Building an Inclusive Church

A WELCOMING TOOLKIT

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

Credits

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In particular, **Emily Eastwood** of the *Reconciling in Christ Program of Lutherans Concerned/North America* deserves the lion share of credit for bringing the vision of relational organizing to the Welcoming Church movement.

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The Welcoming Process: Laying the Groundwork

"Welcome, we are so glad you are here!"

As we enter our churches, as we live as members, as we experience important life-cycle events (falling in love, marrying, having children, baptism, confirmation, coming out, transitioning, etc.), these words of welcome and the concurrent atmosphere of support, understanding and love are what we all long for. This manifestation of God's Extravagant Welcome and the justice and societal witness that accompany it are the heart of what we hope to facilitate with *Building an Inclusive Church: A Welcoming Toolkit*. It is, at once, a critical goal for it calls upon the very core of the Christian gospel, and a goal that requires prayerful, conscious and faithful action.[1]

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

Building an Inclusive Church is designed as a guide for a small group of congregants who wish to facilitate a Welcoming Process in their local congregation. In writing it, we made three important assumptions:

A Welcoming Process needs to be:

• Well thought-out, planned and should draw upon wisdom from other congregations that have done a process of their own

• Grounded in the culture and "personality" of the congregation

• Based in relationship-building with the pastor, the formal lay leadership (councils, boards, sessions, etc.), 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.

A Welcoming Process is a spiritual opportunity for the congregation to grow in membership, stewardship and vitality.[2] As such, it should always be presented in the context of the life of faith of the congregation.

A Welcoming Process has component parts that are critical and somewhat linear. Therefore, 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 critical.

Part A of this Toolkit is designed to help you lay all the groundwork you need to 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 background information on relationship-building, assessment tools and the Welcoming Process Outline.

In addition, we suggest you read:

• *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.

• *Welcoming Congregations in the African America Tradition* (National Black Justice Coalition, 2007) www.nbjcoalition.org/news/33268_tpg_txt-indd-1.pdf

• *Living Openly In Your Place of Worship* (Human Rights Campaign's Religion and Faith Program) www.hrc.org/issues/religion/7163.htm

Building a Welcoming Church Training

We *strongly* encourage you to attend a **Building an Inclusive Church** training which will teach you in depth the community 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**

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[1] In this Toolkit, it also has a particular definition. A Welcoming Process is an officially recognized path that includes organizing, education, some kind of public vote and a public statement of Welcome for ALL persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

[2] For the positive impact welcoming processes can have on stewardship and membership numbers, see Heckles, 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. Rebecca, *To Do Justice: A Study of Welcoming Congregations*, [National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2009].

STEP ONE: Leading this 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 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 using *relational organizing*. To get a better understanding of relational organizing, read the article by Rev. Louise Green in **Appendix One**. It is also important that your Core Team include LGBT members of your congregation or, at the very least, consults with them. To begin, meet with a few folks in your congregation whom you believe might be interested in joining you in this work. Conduct a one-to-one meeting with each (see **Appendix One**), listening deeply, asking their passions, interests, history, etc.

If you hear that Welcoming fits with their passions, "vocation" and 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. If you hear other passions that might help you later on in the process, note them.

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

STEP TWO: Gathering Information

CONGREGATIONAL ASSESSMENT

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, and how it responds to social issues. The Congregational Assessment (**Appendix Two**) is a tool for you to 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 complete the Congregational Assessment and 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 congregations 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 we have a clear sense of when a process will finish so that we don't allow the fears of some to draw the process out indefinitely.

• What are the next steps the Core Team might take to plan your congregation's Welcoming Process?

CONFLICT HISTORY

In addition, have the Core Team talk about the history of conflict or splits in your congregation. What were the issues? How does your congregation deal with conflict?

Read *Congregations and Conflict* (see **Appendix Three**) and make a determination about your congregation's culture around conflict. Make a plan for how you will guide the congregation through the Welcoming Process that takes seriously the role of conflict. 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" for your discussions about LGBT issues? How will you utilize this information?

