary film that chronicles one student's ordeal at the hands of anti-gay bullies and offers an inspiring message of hope to those fighting harassment today. It can become a cornerstone of anti-bullying efforts in middle and high schools. www.tolerance.org/bullied

Call Me Malcolm

A documentary about a 27 year-old transgender seminary student, and his struggle with faith, love and gender identity. <https://www.facebook.com/CallMeMalcolm>

Fish Out of Water

A documentary that explores the impassioned relationship between homosexuality and the Bible. www.fishoutofwaterfilm.com/

For the Bible Tells Me So

Through the experiences of five very normal, very Christian, very American families – including those of former House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt and Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson – we discover how insightful people of faith handle the realization of having a gay child. Informed by such respected voices as Bishop Desmond Tutu, Harvard's Peter Gomes, Orthodox Rabbi Steve Greenberg and Reverend Jimmy Creech, ***For the Bible Tells Me So*** offers healing, clarity and understanding to anyone caught in the crosshairs of scripture and sexual identity. www.forthebibletellsmeso.org/indexc.htm

In Our Fullness: Faith and Activism Across Difference

This documentary presents conversations with activists about faith-based work for radical social change around issues including sexuality, gender, race, class, and age. The video includes powerful testimonies from activist representing Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Native spiritualities, presenting challenges and successes in faith-based progressive-left coalition building. www.WelcomingResources.org/resources.htm

Love Free or Die

A documentary about a man whose two defining passions are in direct conflict: his love for God and for his partner Mark. Gene Robinson is the first openly gay person to become a bishop in the historic traditions of Christendom. His consecration in 2003, to which he wore a bullet-proof vest, caused an international stir, and he has lived with death threats every day since. www.lovefreeordiemovie.com/

Out in the Silence

An inspirational and gripping documentary that uses the story of a small American town confronting the firestorm of controversy ignited by a same-sex wedding announcement to illustrate the challenge of being an outsider in a conservative environment and catalyze new ways of making resources and support available for those working for change. wpsu.org/outinthesilence

Through My Eyes

A 46-minute documentary that intertwines the stories of over two dozen young Christians as they wrestle with issues of faith and sexuality. It provides lots of thought-provoking material for Christians on both sides of the debate. www.throughmyeyesdvd.com/

Voices of Witness: Out of the Box

A groundbreaking documentary giving voice to the witness of transgender people of faith. Courageously inviting the viewer into their journeys, the film is ultimately a celebration of hope and the power of God's love to transcend even seemingly insurmountable obstacles. www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzCANWGEdc&feature=youtu.be

You can find details about and learn how to obtain each of these at www.WelcomingResources.org.

WELCOMING CHURCH PROGRAMS

Below is a listing of the denominationally-based Welcoming Church Programs – the organizations that coordinate the Welcoming Congregations programs within their denominations. For more information and denominational-specific guidance for your Welcoming Process, please contact them before you begin.

Affirm United/S'affirmer ensemble

United Church of Canada

P.O. Box 57057
Somerset Station
Ottawa, ON, K1R 1A1
778.889.5797
www.affirmunited.ca



Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists

American Baptists, Alliance of Baptists, and others
PO Box 545
Kensington, MD 20895
202.240.9220
www.awab.org



Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests

Brethren-Mennonite Church, Church of the Brethren, Mennonite Church USA, & Mennonite Church Canada
Box 6300
Minneapolis, MN 55406
612.343.2060
www.bmclgbt.org



GLAD Alliance

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
P.O. Box 44400
Indianapolis, IN 46244-0400
www.gladalliance.org



Integrity USA

Episcopal Church USA
838 East High Street #291
Lexington, KY 40502
800.462.9498
www.integrityusa.org



More Light Presbyterians

Presbyterian Church (USA)
PMB 246
4737 County Road 101
Minnetonka, MN 55345
www.mlp.org



Reconciling Ministries Network

United Methodist Church

123 West Madison Street, Suite 2150
Chicago, IL 60602
773.736.5526
www.rmnetwork.org



ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation

(formerly Lutherans Concerned/North America)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

1669 Arcade Street, Suite 2
Saint Paul, MN 55106
651.665.0861
www.reconcilingworks.org



Room for All

Reformed Church in America

P.O. Box 11495
Albany, NY 12211
201.364.4538
www.roomforall.com



United Church of Christ Coalition for LGBT Concerns

United Church of Christ
2592 West 14th Street
Cleveland, OH 44113
800.653.0799
www.uccCoalition.org



Welcoming Communities Network

Community of Christ
P.O. Box 520348
Independence, MO US 64052
www.welcomingcommunitynetwork.org

