

Building an Inclusive Church

Help your faith community specifically welcome people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.

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Building an Inclusive Church

A Welcoming Toolkit 3.0

Help your faith community specifically
welcome people of all sexual orientations,
gender identities, and gender expressions.

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The steps are sequential (remembering this is more art than science). The tools are intended to be used throughout your entire journey and beyond.

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Introduction

Welcome! Thank you for taking the time to learn more about how to deepen and expand your faith community's journey of inclusion, celebration, and advocacy with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) people and their families. Each of us comes to this holy work for our own personal reason; collectively, our lives and stories change and encourage the church to be the welcoming place God calls it to be.

This Toolkit intends to address issues at the LGBTQIA+ and faith intersection. The authors of the Toolkit understand this intersection is diverse and includes language, ethnic background, cultural perspective, gender roles, and so on. However, it is the authors' prayer that this Toolkit can serve as a resource from which to start and adapt to different contexts. This resource has been written from a specific cultural context of thirteen national non-profit organizations working in mainline Protestant denominations for over forty years.

In its third edition, the hope for this resource is to keep the information, teaching, and language current in the life of the mainline Protestant church and national LGBTQIA+ culture. This Toolkit is made with a very specific LGBTQIA+ lens in how to approach the work of caring for those who have historically been placed in the margins. However, it is important to remember that LGBTQIA+ bodies come in all bodies, which means for successful justice work to be done, it must be intersectional. As you and your faith community work or create a public Welcome Statement for LGBTQIA+ people, be mindful of other marginalized communities who also need to be seen and named by your faith community. Reach out to the organization of your denominational body and ask for additional resources and trainings centered on racial justice, gender justice, physical ability, language justice, and aging (just to name a few).

May this resource be one that accompanies you and your faith community on a lifelong journey of milestones for justice. It is a joy doing this holy work alongside you. Blessings on your Journey.

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 Journey, 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.ause.ca



Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble is a justice-focused organization of people in The United Church of Canada and beyond. We work for the full inclusion of people of all sexualities and gender identities in the United Church of Canada and in society. We draw strength and hope from biblical stories of liberation; from the prophetic call to live justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with God; and from Jesus' witness to God's inclusive love. AUSE's work includes a process through which ministries of all kinds can be publicly declared "affirming", and as of 2017 almost 200 United Church ministries have this designation.



**Association of Welcoming &
Affirming Baptists**
*American Baptists, Alliance of
Baptists, and others*
PO Box 545
Kensington, MD 20895
202.240.9220
www.awab.org

AWAB promotes understanding and acceptance of members of the LGBTQIA community among Baptist churches and individuals.



**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

The mission of BMC is to cultivate an inclusive church and society and to care for the Mennonite and Brethren lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and allied community.



The Disciples LGBTQ+ Alliance
Disciples of Christ
P.O. Box 44400
Indianapolis, IN 46244-0400
www.disciplesallianceq.org

We, the Disciples LGBTQ+ Alliance, are members of the Christ Church (Disciples of Christ), called to join in God's work of transforming the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in to a just and inclusive church that welcomes persons of all gender expressions and sexual identities into the full life and leadership of the church.



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

Integrity envisions a church where people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions are welcomed and affirmed.



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

More Light Presbyterians engages over 210 congregations and thousands of individuals, enabling Presbyterians to lead LGBTQ service and advocacy in communities nationwide. More Light's mission has always been to empower and equip individuals and congregations to live into their welcome for LGBTQ people. As we move into a new day in the denomination, MLP's work is about pointing towards a particular way of operating in Christian communities with God's abundance at the center of all we do and who we are.



Open and Affirming Coalition of the United Church of Christ

700 Prospect Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44115
216.736.3228
www.openandaffirming.org

The Open and Affirming Coalition of the United Church of Christ advocates for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in the UCC, and equips UCC congregations to become effective witnesses to Christ's extravagant welcome.

Reconciling Ministries Network

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



Reconciling Ministries Network envisions a renewed and vibrant Wesleyan movement that is biblically and theologically centered. As committed disciples of Jesus Christ, the Reconciling Ministries Network strives to transform the world by living out the Gospel's teachings of grace, love, justice and inclusion for all of God's children.



ReconcilingWorks

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

Working at the intersection of oppressions, ReconcilingWorks embodies, inspires, advocates and organizes for the acceptance and full participation of people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions within the Lutheran communion and its ecumenical partners. The Reconciling in Christ (RIC) program is hosted through ReconcilingWorks creating specific welcome to people of all sexual orientations, gender identity, and gender expression.

Room for All

Reformed Church in America
P.O. Box 11495
Albany, NY 12211
201.364.4538
www.roomforall.com



Compelled by the inclusive love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, Room for All's mission is to support, educate and advocate for the welcome and full affirmation of people of all sexual identities and gender expressions in the Reformed Church in America (RCA). The RfA Rostered Congregation program guides local RCA churches toward an intentional and public identity as a welcoming and affirming congregation.

Welcoming Communities Network

Community of Christ

P.O. Box 520348
Independence, MO US 64052
WelcomingCommunityNetwork.org



To embody the love of Jesus Christ, to seek the power and reconciliation of the Holy Spirit, and to honor each other and those who seek to become part of the Welcoming Community Network. To network and support welcoming and affirming congregations and other ministries in the Community of Christ. To increase the number of welcoming and affirming congregations and other ministries in the Community of Christ. To encourage the development of church policies that provide for ministry to and by persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

Terms to know as you begin your Welcoming Journey:

Core Team: The Core Team is a group of passionate people who lead their faith community through a Welcoming Journey. This team will grow as the journey continues.

Journey: The word "journey" is chosen intentionally as a way to remind everyone this work is not about a final destination, but rather a lifetime filled with milestones of inclusion, celebration, and advocacy.

Relational Organizing: This Toolkit will give suggestions and strategies to strengthen and deepen relationships within your faith community. Through these deepened relationships, your community will learn to provide hospitality to all those involved with your ministry.

Hospitality: Creating a space that is prepared to see, name, and care for LGBTQIA+ people and their families.

This Toolkit is designed as a guide for a small group of community members who wish to facilitate a Welcoming Journey in their local faith community. The Toolkit can be used within a congregation, a small-group or class within a larger congregational context, a youth or campus group, outdoor camp ministry, seminary, or any other group convened around shared values and purpose.

This Toolkit is grounded on the following foundational principles:

1. A journey of becoming Welcoming & Affirming is thoughtfully envisioned and carried out, drawing upon wisdom from other faith communities that have completed a journey of their own.
2. A journey of becoming Welcoming & Affirming is grounded in the culture and "personality" of the faith community.
3. A journey of becoming Welcoming & Affirming is 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 – within the individual and within the faith community. Relational organizing is completely different than debate, which should always be avoided.

4. A journey of becoming Welcoming & Affirming is a spiritual opportunity for the faith community to learn more about itself and the people/communities it is called to serve. It can also have additional outcomes in membership, stewardship and vitality. As such, it should always be presented in the context of the life of faith of the community.

Relational organizing strives to take seriously one's role in the Body of Christ. Building and strengthening relationships within a faith community is central to this holy work. These relationships include those in leadership, within key areas of ministry, across ideological and affinity-group lines, and across generational and cultural groupings.

Becoming Welcoming & Affirming has key parts that are somewhat linear. Therefore, taking assessment of your faith community's culture and personality, its theological roots, and likely pace with Welcoming roadblocks is vital.

The Planning the Route portion of this Toolkit is designed to help lay the groundwork needed before beginning public educational work. This cannot be overemphasized. The Toolkit offers information, preparatory materials and background information on relationship-building, storytelling, conflict resolution, assessment tools, worksheets, and the Welcoming Journey outline.

TIP
You are encouraged to follow the wisdom presented in this Toolkit. However, in the end, crafting a Welcoming Journey is more of an art than a science.



Building the Foundation

The “spirit” with which a faith community journeys to become Welcoming & Affirming can make all the difference. It requires deep listening, seeking “the Divine” in the people with whom you engage, and finding the ways in which God is revealed to you through them. The journey must carry a similar spirit. This spirit is called “Graceful Engagement.”

Graceful Engagement is a way of practicing holy conversation in which each person is treated as a beloved child of God. It is about listening, sharing one’s own story, hearing one another’s perspective, and finding commonalities and shared experiences. It is about building relationships based on shared values, so those involved may come to a renewed understanding together as the body of Christ.

In Scripture, 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. 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.

The journey of becoming Welcoming & Affirming is an opportunity to practice discipleship and help the church to be the Church, and a perfect place to practice Graceful Engagement.

It is important to commit to accompanying others in respect and mutuality and walk alongside those with whom we both agree and disagree. This journey is also helpful to discern future directions for shared mission. Divisive rhetoric, actions, and values are to be avoided as this will not move the journey forward and has the potential to create emotional and spiritual wounds. Begin with and return to prayer for guidance and renewal as a positive way to stay grounded in Graceful Engagement.

Graceful Engagement is not a separate step. Rather, it is to be used throughout every aspect of the Welcoming Journey and life of your faith community.

Graceful Engagement Worksheet

Take 30 to 60 minutes at one of your first Core Team gatherings to complete this worksheet as a way to ground yourselves in your Welcoming Journey.

Opening Meditation

Sit prayerfully for two or three minutes in silence, breathing deeply and inviting God’s presence to be fully sensed by each person in the room. Invite participants to remember a time they experienced God’s grace. (Keep in mind that people from various geographic locations and cultures are not exposed to meditation in the same way. Would an instrumental song would be more culturally resonant?) Then, invite each person to reflect upon what it means or how it feels to be filled with or to encounter grace.

Invite those gathered to share the words that come mind to and allow those present to reflect together. Record these words on a large piece of paper or project them on a screen. 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 people are having difficulty, some words other Core Teams have included: loving, powerful, hopeful, centered, peaceful, free, content, calm, whole, open, forgiving, grounded, holy, loved, spiritual.

Scriptural Reflection

With these understandings on a flip chart or screen, invite participants to share their favorite Bible passage, one that informs their daily life. Receive these sacred offerings recognizing and thanking each person for sharing their favorite Bible story or verses.

To engage in more biblical reflection now or at a later date, read aloud and discuss several of the following Scripture 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), or Jesus on the Cross (Luke 23:34).

