

Building an Inclusive Church

Companion to the

Building An Inclusive Church Toolkit 3.0

for Disciples of Christ churches

Rev. Mark C. Johnston, Ph.D.

(portions adapted and updated for DOC congregations from the Building an Inclusive Church Toolkit v. 2.0 and v 3.0.)

This *Companion to the Building an Inclusive Church Toolkit for Disciples* contains advice for using the *Building an Inclusive Church Toolkit* and resources recommended for congregations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

This companion includes:

- Some additional information and resources on some of the tools in the *Toolkit: Graceful Engagement, Storytelling and One-to-One Visits*.
- An overview of the Steps in the *Toolkit*.
- The Congregational Assessment Survey.

Graceful Engagement

Graceful Engagement, Tool #1 in the *Toolkit*, is the foundation of a successful Open & Affirming journey. Or, more accurately, graceful engagement is the spiritual practice that builds a community where all are welcome. Graceful engagement is a commitment to honor each other's faith as it is today, a commitment to honor each other's faith journey as it is being lived out today, and a commitment to value first our relationships as members of the body of Christ regardless of other differences and disagreements.

How to engage gracefully? Here is a very brief introduction:

“Listen to understand; Speak to be understood.”

That's it. Commit to listening only to understand each other, and commit to speaking only to be understood.

Once someone is listened to, there is a better chance that they will listen.

And once a person starts listening, they will hear you better when your focus is on telling them who you are and why you are who you are. And perhaps, their heart will soften and their understanding increase. Or, perhaps yours will.

And certainly, a community who know each other intimately will grow.

Tools #2 and #3 in the *Toolkit*, One-to-One Conversations and Storytelling, can be understood as extensions of Graceful Engagement:

One-to-One Conversations – an opportunity to *Listen to understand*

Storytelling – an opportunity to *Speak to be understood*

Do look at the *Toolkit*, page 12, for more about Graceful Engagement, and do spend time in your core group developing your understanding of and commitment to engaging gracefully.

Storytelling

Storytelling used in an O&A journey is a way to let people know why we personally engage a welcoming journey. These strategically chosen stories are very short statements that tell people about our personal understanding and commitment to this journey.

Each member of your team might have several short one or two minute stories to tell, perhaps a couple slightly longer stories, explaining their personal commitment to an O&A journey. Stories are not meant to be elements of debate, they are meant to be personal statements of one's own journey, that just might nudge another to consider taking steps on their journey.

People indicate that they are ready to listen when they start asking questions. When others are asking questions and ready to listen, that's when we respond with our stories.

The best stories are those that answer the questions that people are already asking – and offer a nudge, offers a small step, towards more welcome and affirmation of all. For example, if people are asking, “Why do we have to say we welcome LGBTQ people publicly,” the response story might be about how close friend, or perhaps you, found public welcome to be a life-saving experience.

Some storytelling resources:

Public Storytelling (*Toolkit* page 31)

<http://disciplesallianceq.org/BeingInRelationship>

<http://disciplesallianceq.org/MyMindWasChanged>

How to focus your One-to-One Visits

You will learn more about One-to-One conversations in the *Toolkit* on page 15.

One-to-One visits are focused times to hear someone on a particular topic. When forming a Core Team, the topic of One-to-One Visit invitations might be “What is your interest in seeing our church become more welcoming of LGBTQ people?” and if interest is high, a second One-to-One might focus on “I'd like to tell you a bit about our plans and hear how you would like to fit in.” At the beginning of an O&A journey, the topic might be “What is your understanding of LGBTQ people and their welcome in the church.” In the midst of an O&A journey the topic might be “What did you hear in the presentation last night, and what are you thinking about this O&A process?” And at the end “I'd like to show you our draft O&A statement and hear your comments and suggestions.”

The person who hosts the one-to-one visit sticks to the topic (though allows the guest to speak their heart as they choose). The host doesn't surprise by saying “that's great! I'd like you to join the committee and work with us 10 hours a week!” Instead, the host might end with an invitation to another conversation on the next topic – which might be about interest in being part of the Core Team.

