

THE PATHWAY TO WELCOMING

How to become part of the Welcoming Community Network

The Welcoming Community Network is an opportunity and a challenge for local congregations to reach out to all people. It is for Community of Christ congregations and other ministries to begin dialogue about the concerns of lesbians, gay, bisexuals, and transgender persons. If your congregation or other ministry is committed to justice, is willing to discuss difficult issues, or has a group of people willing to foster this discussion, then you are ready to begin the process of becoming a welcoming faith community.

Beginning a Welcoming Community Network Ministry is much more than posting a notice that "Everyone is Welcome" or even adopting an official Covenant of Welcome. An effective ministry is a process that benefits from laying a good foundation, drawing up plans, and building a strong and sustainable structure that can weather the storms of change.

This entire process of launching a Welcoming Community Network from initial inquiry to congregational decision may be very brief or quite extended. As you will see below, the "Congregational Decision" to adapt a Covenant of Welcome is only about half way through the process.

The pathway is not fixed. The process will be different for each congregation. A brief or expedited process leading to a congregational decision, for example, might be only 1-2 months. A careful and unhurried approach realistically could take a year or more. Taking your time is especially important if leaders have any reason to believe that some people in the congregation would be suspicious of sudden initiatives and presumed decisions. The "point" of a thorough process is to enable people to understand, to grow spiritually, and to move, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, into a greater openness for mission. A process which is too short may be perceived as a "trick" to get a vote taken and put any discussion and dissent out of the way.

The pathway mapped out here takes the longest trip, so that planners can see what might be involved to create a vibrant ministry in the congregation. (For planning purposes, it is easier to simplify some of the steps shown if they aren't needed, than to re-create plans if something seems to be missing.)

Initial Inquiry	One or two individuals (Seed Group) begin conversation and research, gather resources, look for allies, talk to experienced resource persons, etc. Contact the Welcoming Community Network Program Director, GALA, or other Welcoming Community congregations. (See “Links”)
Early Planning	<p>The Seed Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discusses what would be needed in the congregation to move this process forward, plans steps to take. • Develops a historical perspective of gays and lesbians in the Community of Christ. • Develops a historical and current understanding of the congregations' experience with gays and lesbians. <p>The Congregational Assessment Worksheet can assist in determining the pace and direction that is right for your congregation. The Worksheet can be given to each participant in the discussion. Scoring can be completed by the group or an individual, but should be discussed by the group</p>
Permission to Proceed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach the Pastor(s) and/or Leadership Team to introduce them to the program. • Schedule a Saturday session which might include using the Implications Wheel to help everyone understand the possible implications. (See “Introduction to the Implications Wheel”) • Agree upon a time to bring back to the Pastor(s) and/or Leadership Team a plan for proceeding
Develop Process Plan	<p>After getting the "green light" from the Pastor(s), develop a pathway unique to congregation which may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults and youth classes that addresses the issues of homosexuality and the ministry of welcome • Listening Circles • Special worship services • Workshops/retreat • Visiting programs <p>Organize a coalition of groups and individuals to present/facilitate. (See “Selected Resources for Welcoming Community Network”, and “Temple School Classes”)</p>
Presenting a Process Plan	Report back to the Pastor(s) and/or Leadership Team with Workable Congregational plan. Work with them, to include the plan into the Congregational Calendar.
Preparing Members for Journey	<p>Advertise the up coming activities in newsletters, announcements, special services, home visits, etc.</p> <p>Enlist enthusiasm for broad participation; gather resources and supplies.</p>

<u>CONGREGATIONAL JOURNEY</u>	Undertake the journey to involve a wide spectrum of congregational members, friends and community residents. This trip can take from 6 to 40 weeks depending on the congregation's needs and interest.
Evaluation of Journey	<p>As the Trip progresses, take time to assess and evaluate its effectiveness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is all of the congregation being heard • What is happening • What is not happening <p>Be prepared to make adjustment if necessary to determine the best approach for the actual decision process.</p> <p>Mail a Straw Poll to all members to test the water</p>
<u>CONGREGATIONAL DECISION</u>	Develop a Covenant of Welcome that states your mission and understanding of being a "Welcoming" congregation. Acceptance of this statement should be part of an official action taken at a congregational business meeting. (See "Guidelines For Covenant Of Welcome")
Implementation	Plan ongoing follow-up - remember that the process is not completed once a Covenant of Welcome has been approved. The commitment by the congregation to become a Welcoming Community should be clearly understood by the entire congregation. It is important to ensure ongoing integration of this particular ministry with the other ministries of your congregation. To be a Welcoming Community, you are in a life process that continues to call members and friends to the welcome and inclusion of all people.
Outreach in Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The congregation's ministry "goes public" and develops friends, links and networks in the larger community. • Provide In-Reach ministry to those who still have misgivings about WCN ministry. • Plan activities to celebrate future welcoming events • Commit to support - for the Welcoming Community program nationally through advocacy, financial contributions, and active participation. <p>(See "What does It Mean to Be a Welcoming congregation?" and "Walking the Talk of Welcome – Possible Action Steps after becoming a WCN congregation")</p>
Evaluation of Ministry	Regular "feedback" is gathered and reviewed to sharpen focus, prevent mistakes, make further recommendations for action and outreach. Provide feedback to the Welcoming Community Network Program to assist other congregations in becoming welcoming.
Upgrades and Changes	Planners pursue related changes (budget, calendar, resources, staffing) and additional elements in the program.
Continuing Education	Provide ongoing educational opportunity to lift awareness of mission, GLBT issues, service opportunities, and to sustain consensus.