In each of these contexts, Jesus models a form of discipleship. Jesus treats each person with whom he interacts—those who genuinely seek him out as a teacher and those who seek to destroy him—as a beloved child of God. Christ’s encounters are always filled with grace.

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
- ✓ Doing this work in community

GRACEFUL ENGAGEMENT IS NOT:

- Debate
- Forcing our opinions on others through argument
- Exclusion or outrightly condemning those with whom we do not agree
- Is not homogeneity around scripture and theology

Making It Personal

The goal is to always model Graceful Engagement; however, it can be a challenge to maintain this perspective. You may need the support of your Core Team in the journey to come. Knowing your own “triggers” (those things that you know are likely to pull you away from being able to gracefully engage) can help you be ready when those situations arise.

Lead a discussion about potentially difficult situations or conversations for each member of the Core Team. You might want to role-play specific scenarios to prepare possible responses. Remember sometimes the most graceful option is to end a conversation rather than listening to abusive or hurtful comments. After pondering potential challenges, have each person share a time when they most clearly experienced grace. Remembering these grace-filled moments can also help in more difficult times.

Closing Meditation

Return to silence (or play some soft music in the background) for two or three minutes, breathing deeply and pondering the shared stories of grace. Close the time with spoken prayer. Invite each Core Team member to share their prayer for this Journey.

In the same way Graceful Engagement flows throughout the journey of becoming Welcoming & Affirming, relationship-building is another foundational tool you’ll use throughout. Jesus’ core ministry was about gathering and bringing people together to build relationship. Jesus felt strongly about this, declaring, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” (Matthew 18:20 NRSV) The Welcoming Journey is rooted in relationship-building as an act of faithful discipleship.

Many find using the One-to-One Visit tool within faith communities to be a spiritual practice. When you invite someone into a One-to-One Visit, thinking of the person as your guest (with you as the host) can tap into our faith traditions surrounding hospitality. This “guest and host” mindset can also help keep this conversation from devolving into debate.

Sustainable Action:

Planting the Seeds of Relational Organizing

By Rev. Louise Green

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.

We owe it to our faith community members 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 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. Individual, or One-to-One Visits are critical to create bonds between individuals, 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 that 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?

A ONE-TO-ONE VISIT IS:

- ✓ A 30 to 45 minute face-to-face conversation with one person.
- ✓ Getting to know the other person and being known by learning about shared values and experiences.
- ✓ An inquiry into what matters to a person through hospitable curiosity.
- ✓ A chance to go beyond 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 roadblocks to be addressed that are not on the current action plan.

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 faith community, neighborhood, or city.
- Search for personal friendship or a social encounter.

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

- ✓ An intentional decision to 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 you can simply explain to others.
- ✓ Regular phone call time set aside to ask for and schedule visits.
- ✓ Patience and persistence to work with people's availability and possible resistance.
- ✓ Hospitable curiosity about other people and an ability to listen.
- ✓ Willingness to practice this skill repeatedly, in multiple settings.

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

- ✓ Have a clear introduction and ending: the middle is improvisation with the other person.
- ✓ Listen 70% of the time and speak 30% of the time.
- ✓ Practice hospitable curiosity by asking things like, "Tell me more about that," and, "Can you tell me who taught you about . . ." Try to avoid asking "Why" questions, because they tend to leave people feeling defensive.
- ✓ Talk deeply about a few things instead of covering 20 topics.
- ✓ 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: the conversation is not just for the other person answering your questions.
- ✓ Close by asking the person who else they think you should visit, what questions they have for you, and if they would like to meet again.
- ✓ At the end of your visit make on commitments you will keep. Do not say "let's do this again soon" unless there is a firm plan and commitment to meet again. The commitment may simply be "I'll see you in church on Sunday." If the commitment is "I'll call you with some answers to the questions you asked," keep the commitment.

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

When you decide to do a One-to-One Visit, 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 based on a prepared list (i.e. new members, youth, seniors, religious education teachers)? Is the Core Team preparing to do them with a certain constituency (i.e. LGBTQIA+ people, people of color, young adults, worship associates)?

Create a process for evaluating what you learn once you have a significant number accumu-

TIP

Keep track of each visit by making notes of individuals and decide ahead of time what kinds of things you want to remember. However, do not take notes while you are having the visit itself: this makes you a surveyor or interviewer, which is not the purpose or tone for the conversation. Just write down important items after your visit is over.

lated. This may be your individual work or involve a meeting with the team leading the Welcoming Journey. It is important to go into the visits with an open mind: you can test for certain interests or roadblocks. Your goal is to ask questions and listen without fitting the person into any fixed spot. Remember, this is about meeting someone where they are on their Welcoming Journey, not where you may want them to be. 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
- Different group action
- Second visits with 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 journey is improvised and created out of what you hear and how you decide to respond. You cannot plan a response until you have several One-to-One Visits.

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 engage around their own interests, not an existing plan. The lesson here is very important to highlight. So many persons focus on generating participants in an existing plan as opposed to the organic interests that arise.
- ✓ 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, and can act in a variety of ways over time.
- ✓ A stronger, more dynamic, more creative faith community or organizational life.

One-to-One Reflection Form

Guest:

Phone:

Email Address:

Group or community within faith community

Questions for reflection:

Relationship:

What do we have in common?

What might be the basis of a relationship?

What is their relationship with LGBTQIA+ people?

Self-Interest/Passion/Vocation:

What does this person care most about?

What do they get excited talking about?

How do they spend their time?

What talents/abilities does this person have? How and where are they using them?

How is LGBTQIA+ inclusion part of their vocation/discipleship?

What difference do they want to make given that vocation?

How did their up-bringing form their life?

What relationships does this person have?

What specific wonderings or ideas do they have, and where do the wonderings originate?

What is part of this person’s story?

How/why did they join this faith community?

Is there a role in the community that would excite them?

What I learned about this person:

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

What are this person's areas of passion and vocation?

Self Evaluation:

Questions for reflection:

- As a host... 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? What was the riskiest question I asked?
- Were there "leads" that they gave me that I didn't follow up? How come?
- Did I end with a commitment to find another time to continue the conversation?

Adapted from Rev. Louise Green for specific use in the Welcoming Journey.

STEP 1 Leading the Journey



The first step in a Journey of becoming Welcoming & Affirming is to gather a group of five to ten people who share your passion for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) people in the life of your faith community. These people will form your Core Team and will work together to advocate for, design, and shepherd the journey.

To begin, there may be two or three people already passionate about this conversation. Using the One-to-One Visit tool, tap into the established networks of that small group and meet with a few folks in your faith community who 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 a Welcoming Journey fits with their passions, vocation or sense of discipleship, invite them to join you as part of the Core Team. Ask each of them to read this Toolkit and other resources you have consulted.

Once you have gathered the Core Team and they have read this Toolkit, begin your time with the Graceful Engagement exercise. This will help ground you in a shared understanding of Graceful Engagement and will build relationships among the members of the Core Team.

For denominationally-specific guidance as you begin your journey, do not forget to contact your denominational Welcoming Church Program.

Ensuring LGBTQIA+ people are at the table

A Welcoming Journey can be a difficult time for **LGBTQIA+** members of your faith community. They may not be supportive of the process at all, fearing a negative outcome will mean a loss of their sense of community. They may be concerned this journey 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 (never assume you know someone is LGBTQIA+ unless they have told you) LGBTQIA+ members of your faith community. Determine their preferred role in the Welcoming Journey, and their willingness and ability to be publicly identified in their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression. Assure them you will check in periodically throughout the journey and keep your word.



NOTE

LGBTQIA+ means the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, & asexual community. The "+" stands for any additional identity terms not named in this acronym. Remember: these identity terms are self-identified and should not be ascribed to another person without their consent.

Learn more about these terms in the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression Tool on page 42 of this Toolkit.

2

STEP 2 Gathering Information

To enhance this work, it is helpful for your Core Team to spend some time looking at how your faith community handles change, how it talks about difficult topics, how it responds to social issues, and how it engages other justice issues. Step Two: Gathering Information is a key part of any journey of becoming Welcoming & Affirming. Below are three avenues of gathering information and collecting data (Congregational Assessment, Conflict History, and Authority & Influence) which will be invaluable as you begin to craft your journey.

Congregational Assessment

The Congregational Assessment is an online tool to help you better understand how your faith community approaches conversation or discernment about LGBTQIA+ inclusion and to determine how ready it is to engage in this holy work.

ReconcilingWorks.org/Congregational-Assessment

Each of the Core Team members should complete the Congregational Assessment individually and then gather as the Core Team to discuss the results. Note: when taking the Congregational Assessment try to answer the questions in a realistic, rather than aspirational way, to get the most accurate result possible. Having a lower score is not a judgment on the faith community, but a sign that your journey will take a different pace than you had originally expected.

Ideas for Discussion:

- Was anyone in the group surprised by the average score of your faith community? Were the results encouraging or discouraging? What are the possible reasons?
- Were there any questions that received a very low average score? A very high average score? What are the possible reasons?
- Which of 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 because 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 online assessment, 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 Journey Outline that follows the Assessment and estimate the length of time you hope your journey of becoming Welcoming & Affirming will take. Although those of us who want our faith communities to become Welcoming & Affirming wish it could happen today, it is important not to rush the journey. It is also very important, even if a “cautious” pace is chosen to keep the journey moving forward and not be paralyzed by fear.
- What are the next steps the Core Team might take to plan your faith communities Welcome Journey?

TIP

This online assessment is a great resource at the beginning of a welcoming church journey. This self-assessment is designed to pace your journey and take the temperature of your congregation's overall feelings toward becoming welcoming of LGBTQIA+ people.

Conflict History

In addition, have the Core Team talk about change cycles or conflict in the history of your faith community. What changed? What were the reasons for this change? Who were the leaders in that change process? How did the community deal with it at the time? How does it continue to deal with it?

How does your community deal with conflict in general?

It is important to determine your faith community's culture around conflict, keeping in mind that conflict comes in a variety of forms and does not need to be held in a negative frame. Taking seriously the role of conflict, decide how you will guide the community through the Welcoming Journey and any conflict that may arise. For instance, will you explicitly do a session on conflict during the educational phase of the journey? How will you utilize the *Tips for Handling Conflict and Communication Strategies* for your discussions about LGBTQIA+ people and their families?

Power Analysis

With your Core Team's map out the power structures of authority and influence, both formal and informal, within your faith community.