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 is 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 informal decision processes?
• Who are the opinion leaders?
• Who are the pillars of the congregation?
• Who are the matriarchs?
• Who are the patriarchs?
• 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-on-one meeting technique, assess where your support opposition are 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. S/he does not have to be an ardent supporter, but active opposition to a Welcoming Process on the part of the pastor makes it very difficult for the Process to succeed.

STEP THREE: Choosing the Right Frame

The tenor, spirit and "feel" of a Welcoming Process are critical. Above we've talked about the importance of relationship-building instead of debate. In addition to this relational approach, you want to present the Welcoming Process in a way that resonates with the core values and faith of the congregation using language and images that call on the best in the church's life. This is called "framing."

In his book, *Don't Think of an Elephant*, George Lakoff makes a very compelling argument about the power and importance of framing in secular conversations. Framing is no less important for our conversations within the Church. 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've 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 should provide the focus for discussion and conversation.

You must choose a frame that people already understand and believe in. When the proper ground work has been laid and a frame chosen that deeply resonates with your with your congregation, addressing topics of LGBT persons is understood as part of the church's life.

In order to arrive at the correct frame that will work in your setting, the Core Team should talk about:

• What are some of your congregation's key values?

• What theological and Biblical images are most resonant?

• What Scriptural passages most inspire your congregation?

• What Biblical stories do members hearken to describe your congregation?

• What images do congregants use to describe your church and its mission?

Some congregations value social justice, some value hospitality, for some it is the call to all who are baptized. Below are just a few examples of frames that usually work and ones that might not be as helpful to begin this work.

Positive Frames	Frames to Avoid
• Hospitality	• Homosexuality as sin
• Welcoming the stranger	• Same-sex marriage
• Inclusiveness	• What the Bible says about homosexuality
• Justice	
• Evangelism/church growth	
• Baptism	
• Love of neighbor	
• The Good Samaritan	
• Peter and Cornelius	

The reason to avoid these frames and focus on more Biblical and theological ones is three-fold:

• Any frame that puts the congregation in debate mode is to be avoided.

• 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. Becoming a Welcoming congregation is not about straight people doing something in a paternalistic way for "them." The right frame can help mitigate against the impulse to behave in paternalistic ways.

• While doing a study in human sexuality (like the *Our Whole Lives* curriculum[1]) is a very important opportunity in the life of the congregation, we recommend that this kind of educational process precede a Welcoming Process so that congregants can do their work and reflection on sexuality by focusing on their own sexuality and not use the opportunity of a 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.

STEP FOUR: Outlining Your Process

Given the answers to all of the above, move to PART B and design a process that best fits your congregation.

[1] 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 Unitarian Universalist Association, 2000].

The Welcoming Process: Taking it Public

STEP FIVE: Building Relationships

As we have highlighted, building and deepening relationships within your congregation — particularly across ideological lines — is vital throughout the entire Welcoming Process. 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 meeting techniques **(Appendix One)**, members of the Core Team meet, listen and talk with all of the following:

• Pastor(s)
• Formal Leadership
• Informal Leadership
• Members of the congregation

It is important to get buy-in and official support for the Process from all of these groups.

STEP SIX: Making it Official

The Core Team, which until now has been operating as an ad hoc body, should be replaced by an officially recognized committee of the congregation, often called the Welcoming Task Force. The membership of the 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.

STEP SEVEN: Setting the Frame

It is now time to introduce your chosen frame to the congregation. Choose some time (which will be longer or shorter based on your congregational assessment) in which to focus on the themes of the frame in general ways:

• Worship — sermon series, music, liturgy, ritual, etc.

• Education — both children and adults

• Service Projects — choose a project for the youth group and/or the whole congregation to participate in that lifts up the general theme

STEP EIGHT: Providing Educational Opportunities

Set up a series of educational opportunities for the entire congregation that focuses on your frame. Given the pace of your process, you may not want these initial sessions to focus on sexuality or gender at all. Once you feel the congregation is ready, begin to focus on LGBT people and issues.