The Toolkit: An Overview, Tips, Resources, and Suggestions

Here is an overview of the steps in the *Building an Inclusive Church Toolkit* along with tips and resources for DOC congregations.

Step One: Leading the Journey (Toolkit page 21)	
Tasks: Conduct One-to-One Visits and gather a Core Team. Check in with LGBT people in congregation to determine their preferred level of involvement in a welcoming journey. Contact Disciples AllianceQ (info@disciplesallianceq.org) for additional guidance. Ground your Core Team in Graceful Engagement.	Suggested Pace: St. Cautious: 3-6 months. St. Moderatus: 2-3 months. St. Adventurous: 1-2 months. (See the Congregational Assessment Tool below to score your congregation's pace.)
Tools: Graceful Engagement (<i>Toolkit</i> page 12), One-to-One Visits (<i>Toolkit</i> page 15)	
Tip: Your pastor is not a member of the Core Team. Your pastor can support, provide resources and advice, attend meetings, and preach welcome; and at the same time, your pastor remains pastor to the whole congregation.	
Other Resources: http://disciplesallianceq.org/BecomingOA	
People Involved: Core Team, LGBT People and Disciples AllianceQ	
Step Two: Gathering Information (Toolkit page 22)	
Tasks: Examine your congregation's history, conduct a power analysis, and examine your congregation's culture to gain a better understanding of how it deals with change and conflict. Complete the Congregational Assessment Tool (below) and choose a pace for your journey.	Suggested Pace: St. Cautious: 2-3 months. St. Moderatus: 1-2 months. St. Adventurous: 1 months.
Tools: Graceful Engagement (<i>Toolkit</i> page 12), One-to-One Visits (<i>Toolkit</i> page 15), Congregational Assessment (<i>Toolkit</i> page 22, and below), Congregations and Conflict (<i>Toolkit</i> page 24), How Does Change Happen in Churches or Any Organization (<i>Toolkit</i> page 29).	

Tip: If at this point it is clear that your congregation is not prepared to engage an explicit journey towards Open & Affirming, spend time – lots of time – laying groundwork for the journey. For ideas, see http://disciplesallianceq.org/journey	
People Involved: Core Team, Formal and Informal Leadership of Congregation	

Step Three: Building Relationships (Toolkit page 28)	
Tasks: Conduct One-to-One Visits with formal and informal leadership and church members. Deepen your understanding of how the congregation understands itself and its welcome of LGBTQIA+ people.	Suggested Pace: St. Cautious: 6-9 months. St. Moderatus: 3-6 months. St. Adventurous: 1-3 months.
Tools: Graceful Engagement (<i>Toolkit</i> page 12), One-to-One Visits (<i>Toolkit</i> page 15), Public Storytelling (<i>Toolkit</i> page 31)	
Tip: You will use One-to-One visits to listen and gather information throughout this journey. Be sure to practice this skill.	
Other Resources: http://disciplesallianceq.org/BeingInRelationship http://disciplesallianceq.org/MyMindWasChanged	
People Involved: Core Team, formal and informal leadership, church members	

Step Four: Mapping the Journey (Toolkit page 29)	
Tasks: Develop a frame for your O&A journey and outline each step for your congregation (Bible studies, discussions, educational opportunities) based on the pace and frame you've chosen.	Suggested Pace: St. Cautious: 1-2 months. St. Moderatus: 1-4 weeks. St. Adventurous: 1-2 weeks.
Tools: Graceful Engagement (<i>Toolkit</i> page 12), Framing (<i>Toolkit</i> page 34), Part B of this Toolkit, plus the information you've gathered up to this point	
Tip: Your frame is very important. Do pick a frame that starts from how your congregation understands itself today to ensure buy-in from the start of your journey.	