- Read your community's bylaws to familiarize yourself with the formal process for decision making and organizational change. Keep the mapping of your journey aligned with your bylaws.
- 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 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 community?
- Who holds the long-term memory of the community?
- Who are your storytellers?
- Who are the people whose opinion you need to know?
- **What does your clergy think about becoming Welcoming & Affirming?**

Based on this information, determine a plan for members of the Core Team to meet with identified key stakeholders. Using the One-to-One Visit technique, assess the concerns and potential sources of conflict/roadblocks and plan for relationship-building throughout the Journey.

TIP

If your clergy is not in favor of the work of the Core Team, it can be difficult for the work to proceed. They do not have to be ardent supporters, but active opposition to this journey makes it difficult for the work to succeed. If you do have clergy opposition, stay in the “Core Team” phase of your work and focus on relationship-building with clergy, and informally work within the faith community. Proceed only through Step 4 of this Toolkit until clergy are supportive of the journey.

Congregations and Conflict

By Rev. Dr. Anita L. Bradshaw

Rev. Dr. Anita L. Bradshaw is a consultant working with congregations, judicatories, denominations and non-profits and an ordained pastor in the United Church of Christ. She holds two advanced degrees from Yale University in theology and a Doctor of Philosophy degree from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Though often spoken of in whispers, conflict is a common characteristic of faith communities 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 community life 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. Exploring becoming an inclusive LGBTQIA+ faith community may cause conflict.

- Acknowledge conflict is a reality in the church and sometimes can be overwhelming.
- Story: A congregation hired a consultant to deal with a 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 fighting over many issues but the most prominent was the decision to become Welcoming & Affirming prior to the most recent pastor's arrival. After individual interviews with over 50 members of the 120 member congregation, the committee was charged with figuring out what to do with a definition of church that had emerged from the interviews. On the poster board was written: Happy + Nice = Church; therefore, Conflict ≠ Church.
- What we generally fear is not the conflict itself, but the bad behavior that often accompanies it.

Scripture Reflection:

Invite participants into a time of scripture reflection. Ask a volunteer to read the Philippians passage below and then ask participants to listen for a word or phrase that catches their attention and/or to share 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!*

After the reading, invite people to turn to one other person and share the word, phrase or question that came up for each person.

Invite participants back into the large group and ask for those who are willing to share their observations.

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.

Invite participants to offer ideas about what conflict in the church is. On a flip-chart, write: "What is conflict in the church/faith community?" and record participants' answers.

Then, write: "What are some positive aspects of conflict?"

Point out that conflict could be understood in more positive terms.

- ✓ Opportunity
- ✓ Leading of the Holy Spirit
- ✓ Key to discerning God's mission in your context
- ✓ A way to transition into a more authentic identity
- ✓ A door to new learnings and awareness about your faith community

After you have discussed the possible positive aspects of conflict, review the following levels of conflict as established by congregational consultant, 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 & Affirming Journey seek to keep the conflict level at the lower end.

Science has shown us that all of life is part of a system, and there are two types of systems: open and closed. Churches often function as closed systems, but the Gospel calls for an open system.

Faith Community as a System

Conflict can occur in both closed and open systems, but there is a qualitative difference between the reasons for the conflict.

Closed systems focus on belonging, loyalty, and “guarding” and “protecting” the system. Faith communities 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 operate with a sense of 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 faith community 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 clergy
- Silence is tacit approval
- Intent vs. impact

Tips on Handling Conflict:

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

1. **Admit you need each other.** Far too many faith communities splinter when they insist their way is the only way.
2. **Face the conflict.** Faith communities 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 it runs counter to your own opinion.
4. **Know your audience.** People who join faith communities today may have the kind of consumer identity that asks, “How can this community help me?” If the church can’t manage its own problems, much less help people with theirs, some people may leave.
5. **Recognize the effect of change.** Consider how your faith community 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 community.
6. **Be alert to emotional involvement.** When people say, “It’s only the principle of the thing,” that’s a tip that their ego might be at stake. If you find you are emotionally enmeshed in an issue, ask someone more detached to mediate.
7. **Keep issues separate.** When people are troubled by one thing, they can conflate 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 the new kids they are bringing in? Deal with one issue 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 person a say, but that’s what’s necessary for everyone to take ownership of the problem as well as the 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.

Strategies for Addressing Conflict in Congregations

By W. Craig Gilliam

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.

Ask good questions. Questions are powerful communication tools. Questions should be neutral, and designed to increase awareness and understanding.

Listen authentically. Listening is an art and a sacred act. Ask clarifying questions without making any judgmental statements. Use the one-to-one visit to listen and learn.

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 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.

3

STEP 3 Building Relationships

Building and deepening relationships within your faith community is vital throughout the journey of becoming Welcoming & Affirming. The goal of doing this holy work is for your congregation to be a stronger community at the end with clearly-lived values. When people experience Graceful Engagement, being seen and heard for who they are, they are more likely to respond positively. These heart connections allow people to move forward in support of LGBTQIA+ people and their families, and make a community stronger for having done the work.

Using the One-to-One Visit techniques, members of the Core Team should expand the scope of their visits, listening and talking beyond the clergy and formal leadership to include the entire faith community. For smaller communities, this may mean you speak with every member; for larger communities, it may mean you speak with a selected sample of the membership. It is important to get buy-in and official support from all segments of the faith community for the Journey of becoming Welcoming & Affirming. Throughout this holy work, please keep in mind it is also important to deepen and expand relationships with people you already know. Each person in your faith community has a lifetime of experiences that shape who they are. There is always more people can learn about each other.

TIP

Being in relationship with others helps folks acknowledge the unique gifts they bring to the life of the faith community. Each person is a part of the community for a reason. Take the time to learn from one another.



STEP 4 Mapping the Journey

4

Meet as a Core Team to design a journey to best fit your faith community using everything learned from Building the Foundation thus far. This next step is the pivot towards “Building a Journey.” Plan for your Core Team to meet regularly to assess how your journey is going, and to adjust accordingly. As you develop the plans for your journey, it will be important to read and reflect on the article below in order to ensure your road map does not lead to at unnecessary road-blocks.

How Does Change Happen in Churches or Any Organization

By Rev. Dr. Anita L. Bradshaw

Rev. Dr. Anita L. Bradshaw is a consultant working with congregations, judicatories, denominations and non-profits and an ordained pastor in the United Church of Christ. She holds two advanced degrees from Yale University in theology and a Doctor of Philosophy degree from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Researcher, teacher and author Everett Rogers’ in his groundbreaking book, Diffusion of Innovation, argues that whenever human beings make change, it is a process, which different people respond to differently and at different speeds. It is helpful to discuss this process as you prepare to engage in a process of change in your congregation.

Conventionally, people think change happens by starting at Point A and leaping to Point B. Often referred to as the “gap model of change,” this is in fact not how change takes place. People will see a change and assume that a person or an organization jumps across the gap; but, what goes unrecognized is all the steps and processes which people in the organization or their personal lives move through to get from A to B.

In fact, change can be better viewed like sailing a boat. If one wants to go from the pier or the shore to a point on the horizon, one does not aim the sailboat 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. 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. They can 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 ongoing 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 usually occurring percentages of each group. They are:

TIP

Too often faith communities underestimate the importance of a planned journey reflecting the values, culture and history of their congregation. Intentionality in the journey of becoming Welcoming & Affirming is paramount to its success.

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 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” — As the name suggests, people who are 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 important when approaching the welcoming discernment journey in a faith community. Here are some tips:

- Don’t design for the Laggards or the Late Majority, 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 can make change even against the resistance of the Laggards or even some of the Late Majority.
- 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.

Public Storytelling

TOOL

The opportunity to listen deeply to one another through the Welcoming & Affirming journey is one of the ways to mark it as sacred and filled with Graceful Engagement.

Jesus was a storyteller. Most of Christ’s preaching throughout the Gospels is encapsulated in stories or parables. Christians are called to follow the life and ministry of Jesus as an example of what a faithful life looks like.

Hearts and minds are changed when members of your faith community link Gospel stories to the blessedness of including LGBTQIA+ people and their families in the life of the church.

As a Core Team, read through “Telling Your Public Story: Self, Us, and, Now” to build out the stories you will share to encourage and motivate others to understand why becoming a welcoming congregation is so important.

As the journey continues, consider scheduling times when others in the faith community might learn this Public Storytelling technique.

Telling Your Public Story: Self, Us, Now By Marshall Ganz

Marshall Ganz teaches at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and draws on his experience working in several different movements for justice.

Stories not only teach us how to act—they inspire us to act. Stories communicate our values through the language of the heart and our emotions. It is what you feel (our hopes, our cares, our obligations) not simply what you know that can inspire others with the courage to act.

A plot is structured with:

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

A person’s ability to empathetically identify with a protagonist allows us to enter the story, feel what the storyteller feels, see things through their eyes. The moral, revealed through the resolution, brings understanding. From stories, people learn how to manage themselves, how to face difficult choices, unfamiliar situations, and uncertain outcomes because everyone is the protagonist in their own life story, facing everyday challenges, authoring their own choices, and learning from the outcomes.

By telling personal stories of **challenges** people have faced, **choices** they have made, and what they learned from the **outcomes** others can inspired and share our own wisdom about how they can face their challenges as well. Everyone can express their values through stories not as

TIP

The story you tell of how you came to serve as a leader offers others insight into your values, how 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.

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 has 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 your story doesn't matter, people aren't interested, or you shouldn't be talking about yourself. However, 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 if you don't author your public story, others will, and they may not tell it in the way you like as many recent examples show.

A public story consists of three parts:

A good public story is also 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:

What made you feel it was a challenge? What was so challenging about it? What made it *your* challenge?

Choice:

What brought you to make the choice you made? Where did you find courage? Where did you find hope? How do you want us to feel?

Outcome:

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

This Toolkit focuses primarily on the “story of self,” the place to begin. However we also offer some suggestions on moving 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 only be learned by telling, and listening, and telling and listening.

TIP

Continue to practice telling your story using the following three categories.

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.

A Story of NOW: The challenge this community now faces, the choices it must make, and the outcomes to which “we” can aspire.