Examples include:

• Panels of LGBT people as well as family and friends of LGBT people

• Bible Study on the "clobber passages" which some say speak of LGBT people

• Bible Study on "texts of promise"

• Specific information on transgender and bisexual people

• Book groups focusing on LGBT-themed works

• Movies about the lives and ministry of LGBT people

• Theatre presentations with LGBT themes

• Choral presentations by LGBT choruses

• Newsletter articles

• Bulletin announcements

B&T

In most congregations, being Welcoming has only referred to gay and lesbian people and has not included those who are bisexual or transgender. It is important in this process to include *all* LGBT people. This means you may have to spend some extra time providing education for your congregation to understand what bisexual and transgender mean. There are a lot of resources available for your congregation. For where to begin your search, see **Appendix Seven** and **Appendix Eight**.

STEP NINE: 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. As the Welcoming Task Force, check in with the LGBT members of your congregation. Also, to avoid a paternalistic process, make sure that LGBT and allied persons have consulted on the process and are involved in the education of the congregation.

Examples include:

• Involve LGBT members and family members of LGBT people in any of the above activities in ways that clearly identify them as LGBT or allies.

• Provide preaching opportunities for LGBT members, family members of LGBT people and allies.

STEP TEN: Writing Your Welcoming Statement

It is important to develop a Welcoming Statement to show others that you are a church that has done a lot of work on becoming a Welcoming congregation. This Statement becomes a great tool to show perspective new members what you believe. Each congregation will develop a statement that fits their community. **Appendix Five** includes a few sample Welcoming Statements to give you an idea of what other congregations have written. It is this statement upon which the congregation will later vote, and if accepted, will be put on the church's web site, in the bulletin, in the newsletter, in new member packets, etc.

STEP ELEVEN: Conducting a Straw Poll

When you have completed a process at the pace and with the frame you have chosen and have done the relationship-building and educational work you need to conduct an anonymous online survey or send out an anonymous postcard straw poll asking that if the vote were held today, would people vote in favor or against your congregation becoming Welcoming.

If you receive less than 85% in favor:
Stop, re-group and make plans to repeat some of the steps above.

If you receive 85% or higher:
Make plans for a formal congregational vote.

STEP TWELVE: Holding the Congregational Vote

When you are confident in the outcome, it is time to schedule a formal opportunity for the congregation to vote yes or no to becoming Welcoming. The congregational vote will look different in each congregation depending on your polity and procedures around congregational voting.

STEP THIRTEEN: Celebrating and Publicizing

Hold a worship service or celebration to give thanks to God for the process and faithfulness of the congregation. Also ensure that your Welcoming Statement is public. Indicate in your weekly bulletin, on your church sign, and on your web site that you are a Welcoming congregation.

STEP FOURTEEN: We're Welcoming… Now What?

Becoming a Welcoming congregation doesn't mean you can stick the label on and it's over. Continuing education is important and being active in LGBT equality issues is an ongoing process.

• Review policies and practices. It is important that your policies of being Welcoming are reflected in new member classes, adult and children's education, wedding guidelines, etc.

• Review bathroom facilities — shift from "men" and "women" to unisex.

• Review Sunday School practices — shift forms that list "mother" and "father" to "parent" and "parent."

• Use the Check List (see **Appendix Six**) to help you in this process.

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, meetings 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?

Louise is currently Director of Social Justice Ministries at All Souls Church, Unitarian in Washington D.C. She is a community organizer and UCC minister who worked for 10 years with the Industrial Areas Foundation, a congregation-based, multi-issue power network with over 60 affiliates around the country. The ideas in this article come from her IAF experience and training, particularly through Michael Gecan, National Staff for the Metro IAF in New York, Philadelphia and Chicago. For an in-depth look at this method of community organizing, read Gecan's Going Public, *published by Beacon Press.*

One-to-Ones

What is a one-to-one meeting?