Other Resources: http://disciplesallianceq.org/journey http://disciplesallianceq.org/resources	
People Involved: Core Team	

Step Five: Community Recognition of the Journey (Toolkit page 48)	
Tasks: The Core Team transitions into a formally-recognized committee of the congregation.	Suggested Pace: St. Cautious: 3 meetings with board. St. Moderatus: 2-3 meetings with board. St. Adventurous: 1 meeting with board.
Tools: Consult your congregation's policies, One-to-One Visits (<i>Toolkit</i> page 15), Framing (<i>Toolkit</i> page 34)	
Tip: Have One-to-One visits with each of your board members before taking your plan to an official board meeting to make sure you have overwhelming buy-in from the board before the meeting.	
People Involved: Core Team, church board	

Step Six: Setting the Frame and Providing Educational Opportunities (Toolkit page 49)	
Tasks: Engage the journey detailed in Step Four.	Suggested Pace: St. Cautious: 1-5 years. St. Moderatus: 6-12 months. St. Adventurous: 3-6 months.
Tools: Graceful Engagement (<i>Toolkit</i> page 12), One-to-One Visits (<i>Toolkit</i> page 15), Framing (<i>Toolkit</i> page 34), Public Storytelling (<i>Toolkit</i> page 31), Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (<i>Toolkit</i> page 42), Bible studies, films, panels, newsletter articles, etc.	
Tip: Continue to have One-to-One conversations during this time to ensure your educational opportunities are reaching people. Adjust your plan as needed.	
People Involved: Core Team, clergy, educators, congregation	

Step Seven: Writing Your Welcoming Statement (Toolkit page 55)	
Tasks: Create a draft Open & Affirming Statement that meets the requirements of the Open & Affirming Ministry Program and present it to the formal and informal congregational leadership. Revise statement as needed based on feedback.	Suggested Pace: St. Cautious: 2-6 months. St. Moderatus: 1-3 months. St. Adventurous: 2-4 weeks.
Tools: Sample Welcoming Statements (<i>Toolkit</i> page 55), your chosen frame (<i>Toolkit</i> page 34)	
Other Resources: http://disciplesallianceq.org/SampleStatements http://disciplesallianceq.org/AboutOA	
People Involved: Core Team, formal leadership,	

Step Eight: Conducting an Exploratory Survey (Toolkit page 58)	
Tasks: Send out post cards or develop anonymous online survey for the entire congregation.	Suggested Pace: 1-4 weeks.
Tools: Postcards and postage or free online survey service	
Tip: Do not move past this step until you have overwhelming support from the congregation. If needed, continue providing educational opportunities and do not hold a public vote or decision until you are certain that there is overwhelming support in your congregation for your O&A statement.	
People Involved: Core Team	

Step Nine: Holding the Vote (Toolkit page 59)	
Tasks: Schedule and hold a vote according to your congregation's policies and procedures, or otherwise design a process to gain the congregation's affirmation of the O&A Statement.	Suggested: When exploratory survey shows 75-85% support – or more.
Tools: Congregational policies and procedures	
Tip: AllianceQ does not require a congregational vote. AllianceQ DOES require a congregational affirmation of its O&A commitment. Most congregations do choose to vote. If you hold a vote, we recommend a three way vote: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Yes” - “Yes – although I have personal reservations, the congregation should do this” - “No” Explain that the first two votes count as “yes.” AllianceQ requires your congregation to have an employment non-discrimination statement to be listed as O&A. This can be added to your employee manual or congregational policies. The congregation does not have to vote on this, but it should be added by the process appropriate in your congregation. (See sample at http://disciplesallianceq.org/BecomingOA)	
People Involved: Core Team, Council, and all members.	