Story of Self Worksheet

Challenge:

Choice:

Outcome:

Practice partner feedback:

In the context of a Welcoming Journey, a frame is made up of the words or concepts used to talk about the Welcoming Journey. The tenor, spirit, and “feel” of a Welcoming Journey are key to its destination. Drawing upon the relational approach of Graceful Engagement, the goal is to present your journey toward becoming Welcoming & Affirming in such a way that it feels like a natural next step in the life of your faith community by living out core values and faith, using language and images that call on the best in the community’s life. This is called “framing.”

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 faith community through a well-framed Welcoming Journey. A journey created from a place of listening and care that is well planned, easily adjustable, and is able to incorporate the diversity and “flavor” of your faith community, has the most potential to be successful.

When the time comes to bring LGBTQIA+ inclusion into the conversation, it will be understood as a natural outgrowth of your faith community’s mission.

TIP

Spend a significant amount of time reviewing information learned in One-to-One Visits, conflict history, and relationship building for you to learn what might be a successful framework for your journey.

Framing Worksheet

Prayer

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

Exercise One

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

1. What drew you in?
2. What keeps you here?
3. What makes this a special place?

After a few minutes for reflection, invite the group to share responses. What themes emerge? What rises to the top?

With these reflections in mind, let’s begin to talk about framing. At its most basic, a frame is simply the way you think about or describe something. The words a person chooses frame the value of the subject they are talking about. Words frame how people do or do not think about things. Frames are used in endless ways in society every day.

The goal of choosing a successful frame is for it to feel authentic to your faith community’s ethos, mission, or vision, as well as being short enough to use in multiple ways of messaging (bulletins, newsletters, t-shirts, buttons, and name tags, to name a few). Your framing for your Welcoming Journey will set the tone for the holy work that lies ahead, affecting how members of your community will view it, and impact their ability to join in the work. **The purpose of the frame is to support your journey.**

However, frames are often unintentionally set in a negative way when talking about welcoming LGBTQIA+ people into a faith community. For example, if a member of the Core Team were to tell a community member, “I know this work will be hard, and might cause some division, but it is important so we are going to talk about welcoming LGBTQIA+ people anyway,” the frame has been set that this work will be “hard” and create “division.” **It is important to not reinforce negative stereotypes in this holy work.**

Context matters. The Journey does not happen in a vacuum. It happens within the context of your community’s story. A good frame takes context into account. And if you have chosen well, a good frame provides a powerful way to talk about your Welcoming Journey in a way that resonates with your faith community’s history, culture, and its most deeply held Biblical and theological values. Some examples of faith community’s frames include “Setting the Table for All,” “Where Love Matters,” and “God’s All, Our All.”

Putting Your Frame into Action

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

- ➔ When you plan a worship service around your Welcoming Journey, your frame could be the theme of that service.
- ➔ Your frame language can be used at the top of publicity regarding educational programs.
- ➔ Your frame can provide the focus for discussion and conversation in all aspects of your journey.

Exercise Two

Invite the people who have gathered to reflect on your own faith community. The first exercise asked you to think about your personal relationship with the community. Now, reflect on your community with attention to its history and culture.

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

How is it viewed in your neighborhood and the wider community?

What biblical and theological themes resonate most with your faith community?

What scripture passages or Bible stories resonate most with your faith community?

Does your faith community have a favorite hymn that is sung every congregational anniversary? Is there a phrase or image in the words that could inspire a frame?

Is there art in your sanctuary (stained glass images, etc.) that tells the story of who you are as a faith community?

The importance of finding the right frame for your community cannot be overemphasized. Do not feel rushed to identify what will work best in your setting. For most, this discernment will take time filled with deep conversation and prayer to arrive at your frame.

A Welcoming Journey which calls the faith community back to its core values of hospitality, justice, and genuine love, is an opportunity for your faith community to be public about its values. Therefore, it involves the whole community discerning the core of their faith and their actions together.

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

Doing a study in human sexuality (such as the “Our Whole Lives” curriculum) is an important opportunity in the life of the faith community; it might be helpful to review and potentially use this kind of educational opportunity during Step Six of the Welcoming Journey. We recommend that sexuality not be the theme or frame for a Welcoming Journey. The same is true for gender and marriage issues. While all of these topics will naturally arise in a Welcoming Journey, they are not successful frames to organize around.

Here is how one church identified their frame:

A Simple Cup of Coffee

A Lutheran church was not an official Welcoming Faith Community, 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 LGBTQIA+ community. After taking the courageous step to leave the church years before, he vowed, in an act of self-protection, that he would never to 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. Somehow, he found the courage to show up at the church for rehearsal, despite the emotions of fear, courage, defensiveness, and vulnerability. He walked up the church steps, approached the door, and paused for a moment before finally pushing it open and walking inside.

The first thing he encountered was a friendly face behind the counter saying, “Welcome. Can I make you a latte?” That simple act of hospitality reached through his 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 Journey, 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.

Choose a frame from the very beginning of your journey that resonates with the community. and have buy-in from the community. 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 start, and you may never get them back.

Notes

Horizontal lines for taking notes.

TIP
Remember what you learned about Graceful Engagement. This work is about bringing people together, not pulling them apart.



Living the Journey

God has named each person Beloved, the Spirit gives a diversity of gifts for the common good, and Christ calls us all to work for justice. For these reasons the gifts of LGBTQIA+ people should be celebrated! Every person is fearfully and wonderfully made, and it is the church's calling is to make sure each person has an inclusive, safe, and affirming faith community to celebrate the person they are.

It is common for faith communities to avoid talking about topics like sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. This information is created with the intention to help you and your faith community learn how to speak about LGBTQIA+ in life-giving and affirming ways.

Because this work is about people, it is important to do our best in learning how to care for people where they are. This tool provides basic understanding of the gender binary system of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIE), explores how this system has hurt people over time, and begins to look at a more expansive understanding. With this background, you will be better equipped to assist your faith community in starting these conversations. It is also hoped that learning these terms will help prevent macro and micro aggressions (statements, actions, or incidents regarded as indirect, subtle, or unintentional degradation against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority or LGBTQIA+ people).

Safety is important in this work. Before you begin follow these guidelines:

1. **People Over Definitions:** If you don't know which identity terms, pronouns, or titles to use and find yourself getting "stuck" on terms, re-center yourself on the fact you are talking about a person. It is also okay to ask someone what pronoun they use, or just avoid using gendered terms. Remember, all that is needed to welcome someone is their name.
2. **Curiosity Continuum:** This resource is full of continua which help us understand sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. However, the curiosity continuum is one of the most important as we seek to extend welcome to our LGBTQIA+ neighbors.



When getting to know someone or learning more about a people group, you are sure to have many questions. Before you inquire, ask yourself "Why am I asking?" or "Will this question help me build a relationship of mutual trust and respect?" Does your question represent "hospitable curiosity" or "lurid curiosity?" Asking people about the details of their bodies is not hospitable. The goal of this resource is to dismantle barriers between people, and the perception that LGBTQIA+ people are exotic oddities does not serve that goal.

3. **Self-Care:** Ideally, the SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression) spectrum is a place where hopefully all people can find a reflection of themselves, but, if you can't find yourself, don't worry. Some people identify off the spectrum. Some people also experience a new awareness of themselves or loved ones, and it is important to practice self-care as someone continues in their learning.

Life's First Question

At the moment of birth there are three people and one question: the person giving birth (keep in mind not all people who give birth identify as a female/mother), the newborn, a medical professional/midwife, and the question: "Is it a boy or a girl?" Currently, birth certificates in the US have two boxes, and only one can be checked.

Female Male

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. The way the medical professional

The Gender Binary System		
Sex	Female	Male
Gender Identity	Woman	Man
Gender Expression	Feminine	Masculine
Sexual Orientation	Attracted to Men	Attracted to Women

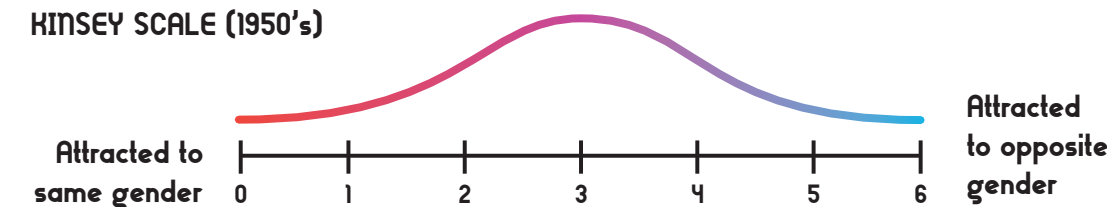
(such as doctor or midwife) answers that question – "Is it a boy or a girl?" – has ramifications throughout one's entire life. Future options, expectations, and opportunities all hinge on which box is checked. And interestingly, notice that the very question – "Is it...?" – withholds personhood until a gender is assigned.

Journey of Learning and Understanding

In public conversations, people 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, Kinsey proposed that people fall on a continuum and/or a spectrum ranging from zero to six, where zero represented being solely attracted to the opposite gender and six represents being solely attracted to the same gender.

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

KINSEY SCALE (1950's)



As people's understanding of sexual orientation has become more complex, so, too has our understanding of sex and gender. Like sexual orientation, people have learned that none of the components of sex, gender identity or gender expression are distinct either/or categories. Each can be placed on a continuum. Over time, we have learned that the artificial confines of the gender binary system have failed to include everyone.

Beyond the Binary: Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression

Most everyone has been steeped in the gender binary system, but some of these concepts can seem very foreign to people. This can be a lot of information to take in. So, let's pause and remember why it is important to learn these new understandings. In the Welcoming Journey, the goal is to deepen and expand a faith community's ability to welcome people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. However, to this day the dominant story LGBTQIA+ people hear from communities of faith is God does not love them just as they are. The hope for a faith community is to be able to respond with hospitality and true welcome to people who hold a diversity of identities, particularly differences in gender identity and/or gender expression.

It is important to remember people learn new things about themselves and their bodies as they go through life; do not freeze people in time. Think about the SOGIE scale as an abacus where people can identify in a variety of ways on each scale to equal a beautiful and whole person.

Sex: is assigned at birth based on external genitalia, reproductive organs, chromosomes, and hormones. Some people with ambiguous or other biological complexities (such as chromosomal pattern or hormonal shift), may identify as intersex.



Gender Identity: Refers to a person's innate, deeply felt physiological identification as a woman, man, or another gender which may or may not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth. Gender Identity is different from the term "gender," which is typically used with references to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones.



