



WELCOMING LGBT PEOPLE OPENLY

Why it's important to welcome LGBT
people openly

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The Disciples Conversation

This isn't a new
conversation!



The Disciples conversation

- ◉ In 1977 the General Assembly supported the civil rights of gay and lesbian people (GA-7747)
- ◉ In 1987 the Assembly refused to declare “homosexuality as one of the sins listed in the Bible and an unacceptable lifestyle for Christians” (GA-8727, not adopted)
- ◉ In 1997 the GA called for “Reflection on the Participation of Gay and Lesbian Persons in the Life of the Church” (GA-9719)
- ◉ In 2005 the GA “denounces all forms of spiritual and physical violence against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons” (GA-0517)



The Disciples conversation

- ◉ **Most recently, GA-1327**
 - “the General Assembly calls upon the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to affirm the faith, baptism and spiritual gifts of all Christians regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and that neither is grounds for exclusion from fellowship or service within the church, but we celebrate that all are part of God’s good creation” and
 - “the General Assembly calls upon all expressions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), as a people of grace and welcome, to acknowledge their support for the welcome of and hospitality to all.”



Why Welcoming Openly is Important

The call to welcome LGBT
people openly is important
for many reasons

Why Welcoming Openly is Important

- GA-1327

Our church in covenant has called on us to welcome openly.



Why Welcoming Openly is Important

- ◉ Scriptural Mandates

“Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:1,2)



Why Welcoming Openly is Important



- Young people are hurting.
 - Bullying, Homelessness, Substance Abuse and Suicide
 - LGBT youth (and those perceived to be) are targets of bullying, often fueled by anti-gay religious speech.
 - The victimization of LGBT youth increases the chance that a young LGBT person will attempt suicide by two and a half times.
 - Without family support, LGB youth are 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs.
 - LGBT youth are between 5 and 12 times more likely to end up homeless than their straight peers.

Why Welcoming Openly is Important



○ May 7, 2015:

Cameron Langrell, 15, came out as trans on Facebook days before she decided to end her life.



Why Welcoming Openly is Important

○ Tuesday, March 24, 2015

Young N.C. transgender activist Blake Brockington dies of suicide



Why Welcoming Openly is Important



- **The trans community is especially hurting**
 - There have been at least 10 reported suicides of trans young people in the U.S. so far in 2015
 - There have been at least 14 murders of trans people in the U.S. so far in 2015

Why Welcoming Openly is Important

- September 2014: Rolling Stone article outlines the rising tide of homeless LGBT teenagers, many due to rejection by their religious families .



The screenshot shows the Rolling Stone website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with categories like MUSIC, POLITICS, TV, MOVIES, CULTURE, SPORTS, REVIEWS, LISTS, RS COUNTRY, and COVERWALL. The main article title is "The Forsaken: A Rising Number of Homeless Gay Teens Are Being Cast Out by Religious Families" by Alex Morris, dated September 3, 2014. Below the title is a social sharing bar with buttons for Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Comment, and Email. The article's lead image shows a young person standing in front of a train car.

Jackie was homeless off and on for years after her Catholic parents cut ties with her for coming out. Redux



Why Welcoming Openly is Important



- Last Tuesday, July 14 - the Senate Tuesday rejected a federal prohibition against discrimination and bullying in K-12 public schools based on sexual orientation and gender identity
- 45 Senators voted against this amendment, preventing its passage.
- Senator Al Franken of Minnesota has been advocating for the bill, saying “We want to extend to LGBT kids the same right that other kids have.”

Why Welcoming Openly is Important



- On a more positive note, research has shown factors that reduce the incidence of suicide among LGBT youth:
 - Family acceptance and connectedness
 - Caring adults
 - School safety
- Of course, all our youth need acceptance, safety, and care.

American Association of Suicidology: Suicidal Behaviour Among LGBT Youth (2014)

Why Welcoming Openly is Important



- Without an open welcome, people will think we're just another homophobic church.
 - “God Hates Fags” -Fred Phelps
 - “God hates homosexuality” - Jerry Falwell
 - “The acceptance of homosexuality is the last step in the decline of Gentile civilization” - Pat Robertson