Step Ten: Celebrating and Publicizing (Toolkit page 60)	
Tasks: Hold a worship service or celebration, and publicize your new Welcoming status to the greater community. Don't forget to send AllianceQ a copy of your O&A statement, a copy of your employment non-discrimination statement, and a description of your O&A journey. Send to info@disciplesallianceq.org .	Suggested: Soon after successful vote.
Tools: Special liturgy, bulletin inserts, church website, church sign	
People Involved: Core Team, clergy and staff, entire congregation	

Step Eleven: We're Welcoming... Now What? (Toolkit page 62)	
<p>Tasks: Ensure church policies are LGBT-inclusive. Provide ongoing educational opportunities. Provide opportunities for church members to take action on LGBT social issues beyond the church doors.</p>	<p>Ongoing: Celebrate, reaffirm, and provide new educational opportunities at least once a year.</p>
<p>Tools: Church policies</p>	
<p>Other Resources: http://disciplesallianceq.org/BeingOA http://disciplesallianceq.org/BeingOpen</p>	
<p>People Involved: Core Team, clergy, educators, Social Justice committee, greater LGBT community</p>	

Congregational Assessment Tool

There is a link to an on-line version of the Congregational Assessment Tool in the Toolkit provided by our Lutheran friends at ReconcilingWorks. You are welcome to use that version of the tool, or the version below, which has been updated and adapted for DOC congregations.

The Congregational Assessment is a tool to help you better understand how your congregation approaches conversation or discernment about LGBTQIA+ inclusion and to determine how ready it is to engage in this holy work. This congregational self-assessment tool is designed to help you select an appropriate Welcoming curriculum from the cautious to the adventuresome. These questions are not to be seen as sure-fire predictors, but they may serve as helpful guides to both the pace a Welcoming Process should take and your congregation's overall temperament when considering controversial subjects.

Each of the Core Team members should complete the Congregational Assessment individually and then gather as the Core Team to discuss the results.

When gathering to discuss the your responses to the Congregational Assessment Tool, be sure to see the Ideas for Discussion in Step 2: Gathering Information in the Building an Inclusive Church Toolkit.

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

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

To get the most accurate result possible when taking the Congregational Assessment, try to answer the questions in a realistic, rather than aspirational way. 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. It will not help you or your congregation to characterize the congregation differently than it really is.

Important: *If your congregation has had a history of sexual misconduct by its clergy or staff, it is important and useful to do the Congregational Assessment in order to collect data. HOWEVER, we recommend that any congregation with such a history of abuse choose the "St. Cautious" pace (see What Does the Average Score Mean below).*

See page 22 of the *Toolkit* for more information about the Congregational Assessment Tool.

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

Congregational Assessment Question	Your Score
<p>1. Does the congregation already have a mission or welcoming statement which explicitly includes people of all sexual orientations and gender identities?</p> <p>1 No mission or welcoming statement 2 Mission or welcoming statement with no diversity mentioned 3 Mission or welcoming statement embracing diversity 4 Mission or welcoming statement with gay and lesbian folk included 5 Yes, inclusive of gay, lesbian, bisexual AND transgender people</p>	
<p>2. Are your clergy in favor of explicitly welcoming and including people of all sexual orientations and gender identities?</p> <p>1 Vocally against 2 Privately against 3 Undecided/unknown 4 Personally, but not publicly, in favor 5 Strongly and publicly in favor</p>	
<p>3. Are you aware of parents or family members of LGBTQIA+ persons in the congregation?</p> <p>1 No 2 Yes, but they do not accept their LGBTQIA+ children or family members 3 Yes, and they accept their LGBTQIA+ children or family members, but are in the closet in the congregation 4 Yes, and they are out of the closet about their LGBTQIA+ children or family members 5 Yes, and they are visible advocates</p>	
<p>4. Are you aware of LGBTQIA+ persons in the congregation?</p> <p>1 No 2 Yes, but they are in the closet 3 Yes, and some are out of the closet to a few members in the congregation 4 Yes, and individuals and/or couples are visible, but not active in leadership 5 Yes, and several individuals and couples are visible and active in leadership of the congregation</p>	
<p>5. Has the congregation hosted same-gender weddings?</p> <p>1 No, never 2 No, but pastor participated in such a service at another location 3 No, but two members did have a service which was not at the church 4 Yes, but the service was private and at the church. The congregation knew. 5 Yes, and the congregation participated</p>	