Gender Expression: Refers to the external characteristics and behaviors that are socially defined as either masculine or feminine, such as dress, grooming, mannerisms, speech patterns and social interactions. The norms vary culturally.



Sexual Orientation: Is the term used to describe which gender(s) someone is physically and or emotionally attracted to. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, queer, and straight are all examples of sexual orientations. A person's sexual orientation is distinct from a person's sex, gender identity, and gender expression.

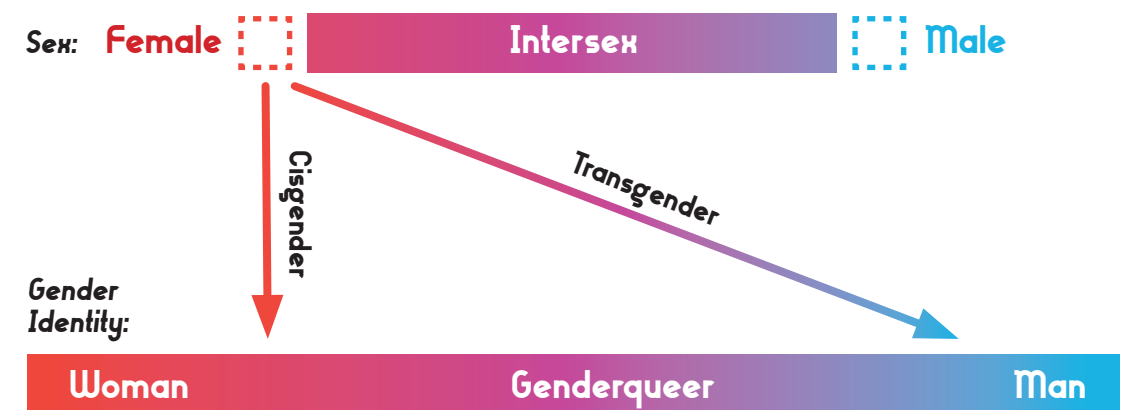


Additional Terms to Know

Bisexual: an identity term describing physical and/or emotional attraction to people of more than one gender.

Pansexual: is a identity term describing physical and/or emotional attraction to people of any gender identity.

Transgender: Trans comes from the Latin word to "cross." Someone who is transgender has crossed from the gender assigned to them at birth to a different gender identity (see below graphic). As a way of practicing hospitable curiosity, it is important to remember a transgender person's body belongs to them and people do not have the right to ask if, or how, they are seeking any medical treatments.



Cisgender: Cis comes from the Latin work for "same." The term "cisgender" means that the person's sex assigned at birth and their gender identity align (see above graphic). Using the term cisgender is a way to extend hospitality and prevent micro-aggressions towards transgender people from happening in conversation. For example, if someone were to introduce you to two women and said, "Sarah is a trans woman, but Emily is a real woman," this way of introduction adds a value and a judgment to which one person is more "woman" than the other. Changing the introduction to "Sarah is a trans woman, and Emily is a cis woman" helps to remove value and judgment.

Queer: a term people use, for a variety of reasons, instead of or in addition to, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Some people choose this term for themselves because their identity is not fully represented by LGB or T. For others, it is a way of identifying with political and cultural differences with those who are straight and cisgender. Queer can sometimes be an umbrella term used for the LGBTQIA+ community. The term is also used as the academic category related to the LGBTQIA+ community and includes "queer theology" and "queer theory."

Gender Non-conforming, Non-binary, and Genderqueer: can describe a person who doesn't express their gender identity and/or gender expression in ways conforming to societal/cultural norms. Non-binary people may identify as "in-between" these genders, both genders, neither genders, or identify as another gender altogether.

TIP

Pronouns are another important way to extend care and hospitality to the LGBTQIA+ community. Here are some pronouns people use:

She/her/hers

He/him/his

They/them/theirs

Ze/Zir/Zirs

Someone's gender identity does not always match their gender expression.

If you're unsure and need to know someone's pronouns, just ask, "What pronouns do you prefer?"

Intersex: is a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. One out of every 2,000 babies are born intersex. Until recently, it was common practice for doctors to respond to intersex babies by simply assigning a sex, making surgical modifications to the child's genitalia to "resolve" the ambiguity. The parents may or may not have 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.

Asexual and Aromantic Spectrums

Asexuality and aromanticism are two of the more recent areas being explored, included, and named in the LGBTQIA+ community. In this work, it is important to remember: all identities are self-identified. Never ascribe an identity to someone else. Let them tell you how they choose to identify. Like gender identity and gender expression, asexual and aromantic identities can change over time.

Asexual (ACE) is a sexual orientation characterized by a lack of sexual attraction toward any gender. "Ace" is short for "asexual," just like "bi" is short for bisexual and "trans" is short for "transgender."

Aromantic (ARO) is an orientation characterized by a lack of romantic attraction toward any gender. "Aro" is short for "aromantic."

ACE & ARO spectrums are two separate orientation spectrums—a sexual and a romantic one—with which to identify. These spectrums can create a multitude of identity combinations. "ACE" and "ARO" are also umbrella terms used to refer to anyone with asexual and/or aromantic identities including demisexual and/or demiromantic and gray-a.

Gray-A is considered the middle gray area between asexuality and sexuality on the sexual spectrum and between aromantic and romantic on the romantic spectrum. Demisexual and demiromantic identities fall underneath this "gray-a" identity.

Demisexual people can experience sexual attraction after a close emotional connection has formed.

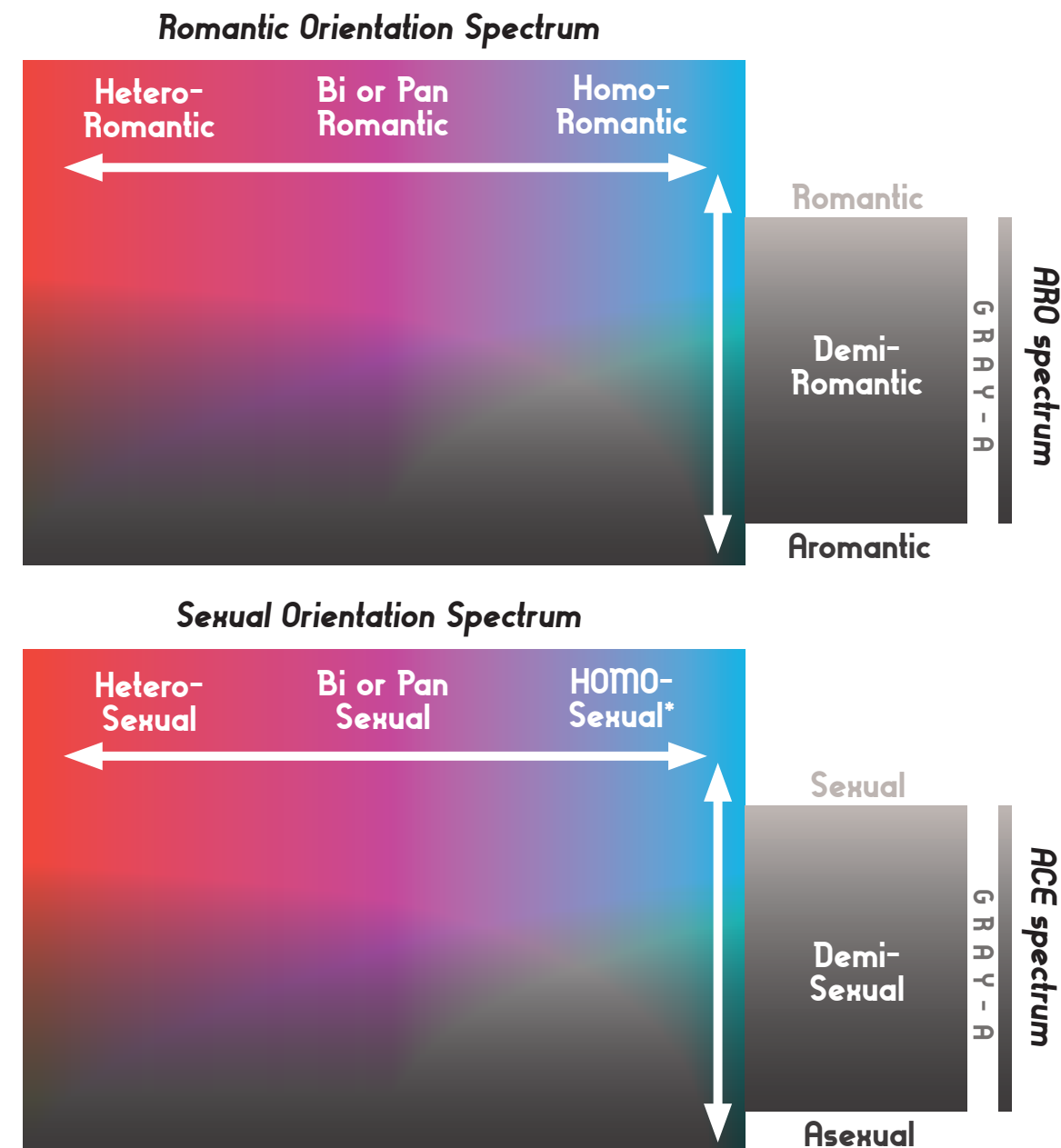
Demiromantic people can experience romantic attraction after a close emotional connection has formed.

NOTE

Make sure your core team has a firm understanding of sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation before moving onto the ACE and ARO spectrums which tend to be more advanced for learners new to this work.

A New Grid: Adding Asexual and Aromantic to the Continuum

The horizontal red to blue spectrums represent the orientation of one's romantic or sexual desire. The vertical gray Aro and Ace spectrums represent the intensity of one's attraction toward that orientation. Although romantic orientation and sexual orientation might often correlate, they do not necessarily align. For example, a person might identify as heteroromantic but bisexual. Plot yourself on each grid.



* The term, "Homosexual," is useful when learning aro/ace spectrums, however most gay and lesbian people do not use it as an identifying term and find it offensive.

5

Step 5 Community Recognition of the Journey

Preparation for Step Five has taken place in previous steps.

Now is the time for the Core Team to officially bring their desire to have the Welcoming Journey recognized by the faith community's governing body. As you prepare to share your plan with your community's governing bodies, here are some suggestions on how to prepare.