Why Welcoming Openly is Important

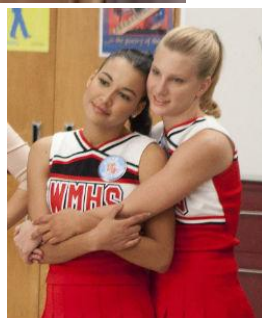
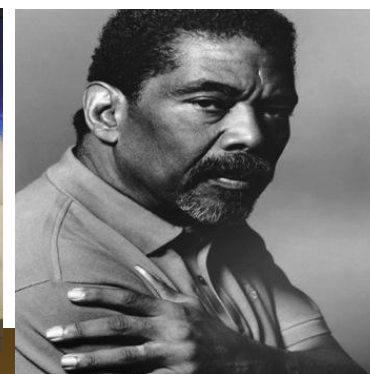


- Young adults aren't interested in a church that rejects LGBT people.
 - Nearly 7-in-10 Millennials (ages 18 to 33) favor same-sex marriage.
 - Nearly 6-in-10 black Millennials say gay and lesbian people should be allowed to legally marry.
 - Among Millennials who no longer identify with their childhood religion, nearly one-third say that negative teachings about, or treatment of, gay and lesbian people was an important factor in their disaffiliation from religion.

**Public Religion Research Institute, Washington, DC
(publicreligion.org), "A Shifting Landscape" 2014**

Why Welcoming Openly is Important

- If LGBT people aren't welcome in your congregation, your young people won't be interested.



Why Welcoming Openly is Important



- Congregations that welcome openly are healthy vibrant places.
 - “Successfully completing a Welcoming Process makes a congregation more likely to work and witness on other justice issues.”
 - “Congregations that directly engage the question of welcoming lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons have low levels of conflict.”

To Do Justice: A Study of Welcoming Congregations, Rev. Rebecca Voelkel

Why Welcoming Openly is Important

- The inability to discuss the welcome of LGBT people is often a bottleneck in congregations, preventing the discussion of welcoming other neighbors and the discussion of other difficult issues.
 - Congregations that have worked through an Open & Affirming process often discover that other issues are no longer so difficult.



Why Welcoming Openly is Important

- Often a congregation is ready for and needs this conversation more than the leadership is aware.
 - Members often have LGBT family, friends and coworkers but don't feel safe speaking of them at church.





What does it mean to welcome Openly and why is that important?

The Open & Affirming
Ministry Program
emphasizes the need to
welcome *Openly*



What does it mean to welcome Openly and why is that important?

- Many of our Disciples churches have LGBT members but ask “Aren’t we already welcoming? Is there anything more we need to do?”
 - A welcome mat belongs outside your door, not inside.
 - Our ministry must be to the hurting people outside our churches, not the comfortable people already inside.
 - For all the reasons listed above, if your welcome isn’t public, open, and explicit, you won’t reach those who need your ministry.





Welcoming All

Is this just about LGBT
people?

Welcoming All



- This is about welcoming all people!
- An Open & Affirming statement is a welcome of all people.
- If I don't know that you're welcome, how do I know that I'm welcome!?!?





Why GLAD's Open & Affirming Ministry Program?

How does joining GLAD's
Open & Affirming Ministry
Program help us welcome
openly?

Why GLAD's Open & Affirming Ministry Program?



- **“Seal of Approval”**

- The congregation has shown by study and example that it understands welcome and affirms LGBT people.

- **Visibility**

- GLAD provides visibility to the DOC through its website and ecumenically through the IWR.

Why GLAD's Open & Affirming Ministry Program?



◉ Network

- Joining GLAD's Open & Affirming Ministry Program joins your congregation to the network of DOC O&A ministries.

◉ Witness

- Joining GLAD's Open & Affirming Ministry Program is a witness to the Christian Church (DOC), the Christian church ecumenical, and all our neighbors.

Questions?

- ◉ Thank you!
- ◉ Please stick around to learn more about how your congregation can become part of the Open & Affirming Ministry Program.





BECOMING AN OPEN & AFFIRMING CONGREGATION

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Leading the Conversation

How to lead the conversation

Leading the Conversation



- Congregations are in many different places about welcoming LGBT people.
 - Some aren't ready to talk about LGBT people at all.
 - Some are clear the LGBT people are not welcome.
 - Some are welcoming LGBT people but uncomfortable.
 - Some are welcoming but not willing to be open about their welcome of LGBT people.

Leading the Conversation



- Each congregation is going to engage best with a process uniquely designed for its specific culture and needs
- No congregation is going to take a giant leap, each must start where it is and take just the next step
 - ... and then the next step.