• 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 is not a one-to-one meeting for relational organizing purposes?

• 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 one-to-one meetings?

• 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 meetings.

• 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 meetings?

• 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 meeting with, and what questions they have for you.

How do you use one-to-one meetings?

When you decide to do a one-to-one meeting campaign, it is important to establish a context: Are you the only one doing meetings, 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 meeting 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 meeting itself: this makes you a surveyor or inter-viewer, 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 meetings 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 meetings 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 meetings, either individually or as part of a team, evaluate what you learned. This may lead to various choices:

• Additional one-to-one meetings with new people,

• Some kind of different group action,

• Second meetings 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 individual meetings.

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.

One-to-One Meeting Summary

What is a one-to-one meeting?

• 30-45 minutes of face-to-face conversation with one person.

• A chance to set aside tasks, agendas, and small group activities.

• For the purpose of knowing the other person (70%) and being known (30%). That's it.

• An opportunity to know the private motivations we each have for doing public action.

• A search for talent, motivation, energy, and issues.

What is it not?

• An interview of non-stop questions.

• Going through the whole life story or resume.

• A social service appointment.

• A recruitment device that fits someone into your plan.

• Only a discussion about the issues of the neighborhood or city, or policy questions.

Ways to do better one-to-one meetings:

• 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 (page 11) as a place to write notes after meeting with someone. This will help you remember key details and stories that were shared in the visit.

One-to-One Reflection Form

Person Visited: _____   Phone _____

Address: _____   City: _____

Congregation: _____

Questions for reflection:

Relationship:

• What do we have in common?

• What might be the basis of a relationship?

Passions, Vocations or Self-Interest:

• What does this person care most about? Why?

• What do they get excited talking about?

• How do they spend their time?

• What talents and abilities does this person have?

• How and where are they using them? What relationships does this person have?

• What specific concerns or ideas does this person have? Why?

• What is this person's story?

• Why is this person a member of this church?

• Is there a potential role in the church that would really get them excited?

A. **Important things I learned about this person:**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

B. **Talents, background, and/or gifts this person has to offer:**

_____

_____

_____

_____

C. **What are this person's areas of passion, vocation or self-interest?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

Self Evaluation

Questions for reflection:

• What did I do well?

• What can I do differently next time?

• Did I establish a relationship?

• Did I listen for the stories behind people's facts and opinions?

• How courageous was I? Did I probe?

• What was the riskiest question I asked?

• Were there "leads" that they gave me that I didn't follow up? Why?

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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 the speed that a Welcoming Process should take and your congregation's overall temperament when considering controversial subjects.

Scoring is from 1 to 5 points. Each person participating in the assessment process should have a separate Worksheet. Each person should total their individual score. Then together, tally your group score on page 18 and discuss the questions on page 4

There is no perfect template for how to do this Welcoming Process "right" 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 that the best predictors of probable success are the building of solid relationships across ideological lines and the real engagement in the process by a significant percentage of active congregants.

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."

Congregational Assessment

		SCORE
1	Does the congregation already have a mission statement which explicitly includes people of all sexual orientations and gender identities? 1 No mission statement 2 Mission statement with no diversity mentioned 3 Mission statement embracing diversity 4 Mission statement with LGBT people included 5 Yes	
2	How does the congregation receive and include new people? 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	
3	Does the congregation welcome/include a diverse population? 1 No, seeks a homogenous environment 2 Yes, but only some types of diversity are accepted 3 Yes, and many types of diversity are accepted 4 Yes, and gay and lesbian folk are encouraged to attend 5 Yes, and LGBT people are encouraged to attend	
4	Is/are the pastor(s) 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	
5	Are you aware of parents or family members of LGBT persons in the congregation? 1 No 2 Yes, but they do not accept their children 3 Yes, and they accept their kids, but are in the closet in the congregation 4 Yes, and they are out of the closet about their children 5 Yes, and they are visible advocates	
6	Are you aware of LGBT persons in the congregation? 1 No 2 Yes, but they are in the closet 3 Yes, and some are out of the closet 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	
7	Has the congregation already done or participated in blessings of same-gender relationships? 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	