NOTE

In some faith communities, the most adamant opponents demand to be on the Core Team. Study the Bylaws and work with your faith community leadership to delicately thread this needle. You will be more successful if your leadership team is made up of supporters. Should this not be possible, continue to have One to One conversations with the opponents in your community and slow the process down.

1. **Create a new name for your Core Team.** Choose a name for your leadership team that is a direct reflection of your chosen frame.
2. **Prepare a brief outline** of the following information to share and present to your governing body.
 3. **How did the Core Team** (or use your leadership team's new name) come to be?
 - a. **What ground work have you done** to get to this point (congregational assessment, One-to-One visits, Relationship Building, and Framing) to show your thoughtful and thorough preparation?
 - b. Share with them **a brief overview of the map you have created for your journey** and how it has been designed to meet the specific needs of your faith community. Inform them of your projected timeline, showing them the pace you have set. Share with them this is the current plan, but that as potential need arises, the plan can be changed and adapted.
 - c. Let them know what your leadership team's final goal is.
4. Have a few members of the leadership team **share your prepared document** with community clergy to ensure they are in support of your team's work.
5. **Reach out to the governing body leadership** and ask for time on a future agenda item to share the map of your Welcoming Journey in hopes of approving it by the group.
6. At this point, it is a good idea to consider **expanding the membership of your leadership team** to include key faith community leaders and influencers. Be sure to check in with the known LGBTQIA+ members and include them if they choose.

Step 6 Providing Educational Opportunities

6

When thinking about helping their faith community 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. Your educational opportunities will have a much greater impact when they are placed within the context of a well-planned Welcoming Journey and are shared through the frame your Core Team has chosen. Through your One-to-One Visits, you will hear from key leaders of the community about concerns they have about the Welcoming Journey. These One-to-One Visits will give your leadership team opportunity to tell your stories about why the Welcoming Journey matters to you. Your chosen frame will help you tell these stories in ways that reinforce your community's understanding about who you are and what your mission and ministry is now. These conversations will help you design educational opportunities that meet the needs of your community, rely on and deepen the relationships within your congregation, and that lead to a shared commitment to live out your Welcoming Journey.

Given the pace of your journey, 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, affirmation and reconciliation. These programs can then move gradually into more focused attention on inclusion, affirmation, and advocacy of LGBTQIA+ people.

Below are some ideas of different types of educational opportunities you might provide.

Panels

Panels are a time-tested way of ensuring people are able to hear the stories of LGBTQIA+ people. Parents and other family members of LGBTQIA+ people can also have very powerful stories to tell. Panels show the Welcoming & Affirming Journey is about real people and not simply about abstract "issues" (it is harmful to frame people as issues). As noted in Step One, LGBTQIA+ people within your faith community may or may not feel able to serve on a panel. To find potential panelists in your area, contact other Welcoming & Affirming communities, your Welcoming Church Program, or local LGBTQIA+ community organizations. Having a One-to-One Visit with each panelist prior to the scheduled event will help them understand your faith community and how the panel fits into your Welcoming Journey. This will also help panelists know which of their stories would be most helpful to share.

A "digital panel" option is ReconcilingWorks *Clunky Questions* YouTube series in which a group of LGBTQIA+ rostered and lay Lutherans answer some "Clunky Questions" that LGBTQIA+ people are often asked. View for free: ReconcilingWorks.org/clunkyquestions

NOTE

Before beginning an educational process, it is important to check in again with the LGBTQIA+ people and their family members within your faith community to find out their preferred role(s) in the journey and to listen to any concerns they might have.

Bible

Bible studies are another successful element in the Welcoming Journey. However, when people only discuss the eight “clobber passages” (the Bible verses most often cited to condemn same-gender-loving people), a negative frame is inadvertently set up around scripture. Scripture is full of texts that speak a word of promise to LGBTQIA+ 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. It is best to study themes of welcome and justice in the Bible first, and then read those texts commonly assumed to be about LGBTQIA+ issues within that context.

The Arts

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

- **For the Bible Tells Me So** - Can the love between two people ever be an abomination? Is the chasm separating gays and lesbians and Christianity too wide to cross? Is the Bible an excuse to hate? <http://www.forthebibletellsmeso.org>
- **Through My Eyes** - “Through My Eyes” is a moving, thought-provoking look at the lives of young Christians who have been personally affected by this debate in the church. It’s a great conversation starter for your church, parents, friends, small group, or anyone looking for a better, more compassionate approach to a controversial topic: <https://youtu.be/QImNx1JA3BI>
- **Out of Order** - a groundbreaking feature documentary revealing the complex and painful struggles faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer faith leaders as they confront entrenched bigotry and work to build loving support within their churches: <http://www.outoforderdoc.com>
- **Fish Out of Water** - seizes the issue of homosexuality and the Bible, dissecting the impact it has had on American culture, politics, the LGBTQIA+ community and the Christian church as a whole. With animated historical clips and quirky interviews taken from barbershops to truck stops, the film will inspire, inform, and with hope, transform America: <http://fishoutofwaterfilm.com>

Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression

It is important in this holy work to include people on a broad spectrum of sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. This means you may have to spend some extra time in providing education for your faith community in understanding the beautiful diversity in the SOGIE spectrum. 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.

Intersections

LGBTQIA+ people come in all bodies. Issues related to LGBTQIA+ persons and the work of welcoming are deeply related to other issues of inclusion and justice. LGBTQIA+ people embody every race, class, ability, and age group.

Racial Justice:

- **RaceForward**, Race Forward brings systemic analysis and an innovative approach to complex race issues to help people take effective action toward racial equity.: <https://www.raceforward.org/>
- **The White Privilege Conference** examines challenging concepts of privilege and oppression and offers solutions and team building strategies to work toward a more equitable world: <http://www.whiteprivilegeconference.com>
- **White Privilege: Let’s Talk—A Resource for Transformational Dialogue** is an adult curriculum from the United Church of Christ that’s designed to invite church members to engage in safe, meaningful, substantive, and bold conversations on race. <http://privilege.uccpages.org/>
- **The Brown Boi Project** is a community of masculine of center womyn, men, two-spirit people, transmen, and our allies committed to changing the way that communities of color talk about gender: www.brownboiproject.org
- **Trans Women of Color Collective** uplifts the narratives, leadership, and lived experiences of trans and gender non conforming people of color: www.twocc.us
- **Trans Latin@ Coalition**: advocates for the specific needs of the Trans Latin@ community that resides in the U.S.A. and plans strategies that improve our quality of life: www.translatinacoalition.org/

LGBTQIA+ Aging information:

- **Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders (SAGE)** is the country’s largest and oldest organization dedicated to improving the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender older adults: <https://www.sageusa.org>
- **The National Resource Center on LGBT Aging** is the United States’ first and only technical assistance resource center aimed at improving the quality of services and supports offered to lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender older adults. <https://www.lgbtagingcenter.org>
- **American Society on Aging**: supports the knowledge and skills of those who seek to improve the quality of life of older adults and their families. <http://www.asaging.org/education/5>

Gender Justice:

- **National Center for Transgender Equality**: The National Center for Transgender Equality is the nation’s leading social justice advocacy organization winning life-saving change for transgender people: <https://www.transequality.org>
- **Gender Justice**: a legal and policy advocacy organization devoted to addressing the causes and consequences of gender inequality: <http://www.genderjustice.us/>

TIP

It is strongly recommended to do educational work about the ways in which LGBTQIA+ inclusion and justice are woven into and connected to other issues of justice and inclusion.

Are there ways you can connect LGBTQIA+ work to the justice work currently happening in your faith community?

- **National Organization for Women:** an organization devoted to achieving full equality for women through education and litigation: <http://now.org>
- **Everyday Feminism:** helps people dismantle everyday violence, discrimination, and marginalization through applied intersectional feminism and to create a world where self-determination and loving communities are social norms through compassionate activism: <http://everydayfeminism.com>

Ability:

- **REGARD,** a national organization of LGBTQ people in the United Kingdom who self-identify as disabled: <http://regard.org.uk>
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness,** the United State’s largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness: <https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/LGBTQ>
- **Deaf Queer Resource Center:** a resource and information center for, by, and about the Deaf LGBTQIA+ communities: <https://www.facebook.com/deafqueer>

Advocacy

The Welcoming Journey is not only important within the four walls of worship, but the church building is also critical in the life of LGBTQIA+ people in the cities, counties, and states in which they live. Currently LGBTQIA+ people are not a federally protected people group, which means it is up to individual states, counties, and cities to create their own LGBTQIA+ protections. For example, a transgender person can be fired from their job or evicted from their housing in 32 states just for being who they are. It is 28 states for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. It is important to inform people about the state of LGBTQIA+ protections in your local area. Check out the following links to learn more about what is happening in your local area.

- **Equality Federation:** This national organization is able to connect you with all state LGBTQIA+ organizations. <http://www.equalityfederation.org/>
- **ACLU:** Will be able to keep you up to date on bills being developed to become law, lawsuits, and any advisories for LGBTQIA+ people. <https://www.aclu.org/>
- **Denominational Leadership:** Every mainline Protestant body has its own unique stance on LGBTQIA+ people and their families. Stay informed about the position your denomination holds.

Communication

Think of all the ways communication happens in your faith community, from the newsletter, email alerts, social media, worship bulletins, to posters on the walls! These are all potential resources for sharing the Welcoming Journey with your community in ways that reflect your chosen frame. Sermons are another ready resource, whether from your own clergy or an invited guest speaker. Your liturgy, prayers, and hymns can also support your Welcoming Journey. The options are many!

Scripture is foundational for many people; therefore, it is important to know how to engage with Scripture on the topic of LGBTQIA+ people and their families. Each faith community has a different understanding of the role of Scripture in the life of their church and it is important for the Leadership Team to have a good understanding of their tradition.

For example, in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), it is important to remind people that Lutherans are not biblical literalists. They believe in a diversity of interpretations that change and evolve over time as we learn more about biblical culture as well as our own. This quote is from the ELCA webpage:

“A cradle that holds the infant Jesus. Baby blankets that clothe the newborn Christ. Lutherans often use these well-known metaphors from Martin Luther to describe the Christian Scriptures and their importance. These simple metaphors clearly and profoundly describe both what the Scriptures are and what is their purpose.