Leading the Conversation

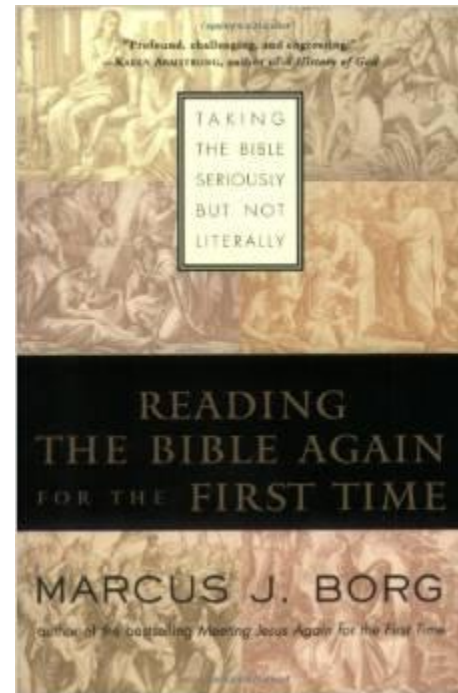


- No matter where a congregation stands on welcoming LGBT people openly, there are resources to move that congregation towards more welcome
 - Here are a few examples:

Leading the Conversation



- For a congregation where LGBT people are clearly not welcome, work on reading the Bible with a more progressive mindset can help.
- A book such as Marcus Borg's *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time* is a good start.

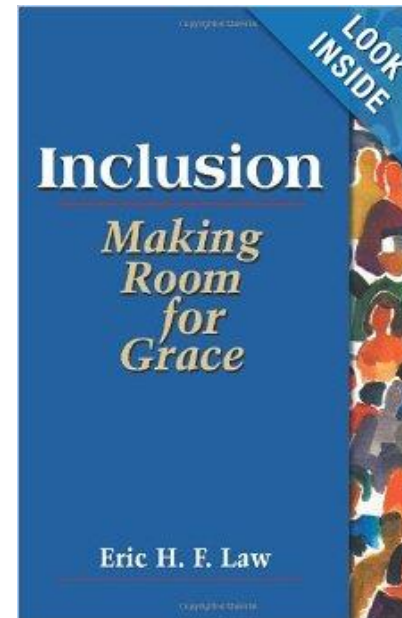


Leading the Conversation



- For a congregation ready to talk about welcome but not LGBT people, *Inclusion: Making Room for Grace* (Rev. Eric Law, published by Chalice Press) can be a good place to start.

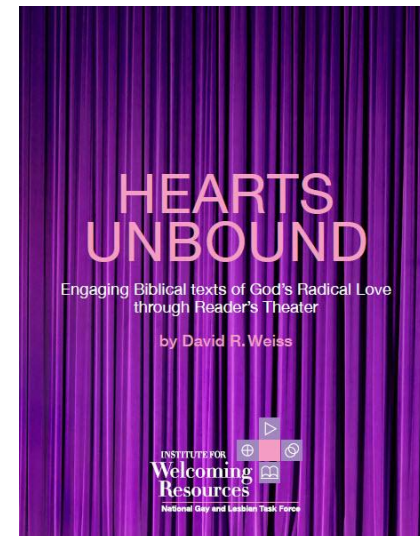
A practical and theologically based guide in responding to diversity.



Leading the Conversation

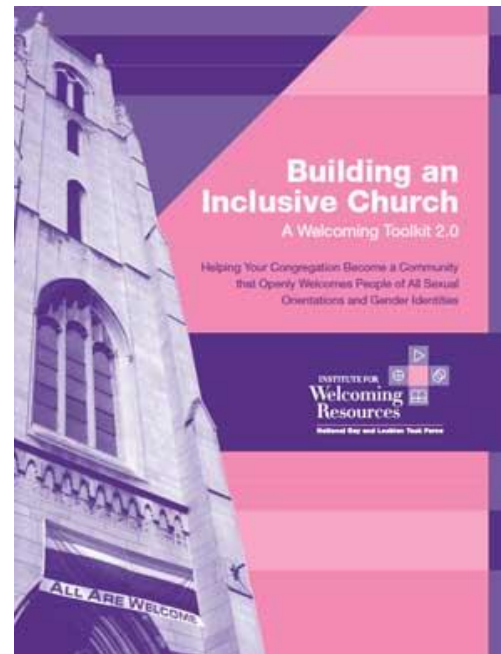
- For a congregation ready to delve into the Biblical narrative on welcome, including LGBT people, *Hearts Unbound: Engaging Biblical texts of God's Radical Love through Reader's Theater* (David Weiss) is an excellent resource.