		SCORE
8	Is the congregation presently very homogeneous or quite diverse (race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, language, etc.)? 1 The congregation is completely homogenous 2 The congregation includes a few people of various backgrounds 3 The congregation is somewhat diverse 4 The congregation is quite diverse 5 The congregation is known for being diverse	
9	How does the congregation handle disagreement, conflict or controversy? 1 We have a history of blow-ups and people leaving the congregation 2 Conflict arises from time to time, but it isn't fully dealt with or talked about again 3 We try to avoid conflict 4 Conflict is sometimes dealt with in a healthy way, but it is inconsistent across the congregation 5 We face conflict head-on and keep loving each other	
10	Who comes up with new ideas for ministry? 1 Pastor(s) 2 Council 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	
11	Does your congregation have an openly LGBT pastor? 1 No 5 Yes	
12	Is the congregation educated about and working on other justice issues now? 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 view of scripture? 1 Literal and inspired Word of God 2 Selectively literal 3 No overall congregational view of scripture 4 Contextual with emphasis on New Testament 5 Contextual with emphasis on the Gospels	
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 and liturgy 5 Inclusive language for God and human beings in sermons, readings and liturgy	

		SCORE
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	
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%	
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, but part of a mixed staff 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	

		SCORE
23	Does your pastor use examples including people of all sexual orientations and/or 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 No, have not heard a thing 2 Yes, and they are solidly against 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 1000 2 Program church with average worship attendance 700 to 1000 3 Program church with average worship attendance 300 to 700 4 Pastoral church with average worship attendance 150-250 5 Family-sized church with average worship attendance less than 150	
	TOTAL	

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 to 75: the St. Cautious curriculum

76-100: the St. Moderatus curriculum

101 and up: the St. Adventurous curriculum

Congregational Assessment — Group Scoring

Use this Scorecard with the **Congregational Assessment Worksheet** for up to six people in your Core Team

Instructions: • Enter the scores from each person's Worksheet in columns A-F. • In column G, enter the total by adding A-F. • In column H, find the average by dividing the total by the number of responses.	Person A	Person B	Person C	Person D	Person E	Person F	G: Total	H: Average
1. Does the congregation already have a mission statement which explicitly includes people of all sexual orientations and gender identities?								
2. How does the congregation receive and include new people?								
3. Does the congregation welcome/include a diverse population?								
4. Is/are the pastor(s) in favor of explicitly welcoming and including people of all sexual orientations and gender identities?								
5. Are you aware of parents or family members of LGBT persons in the congregation?								
6. Are you aware of LGBT persons in the congregation?								
7. Has the congregation already done or participated in blessings of same-gender relationships?								
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 gay or lesbian pastor?								
12. Is the congregation educated about and working on other justice issues now?								
13. What is the prevailing congregational view 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 worshiping adults 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?								
TOTALS								

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 to 75: the **St. Cautious** curriculum

76-100: the **St. Moderatus** curriculum

101 and up: the **St. Adventurous** curriculum

You will find these three curricula outlined on page 19.

Welcoming Process Outline
(Based on Congregational Assessment)

	ST. ADVENTUROUS	ST. MODERATUS	ST. CAUTIOUS

Step One: Lead the Process

TASKS:	Conduct one-on-one meetings and gather a Core Team. Contact your denominational Welcoming Church Program for additional guidance.		
TOOLS:	Sustainable Action (Appendix 1), Welcoming Church Programs (Appendix 6)		
PEOPLE INVOLVED:	Core Team, Welcoming Church Program		
SUGGESTED PACE:	1-2 months	2-3 months	3-6 months

Step Two: Gather Information

TASKS:	Examine your congregation's history, power analysis, and culture to gain a better understanding of how it deals with change and conflict. Choose a pace for your process.		
TOOLS:	Congregational Assessment (Appendix 2), Congregations and Conflict (Appendix 3)		
PEOPLE INVOLVED:	Core Team		
SUGGESTED PACE:	1 month	1-2 months	2-3 months