Simply stated, the Scriptures tell about Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to present Jesus to all who listen to or read them. That is why Lutheran Christians say that the Scriptures are the “source and norm” of their teaching and practice. As the author of the Gospel of John wrote, “These things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

Obviously, the Scriptures that are collected into a book or Bible describe and speak about many other things — everything from the creation of the world to the world’s end. Because these writings originate from a period that spans about a thousand years and come to us in a variety of handwritten manuscripts and fragments, they have been studied carefully with all the tools of research that are available. This research continues to enrich understanding of the Scriptures and their message.

Despite the diversity of viewpoints and the complexity of the many narratives contained in the Scriptures, Lutheran Christians believe that the story of God’s steadfast love and mercy in Jesus is the heart and center of what the Scriptures have to say.”

Group Activity

Due to the diversity of beliefs around Christian Scripture, it is beneficial to try to avoid proof texting and debating about Scripture. A way to do this is to stick to Biblical themes and values. Ask people to share their favorite Bible verses. Write them on a white-board or large sheet of paper so your group can see them. Once everyone has shared, ask the group if they notice any themes with the passages that have been shared. Often themes and values of welcome, love, forgiveness, wholeness, respect, and justice are named. Here are some additional Gospel themes to share with people:

1. We are called to love God and love our neighbors.
2. It is not our place to judge.
3. Treat others as you would want to be treated.

TIP

Debating with someone over scriptural interpretations does not tend to move people’s hearts and about welcoming the LGBTQIA+ community. This is a great time to use the “One-to-One” conversation tool as a way to define shared values and experiences around gospel values and themes.

However, you may also find there are some members of your community who hold a very firm opposition to your Welcoming Journey because of current understanding of Scripture, so it will be important to practice Graceful Engagement and hospitable curiosity when engaging Scripture. Consider asking people who are struggling the following questions in hopes of being able to learn more about them and their relationship with Scripture:

1. Where did you learn about Scripture?
2. Who taught you about Scripture?
3. What role does Scripture play in your life?
4. Can I share with you about the values I have learned through Scripture?

Additional Resources About Scripture

- ➔ **My Mind Was Changed** – A new way to talk about the dignity and equality of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people that helps move conflicted Christians through their religious and emotional conflicts to stand for, not against, LBGT equality. <http://auburnseminary.org/report/my-mind-was-changed/>
- ➔ **Shaping Sanctuary: Proclaiming God’s Grace in an Inclusive Church** Essays, sermons, liturgies and hymns for the Welcoming Movement. <http://a.co/8ciLy31>
- ➔ **How to Talk About the Bible & LGBTQ Inclusion** – a 70-page booklet designed to give readers a concise but comprehensive overview of the biblical case for LGBT inclusion. Covering topics ranging from experience, tradition, celibacy, and gender complementarity to the six main Bible passages at dispute over same-sex relationships, this resource will help you both to better understand the relevant theological issues and to make a clear, compelling case for LGBT affirmation to those in your life who disagree with you. http://www.reformationproject.org/a_brief_biblical_case
- ➔ **Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition** by Rabbi Steven Greenberg. For millennia, two biblical verses have been understood to condemn sex between men as an act so abominable that it is punishable by death. Traditionally Orthodox Jews, believing the Scripture to be the word of God, have rejected homosexuality. In 1999, Rabbi Steven Greenberg challenged this tradition when he became the first Orthodox rabbi ever to openly declare his homosexuality.

Resources in Spanish

- ➔ **A La Familia** – a bilingual project that promotes inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people within comunidades Latinas. <http://www.hrc.org/resources/a-la-familia>
- ➔ **Faith, Family, Equality: The Latinx Roundtable** - provides Latinx families with the tools to understand, accept, and affirm LGBTQ+ persons in families, communities, and churches: www.fefamiliaigualdad.org

Step 7 Writing Your Welcoming Statement

7

When the journey has progressed to a place where your faith community understands the importance of openly welcoming and affirming LGBTQIA+ people, it is time to start writing your welcoming statement.

It is important to develop a Welcoming Statement to show others that your faith community has publicly committed to living as a Welcoming faith community on a lifelong journey. This statement becomes a great tool to show visitors as well as members what you believe and how you intend to live it out. Each faith community will develop a statement that fits their community. You may find that some statements resonate more strongly with your chosen frame. Every faith community’s Welcome Statement is as diverse as they are.

Once you have a draft prepared, share it with key leaders and influencers. Strong negative reactions are a sign that additional relationship building through One-to-One Visits is needed to hear the concerns and fears within the faith community. You may need to change your statement. Be careful not to add other groups or individuals to your statement without completing a process to include their stories and experiences, as well, to ensure that those named are able to receive hospitality and welcome when they attend your community worship and events.

Each denominational Welcoming Church Program has its own set of standards and rules for how a faith community can be 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 your denominational Welcoming Church Program for more information.

Sample Welcoming Statements

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.

Faith Presbyterian Church

Austin, TX

We at Faith Presbyterian Church are an inclusive and welcoming Christian community, faithfully committed to ministries of compassion, diversity, equality and social justice.

Our Vision:

- ➔ To lovingly share the Good News of God's grace and love in the name of Jesus Christ, and in the spirit of Christ's life and teachings;
- ➔ To nourish, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual needs of our members, neighbors in our diverse community, and the world around us;
- ➔ To communally provide a place of safe refuge and sanctuary for all ages, allowing for participation in diverse worship experiences, Christian education, and discipleship;
- ➔ To faithfully practice the pursuit of peace, social justice, and environmental stewardship in our world; and
- ➔ To joyfully encourage full participation in the life of the Church by children and those of all ages, regardless of color, gender, national origin, physical or mental ability, race, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status.

Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd

Hamden, CT

We, the members of Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, (Hamden, CT) joyfully affirm that every individual person is a child of God. We recognize that we are called to be one body with many members, and that all are necessary for the health and well-being of the body.

Whatever your race, ethnicity or heritage; Whether you are married, divorced, widowed, or single; Whatever your sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or gender expression; Whether you are gay or straight, lesbian or bisexual, transgender or questioning; Whether you have spent a night in prison or have never gotten a parking ticket; Whether you work full time,

part-time, are retired, or searching for a job; Whether you are financially challenged or don't have to worry about money; Whether you are pre-school, in school, or done with all that; Whether you are young in body, mind or spirit, or feeling your age; Whether your belief is strong, wavering, or non-existent; Whether you are comfortable sitting in a pew, need to stand, or enjoy boisterous participation.

We love you for every aspect of who you are. We welcome all people to join us in the wonder of the journey of faith and service.

Johns Creek Christian Church

Johns Creek, GA

Johns Creek Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a vibrant congregation where all people are welcomed into a community united by the grace, love, and forgiveness we know in Jesus Christ. In all that we say and do, and especially in our celebration at the Lord's Table, we proclaim God's wide welcome to all, especially those who have known the pain of exclusion or discrimination in church and society. God has called us to the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18).

We proclaim that we are an Open and Affirming congregation and we covenant with our community to provide a loving welcome for all God's children into the full life and leadership of Johns Creek Christian Church. We welcome all who seek to follow Jesus regardless of race, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, nationality, ethnicity, marital status, physical or mental ability, family configuration, political affiliation, economic circumstance, or theological perspective.

Johns Creek Christian Church

Albany, NY

In response to God's unconditional love for all people made known to us in Jesus Christ, we are called to be a welcoming and affirming community. The First Church in Albany includes young and old, families, couples, and singles, rich and poor, persons of various races, ethnicities, backgrounds, sexual orientations and gender identities, differing physical and mental abilities, believers and seekers. We welcome in the full life of the church all those whom God sends us. Centered in Christ, we commit ourselves to breaking down dividing walls and building a community where all are loved.

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Step 8 Conducting an Exploratory Survey

While you may be tempted to skip this step, it is a vital one. Remember, the foundational goal of the Welcoming Journey is to help people experience the fullness of the Body of Christ, not to divide people against one another. If you skip this step and go directly to the formal vote, in the event that the results are close and people are divided, the journey might feel like it has failed even if the vote passes.

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

FRONT:
A graphic branded with your community.

PROPOSED WELCOME STATEMENT

This community commits to welcoming, including, and celebrating people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expression.

If a vote were held today on the above welcome statement, how would you respond?

YES wholeheartedly.

YES, but I would appreciate more education

YES, but I would appreciate more scriptural engagement.

NO, because I need more _____.

Additional Comments:

BACH: Sample ballot with welcome statement

Once you have completed the previous steps and feel you have done the necessary relationship-building and educational work, it's time to hear from the faith community. Send out an anonymous online survey (they are free and easy to create with online resources) or a postcard including your proposed Welcoming Statement. Here is a sample survey card.

By doing this, you give every respondent an opportunity to give clear feedback, which will tell you specifically what remains to be done in the Welcoming Journey, prior to a final vote.

If you receive less than 75% in favor, take this as a sign that a vote at this point will create tension and not achieve the goal of remaining in community (75% would mean that one in four people are not ready to welcome LGBTQIA+ people and their families). It is recommended that you go 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.

Step 9 Holding the Vote

9

The vote is the opportunity for your faith community to publicly affirm your commitment to live as a Welcoming & Affirming community.

How this vote occurs will vary from community to community, and from denomination to denomination. Sometimes votes are held by the entire membership, a governing body, or by proclamation of the clergy. Some faith communities only require a simple majority for a motion to pass, others require two-thirds. Be sure to consult with your denominational welcoming church program for more information about what is expected for your congregation to be included in that program.

Consult with your community leadership and constitution or by-laws so that you are clear about how this culminating step will occur. It is recommended that you do not deviate from the established protocol of decision making when holding this vote. In other words, do not make a special process just for this vote, as it will make this work feel different and separate from the norms of the community.

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Step 10 Celebrating and Promoting

You and the leadership team have spent months, if not years, leading this journey, and now is the time to celebrate! Make this new milestone in the life of your faith community a big deal!

Incorporate the following into your celebration:

1 Notify your denominational Welcoming Church Program.

Notify your denominational Welcoming Church Program 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 community.

2 Share your hard work!

Share your hard work on social media, in your congregation's newsletter, bulletin, and local paper. This is good news and should be shouted from the mountain top.

3 Hold a worship service.

Hold a worship service, reception or party and invite all who have been involved in the Welcoming Journey. Invite other local Welcoming & Affirming communities to come and celebrate with you. It is powerful to invite the local press, because people of faith making a public welcome to LGBTQIA+ people is still considered newsworthy, as they continue to be seen as an unexpected messenger for the LGBTQIA+ community.