Explores ten Biblical stories of love and welcome.



Leading the Conversation

- However, before using any of these resources, making use of *Building An Inclusive Church: A Welcoming Toolkit* is recommended to ensure a smooth, grace filled process
 - An ecumenically designed and tested resource developed by the Institute for Welcoming Resources





Building an Inclusive Church

What's in the Toolkit?



Building an Inclusive Church

- What the *Toolkit* doesn't do
 - The *Toolkit* is not a cookie cutter O&A process for all congregations.
- What the *Toolkit* does
 - The *Toolkit* guides a small group of congregants who wish to design an Open & Affirming process for their congregation.
 - Lay led - not led by the clergy. The pastor must remain pastor to the whole congregation.



Building an Inclusive Church

○ Tools

- Graceful Engagement
- Congregational Assessment
- One-to-One Visits
- Strategic Storytelling



Building an Inclusive Church

- ◉ Designing an Open & Affirming Process for the Congregation
 - Using these tools, the small group determines the unique needs of the congregation and designs an Open & Affirming process.



Building an Inclusive Church

○ The Open & Affirming Process

- Usually includes
 - Bible Study
 - Prayer and Reflection
 - Story Telling
 - Community Building
- Never includes
 - Debate
 - Argument
 - Coercion
 - None of these are Graceful Engagement



Building an Inclusive Church

- How Resources are Introduced (Gracefully, of course!)
 - Resources are not used to pressure people into new points of view.
 - Through relationship and community building, people are encouraged to reflect and ask questions.
 - Resources are used to answer the questions that people already have...
 - ... and to nurture the next question.



Building an Inclusive Church

○ Outcome

- The *Toolkit* advocates prayer, Bible study, personal sharing, community building, and reflection until a vast majority of the congregation is in agreement.
- It is NOT recommended to seek a consensus or a vote until more than 85% of the congregation is in agreement.



Building an Inclusive Church

- It is recommended that a vote include three options:
 - Yes, I support this decision and I am personally supportive.
 - Yes, I support this decision, but I can't personally agree with this right now.
 - No, I don't support this decision.
- Experience
 - Most churches, when they vote, experience very few No votes, minimal if any loss of members, and new members both LGBT and straight.



Building an Inclusive Church

○ Trainings

- Trainings are available that cover the tools and process in the toolkit
- Scheduled trainings are on GLAD's calendar at <http://www.gladalliance.org/calendar/>
- Trainings can be scheduled when and where needed. Contact mark@gladalliance.org for information.



Resources

Where to Find Resources



Resources

- The “Resources” tab on the GLAD Alliance website has many resources available.

www.gladalliance.org

- Especially recommended are the resources listed there under the heading “Beginning the Journey”
- This page can be especially useful when designing an O&A process:
gladalliance.org/site/the-welcoming-journey
- There are also resources for African-American, Hispanic, and Asian congregations.



Beyond an Open & Affirming Statement

What then?

Beyond an Open & Affirming Statement



- Once a congregation has declared itself Open & Affirming, the work of welcoming isn't over.
 - Congregations need to remind themselves of their Open & Affirming commitment; both newcomers and long time members need continuing education.
 - Open & Affirming isn't just about LGBT people, but about learning to welcome all of our neighbors. There's always room to expand the welcome!

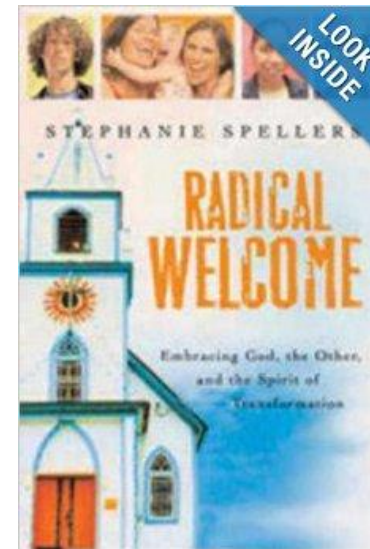
Beyond an Open & Affirming Statement



- A resource to expand our welcome to all our neighbors:

Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other and the Spirit of Transformation
(Rev. Stephanie Spellers)

A practical theological guide for congregations that want to move beyond mere inclusivity toward becoming a place where welcoming “The Other” is taken seriously.





Thank you!

Questions?

Discussion?