Step Three: Choose the Right Frame

TASKS:	Decide upon a frame for your Welcoming Process that already deeply resonates with your congregation.		
TOOLS:	Your congregation's mission statement, strategic plan, favorite Scripture passages and hymns.		
PEOPLE INVOLVED:	Core Team		
SUGGESTED PACE:	1-2 weeks	1-2 weeks	1-2 weeks

Step Four: Outline the Process

TASKS:	Outline the Welcoming Process for the congregation based on the pace you've chosen.		
TOOLS:	The information you've gathered up to this point.		
PEOPLE INVOLVED:	Core Team		
SUGGESTED PACE:	1-2 weeks	1-2 weeks	1-2 weeks

Step Five: Build Relationships

TASKS:	Conduct one-on-one meetings with clergy, formal and informal leadership, and church members.		
TOOLS:	Sustainable Action (Appendix 1)		
PEOPLE INVOLVED:	Core Team		
SUGGESTED PACE:	1 month	3-6 months	6-9 months

	ST. ADVENTUROUS	ST. MODERATUS	ST. CAUTIOUS

Step Six: Make it Official

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.		
PEOPLE INVOLVED:	Core Team, church council		
SUGGESTED PACE:	1 meeting with board or council	2-3 meetings with board or council	3 meetings with board or council

Step Seven: Set the Frame

TASKS:	Introduce your chosen frame to the congregation at large, using worship, education, and service projects.		
TOOLS:	Sermons, worship services, Bible study, etc.		
PEOPLE INVOLVED:	Welcoming Task Force, clergy, educators		
SUGGESTED PACE:	1-2 Sundays	1-2 months	2-3 months

Step Eight: Provide Educational Opportunities

TASKS:	Set up a series of educational opportunities for the congregation.		
TOOLS:	Bible studies, films, panels, etc.		
PEOPLE INVOLVED:	Welcoming Task Force, clergy, educators, congregation		
SUGGESTED PACE:	3-6 months	6-12 months	1-2 years

Step Nine: Ensure LGBT People are at the Table

TASKS:	Directly involve LGBT people and family of LGBT people in the education process.		
TOOLS:	One-to-one visits, panels, etc.		
PEOPLE INVOLVED:	Task Force, LGBT members, congregation		
SUGGESTED PACE:	Concurrent with educational opportunities		

Step Ten: Write Your Welcoming Statement

TASKS:	Create a draft Welcoming Statement and present it to clergy and the Council.		
TOOLS:	Sample Welcoming Statements (Appendix 4), your chosen frame		
PEOPLE INVOLVED:	Welcoming Task Force		
SUGGESTED PACE:	2 weeks	1-2 months	2-3 months

	ST. ADVENTUROUS	ST. MODERATUS	ST. CAUTIOUS

Step Eleven: Conduct a Straw Poll

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		
SUGGESTED PACE:	1 week	1 week	1 week

Step Twelve: Hold the Congregational Vote

TASKS:	Schedule and hold a congregational vote.		
TOOLS:	Congregational policies and procedures		
PEOPLE INVOLVED:	Task Force, Council, and all members		
SUGGESTED PACE:	When straw poll shows greater than 85% support		

Step Thirteen: Celebrate and Publicize

TASKS:	Notify your denominational Welcoming Church Program. Hold a worship service or celebration, and publicize your new Welcoming status to the greater community.		
TOOLS:	Special liturgy, bulletin inserts, church website, church sign		
PEOPLE INVOLVED:	Welcoming Task Force, clergy and staff		
SUGGESTED PACE:	Soon after successful congregational vote		

Step Fourteen: We're Welcoming… Now What?