In addition to celebrating, you will want to make sure your Welcoming Statement is public. Many faith communities include it each week in their bulletin, so first-time visitors can see their commitment and feel welcome in a real way. Most people find new worshiping communities through the internet, so make sure that your Welcoming Statement is as easy to find on your website as your street address. In addition, make sure to add a visible logo to any external signs on your property as a form of advertising your welcome.



ABOVE: Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd (San Jose, CA) recently celebrated the 30th anniversary of passing its welcome statement.

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Step 11 We're Welcoming Now what?

The holy work of welcome is a lifelong journey for everyone. There are countless milestones to be reached in a faith community to welcome, include, and advocate for LGBTQIA+ people and their families and other marginalized communities. These milestones will be reached through ongoing education, relationship building, and staying up to date on LGBTQIA+ needs. The LGBTQIA+ community is not a Federally Protected People Class, which means it is up to individual cities, counties, and states to pass non-discrimination laws protecting LGBTQIA+ people from being fired from their jobs or evicted from their housing (which is currently legal in 28 states as of September 2017).

Below is an example of a checklist which can help your faith community ensure that your Welcoming Journey continues to reach new milestones. Your leadership team can continue to meet and review the following list and work to create next steps to ensure that your Welcome Statement is reaching into all areas of the community.

TIP

Incorporating welcome into the life of your faith community will take time. Consider making annual goals as your commitment to increase your welcome.

Leadership

- Does your faith community have, or has it had, an openly LGBTQIA+ clergy person?
- Does your faith community have, or has it had, an openly LGBTQIA+ paid staff?
- Does your faith community have, or has it had, openly LGBTQIA+ moderators, treasurers, council members or other elected lay positions?
- In the hiring of staff or volunteers is there training spent on how your faith community lives out its Welcome Statement?

Adult Education

- How often does your faith community offer adult forums on issues relating to LGBTQIA+ topics, needs, and advocacy? Are they well attended?
- Has your faith community offered intersectional educational opportunities suggested in Step Six?
- Are your adult educational opportunities facilitated by openly LGBTQIA+ people in your faith community or neighborhood?

Children's Education

- Does your faith community offer curriculum for elementary aged children on LGBTQIA+ inclusion?
- Does your faith community offer curriculum for junior high aged children on LGBTQIA+ inclusion?
- Does your faith community include LGBTQIA+ inclusion as part of your Confirmation curriculum?
- Does your faith community offer curriculum for high school aged people on LGBTQIA+ inclusion?

- Does your faith community offer Sunday School registration forms that list "parent(s)/guardian(s)" instead of "Mother and Father?"

Worship

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

Mission Outreach

- Does your faith community offer mission trips for its youth group (and adults) that address specific LGBTQIA+ issues?
- Does your faith community offer letter writing, legislative visits and other forms of public witnessing on behalf of LGBTQIA+ persons and families?
- Does your faith community work with your denominational LGBTQIA+ advocacy group to engage within your denomination on behalf of LGBTQIA+ persons?
- Does your faith community work with state and local organizations on LGBTQIA+ issues?

Facilities

- Does your faith community clearly display its welcome statement and/or rainbow color logos which indicate a specific welcome to LGBTQIA+ people?
- Does your faith community offer gender inclusive bathrooms?
- Does your faith community have a sign on its building that declares it specifically welcoming of LGBTQIA+ people?

Additional Resources

This resource addendum is divided into three categories: online, print, and film resources, which are categorized using the following tags:

INTRO These resources are suitable for people at any stage of their learning journey.

COFFEE HOUR These resources have components which are great for adult education opportunities like coffee hour.

INTERSECTIONAL These resources look at LGBTQIA identities through an additional identity or culture's lens.

SCRIPTURE These resources directly engage with what the Bible says and doesn't say about LGBTQIA+ identities.

WORSHIP Use these resources in a worship setting.

ADVANCED These resources are suitable for people at an advanced stage of their journey learning about LGBTQIA+ people.

Online Resources

A La Familia: A Conversation About Our Families, The Bible, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity by Rev. Dr. Miguel De La Torre. A La Familia is a bilingual project created por comunidades Latinas, para comunidades Latinas that promotes inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people within comunidades Latinas. www.hrc.org/resources/a-la-familia **INTERSECTIONAL** **INTRO** **SCRIPTURE**

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 LGBTQ Task Force's Institute for Welcoming Resources. Available for free download at <http://welcomingresources.org/APlaceinGodsHeart.pdf> **WORSHIP**

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 **WORSHIP** **COFFEE HOUR** **SCRIPTURE**

Straight for Equality Straight for Equality provides information and resources that will help straight allies understand their role in supporting and advocating for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. www.straightforequality.org **INTRO**

To Do Justice: A Study of Welcoming Congregations by Rev. Dr. Rebecca Voelkel. This resource is published by the National LGBTQ Task Force and available for free download from [/www.welcomingresources.org/To_Do_Justice.pdf](http://www.welcomingresources.org/To_Do_Justice.pdf) **ADVANCED**

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: www.clgs.org/Umoja. **INTRO** **INTERSECTIONAL** **SCRIPTURE** **COFFEE HOUR**

The Reformation Project works to train Christians to support and affirm LGBT people. Includes several resources on Bible interpretation. Reformationproject.org **INTRO** **SCRIPTURE**

Queer Theology provides a supportive community and in-depth resources for queer Christians and straight supporters, with free email affirmations, digital resources, podcasts, and an online community. www.queertheology.com **ADVANCED** **SCRIPTURE**

Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry works to advance the well-being of LGBTQ people and to transform faith communities and the wider society by taking a leading role in shaping a new public discourse on religion, gender and sexuality through education, research, community building and advocacy. Their site features many articles and resources on interpretation and theology. **INTRO** **ADVANCED** **SCRIPTURE** **INTERSECTIONAL**

Canyon Walker Connections works to repair the division existing between social and Christian conservatives and the LGBT community through education, training, encouragement, and dialogue in both secular and religious environments. canyonwalkerconnections.com **INTRO** **ADVANCED** **SCRIPTURE**

ManyVoices is a black church movement for gay and transgender justice, and envisions a community that embraces the diversity of the human family and ensures that all are treated with love, compassion, and justice. www.manyvoices.org **INTERSECTIONAL** **INTRO** **ADVANCED** **SCRIPTURE** **WORSHIP**

TransFaith is a national non-profit that is led by transgender people and focused on issues of faith and spirituality, working to affirm, empower, and engage transgender and gender non-conforming people and their communities. www.transfaithonline.org **INTERSECTIONAL** **INTRO** **SCRIPTURE** **WORSHIP**

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 **INTERSECTIONAL** **INTRO** **SCRIPTURE**

QSpirit is a project from lesbian Christian author Kittredge Cherry, compiling a list of religious events, saints, and books around the topics of LGBTQ life and Christianity. <http://qspirit.net> **ADVANCED** **WORSHIP**

Print Resources

And God Loves Each One: A Black Church Guide to Sexual Orientation A resource for dialogue about sexual orientation by Ann Thompson Cook and Rev. Cedric A. Harmon <http://a.co/6XcQ58t> **INTERSECTIONAL** **INTRO** **SCRIPTURE**

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. Fortresspress.com/doingjustice **ADVANCED**

Shaping Sanctuary: Proclaiming God's Grace in an Inclusive Church Essays, sermons, liturgies and hymns for the Welcoming Movement. <http://a.co/8ciLy31> **INTRO** **SCRIPTURE** **WORSHIP**

Rescuing Jesus: How People of Color, Women, and Queer Christians are Reclaiming Evangelicalism An inside look at the young, diverse, progressive Christians who are transforming the evangelical movement <http://www.deborahjanlee.com/rescuing-jesus/> **INTERSECTIONAL** **INTRO** **SCRIPTURE**

Our Whole Lives a useful comprehensive sexuality education curriculum stewarded by the United Church of Christ and Unitarian Universalist Association. It includes a faith supplement: “Our Whole Lives: Lifespan Sexuality Education Curricula and Sexuality and Our Faith: A Companion to Our Whole Lives” <http://www.UCC.org/OWL> **INTERSECTIONAL** **INTRO** **WORSHIP**

Film Resources

Fish Out of Water A documentary that explores the impassioned relationship between homosexuality and the Bible. www.fishoutofwaterfilm.com/ **SCRIPTURE** **COFFEE HOUR** **INTRO**

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 **SCRIPTURE** **COFFEE HOUR** **INTRO**

Out in the Silence An inspirational and gripping documentary about a small American town confronting the firestorm of controversy ignited by a same-sex wedding announcement. The film illustrates and catalyzes 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 **COFFEE HOUR** **INTRO**

Out of Order What does it mean to love an institution that does not embrace you fully? How can one follow a calling when the reality of gender and sexual orientation threaten to exclude you? “Out of Order” is a film that draws timely attention to the joyful experiences and complex struggles of queer young people who persist in faith and follow God’s call. www.outoforderdoc.com **INTERSECTIONAL** **SCRIPTURE** **COFFEE HOUR** **INTRO**

Here I Am In this documentary, parents, children, partners, couples and supporting pastors and psychologists speak from the heart about the experience of coming out in a Christian environment. They discuss the importance of faith, the difficulties of coming out in families and the church, solutions to the problems, their best advice for others, and hope for the future. <https://vimeo.com/158130932> **SCRIPTURE** **COFFEE HOUR** **INTRO**

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. throughmyeyesdvd.com **SCRIPTURE** **COFFEE HOUR** **INTRO**

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> **SCRIPTURE** **COFFEE HOUR** **INTRO**

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. <http://www.integrityusa.org/ootb> **SCRIPTURE** **INTRO** **COFFEE HOUR**

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 **COFFEE HOUR**

Austen Hartke is the creator of the YouTube series “Transgender and Christian,” which seeks to understand, interpret, and share parts of the Bible that relate to gender identity and the lives of transgender individuals. Austen is a graduate of Luther Seminary’s Master of Arts program in Old Testament/Hebrew Bible Studies, and is the winner of the 2014 John Milton Prize in Old Testament Writing. <http://austenhartke.com/> **INTERSECTIONAL** **SCRIPTURE** **COFFEE HOUR**

What if extending a specific welcome to LGBTQIA+ people sparked a renewal of your community's faith life?