TASKS:	Ensure church policies are LGTB-inclusive. Provide ongoing educational opportunities. Provide opportunities for church members to take action on LGBT social issues beyond the church doors.		
TOOLS:	Church policies		
PEOPLE INVOLVED:	Welcoming Task Force, clergy, educators, Social Justice committee, greater LGBT community		
SUGGESTED PACE:	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing

Congregations and Conflict

By Rev. Dr. Anita L. 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 terrible conflict with their current pastor. A quick review of the congregation's 90 year history revealed that pastors had been fired, chased off or quit every seven years. The current pastor quit as the consultant came on board and it became clear the extreme fighting was over many issues but the most prominent was the decision to become Welcoming. The Welcoming decision was actually made prior to the most recent pastor's arrival, but the pastor was blamed for the decision and the process. After individual interviews with over 50 members of this 120 member congregation, the consultant met with the Committee charged with dealing with the situation and told them that among the many things which came out of the interviews was an operative definition of what church is supposed to be. The consultant wrote on a whiteboard: **Happy** + **Nice** = **Church; therefore, Conflict ≠ Church.**

What we often fear is not really the conflict itself, but the bad behavior that often accompanies it.

Rev. Dr. Anita L. Bradshaw is the National Field Organizer working with the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists (AWAB), Gay & Lesbian Affirming Disciples (GLAD), the Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests (BMC), and the Welcoming Community Network (WCN). She is also a Minister-in-Covenant with Mayflower Community Congregational Church, UCC in Minneapolis, Minnesota. An ordained pastor in the United Church of Christ, she served previously as director of supervised ministries and adjunct faculty at Yale University's Divinity School, as well as professional staff in several non-profit and governmental organizations and as a consultant. She has also served as faculty for several universities, colleges and seminaries. She holds two advanced degrees from Yale University in theology and a Doctor of Philosophy degree from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

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 catches their attention or a question that is raised for them.

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

²⁷ Conduct 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.

⁵ Your attitude must be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

⁶ Christ, 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.

⁸ Jesus was thus humbled —

⁹ obediently accepting death, even death on a cross!
Because of this, God highly exalted Christ
and gave to Jesus the name above every other name,

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee must bend
in the heavens, on the earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and 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 pairs, share the word, phrase or question that came up for each.[1]

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 text:

• 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 flipchart, 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, proceed to a discussion of Speed Leas' "Levels of Conflict" from below. 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.

Speed Leas' (The Alban Institute) Levels of Conflict

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

[1] Process based on "Listening to the Word" by Church Innovations (www.churchinnovations.org) and Scripture reflections utilize commentary by The Rev. David Frederickson, Ph.D. (Luther Seminary).

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 into which God is calling the congregation 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 needs 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

Adapted from W. Craig Gilliam

For more information, read *Notes on Communication:*
Strategies for Addressing Conflict in Congregations
www.divinity.duke.edu/programs/spe/articles/200809/communication.html

Listening authentically

As we have said throughout this Toolkit, to listen is sacred and a gift to the other person. An important part of listening is that you are engaging the other person with curiosity and genuineness.

Questioning

Questions help us understand more deeply what the other person is saying and what they mean. Use your questions to better know who the other is.

Summarizing

This helps the other person know you are present and really listening. It also helps them clarify if you have not heard well.

Acknowledging

This helps the speaker know you have heard their emotions and feelings.

Reframing

This technique involves hearing the detail and emotion of the speaker and then offering an image or analogy that can take the conversation in a different direction where you both can go together.

Silence

Silence for thinking, breathing and allowing God's presence to be felt can help when emotions are high.

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 changes 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 from one 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 here them, but do not let them control the process.

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

Rev. Dr. Anita L. Bradshaw is the National Field Organizer working with the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists (AWAB), Gay & Lesbian Affirming Disciples (GLAD), the Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests (BMC), and the Welcoming Community Network (WCN). She is also a Minister-in-Covenant with Mayflower Community Congregational Church, UCC in Minneapolis, Minnesota. An ordained pastor in the United Church of Christ, she served previously as director of supervised ministries and adjunct faculty at Yale University's Divinity School, as well as professional staff in several non-profit and governmental organizations and as a consultant. She has also served as faculty for several universities, colleges and seminaries. She holds two advanced degrees from Yale University in theology and a Doctor of Philosophy degree from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Sample Welcoming Statements

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

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.

Asbury United Methodist Church
Charleston, West Virginia

The people of Asbury are called to share God's love as we minister with and to all persons in the community where the church is located and beyond, providing worship, nurture, fellowship, and service. Our welcome knows no boundaries of age, race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, economic condition, physical or mental ability. We embrace and seek to preserve the beautiful, amazing diversity of God's creation. We cooperate in ministry with other local churches and groups of God's people as we participate in the worldwide mission of Christ.

Church of the Beatitudes
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 transgendered 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.

We're Welcoming… Now What?
A Check List

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 1 and parent 2" 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 on work within your denomination on behalf of LGBT persons?

☐ Does your congregation work with organizations like the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Force or local advocacy groups on LGBT issues?

Facilities

☐ Does your congregation offer gender-neutral bathrooms?

☐ Does your congregation have a sign on its building that declares it Welcoming?

☐ Does your congregation makes its space available for use by LGBT groups?

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:

Anti-LGBT & "Ex-Gay"
www.WelcomingResources.org/antilgbt.xml

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

Families & Children
www.WelcomingResources.org/families.xml

How to Become a Welcoming Church
www.WelcomingResources.org/welcoming.xml

Interlocking Oppressions
www.WelcomingResources.org/interlocking.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

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 has produced a number of resources that you might find helpful during your Welcoming Process (and more are in the pipeline all the time!):

All in God's Family: Creating Allies for Our LGBT Families
A three-session curriculum designed to help congregations fully welcome LGBT families in their midst and to advocate for LGBT families in civil society from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Institute for Welcoming Resources

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

***trans*ACTION: A Transgender Curriculum for Churches and Religious Institutions**
A three-session curriculum designed to help congregations become aware and welcoming of transgender members from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Institute for Welcoming Resources

All God's Children
Teaching children about sexual orientation and gender diversity by Ann Thompson Cook

Claiming the Promise
An ecumenical Welcoming Bible study resource on homosexuality by Mary Jo Osterman

Made in God's Image
A resource for dialogue about the church and gender differences by Ann Thompson Cook

Shaping Sanctuary: Proclaiming God's Grace in an Inclusive Church
Essays, sermons, liturgies and hymns for the Welcoming Movement edited by Kelly Turney

And God Loves Each One
A resource for dialogue about sexual orientation by Ann Thompson Cook

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 denominationally-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
PO Box 42544, Washington, DC 20015
240.515.8664
www.wabaptists.org

IntegrityUSA
Episcopal Church USA
620 Park Ave #311
Rochester, NY 14607-2943
800.462.9498
www.integrityusa.org

More Light Presbyterians
Presbyterian Church (USA)
369 Montezuma Avenue PMB #447
Santa Fe, NM 87501-2626
505.820.7082
www.mlp.org

Welcoming Ministries of the Gay, Lesbian & Affirming Disciples (GLAD) Council
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
P.O. Box 44400, Indianapolis, IN 46244
www.gladalliance.org

Open and Affirming Program of the 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

Reconciling in Christ Program of Lutherans Concerned/North America
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
PO Box 4707, Saint Paul, MN 55104-0707
651.665.0861
www.lcna.org

Reconciling Ministries Network
United Methodist Church
3801 North Keeler Avenue
773.736.5526
Chicago, IL 60641-3007
www.rmnetwork.org

Room for All
Reformed Church in America
26 Railroad Avenue #341
Babylon, NY 11702
www.roomforall.com

Supportive Congregation Network of the Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests
Brethren-Mennonite Church, Church of the Brethren, Mennonite Church USA, & Mennonite Church Canada
Box 6300, Minneapolis, MN 55406-0300
612.343.2060
www.bmclgbt.org

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