<p>6. How does the congregation receive and include new people?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Outsiders are not included easily in the congregation 2 New members are encouraged to join but not actively integrated in the life of the church 3 New members are welcomed and are actively integrated in the life of the church 4 Visitors of all kinds are vigorously pursued, welcomed and encouraged to join and integrate in the life of the congregation 5 New members are quickly invited to consider positions of leadership in the congregation 	
<p>7. Does the congregation welcome and include a diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities?</p> <p>Choose from 1 to 5, with 1 being completely homogenous and 5 being overwhelmingly diverse.</p>	
<p>8. Is the congregation presently very homogeneous or quite diverse in terms of ethnicity, class, language, etc.?</p> <p>Choose from 1 to 5, with 1 being completely homogeneous and 5 being overwhelmingly diverse.</p>	
<p>9. How does the congregation handle disagreement, conflict or controversy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 The congregation avoids conflict entirely 2 Conflict is quietly suppressed 3 Conflict is dealt with, but always poorly and rarely openly 4 Conflict is engaged, but frequently neither well nor openly 5 Conflict is usually engaged well and openly 	
<p>10. Who comes up with new ideas for ministry? (Score the highest number that applies)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Clergy 2 Elders/Deacons/Board 3 Various lay leaders, not all are elected to an office 4 Ideas of lay members are valued and pursued 5 Ideas are solicited from members who think outside the “everyday church” box 	

<p>11. Does your congregation have an openly LGBTQIA+ pastor?</p> <p>1 Not currently, but a previous LGBTQIA+ pastor was fired/asked to resign/left under conflict or accusations</p> <p>2 Not currently but has in the past and is not open to an LGBTQIA+ pastor in the future</p> <p>3 No</p> <p>4 Not currently but has in the past and is open to an LGBTQIA+ pastor in the future</p> <p>5 Yes</p>	
<p>12. Is the congregation educated about and currently working on other justice issues?</p> <p>1 No, not really</p> <p>2 No, but they have from time to time</p> <p>3 Yes, but only a few congregants are involved</p> <p>4 Yes, and the congregation actively supports this work</p> <p>5 Yes, and the congregation actively seeks new issues for education and action</p>	
<p>13. What is the prevailing congregational understanding of the message of scripture?</p> <p>1 The book of rules to avoid eternal condemnation</p> <p>2 The way to achieve personal salvation</p> <p>3 No overall view</p> <p>4 The message that God is Love</p> <p>5 Full of examples of God's hospitality, welcome, and inclusivity.</p>	
<p>14. Is the lay leadership of the congregation predominantly male or female identified?</p> <p>Choose from 1 to 5 with 1 being completely male to 5 being completely female</p>	
<p>15. Does the congregation use inclusive language in worship?</p> <p>1 Not at all</p> <p>2 Inclusive language for human beings but not for God</p> <p>3 Inclusive language for human beings and God in sermons</p> <p>4 Inclusive language for human beings and God in sermons, hymnody and liturgy</p> <p>5 Inclusive language for human beings and God in sermons, hymnody, liturgy and Scripture readings</p>	

<p>16. Relationships within the congregation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Isolated individuals and families 2 Small groups of close friends (cliques) 3 Friendly within affinity groups (i.e. age, gender, class, race, language, education, orientation) 4 Friendly across affinity group lines 5 A community of faith embracing relationships across affinity and ideological lines 	
<p>17. Assess the political temperament of the congregation. Score from 1 completely conservative to 5 completely liberal/progressive</p>	
<p>18. Has your congregation engaged studies on sexuality?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 No, never; the subject is taboo 2 Yes, and we'll never do it again 3 Yes, in youth group and adult Sunday School but only a few people participated 4 Yes, in youth group and adult Sunday School and we had a good turn out 5 Yes, there was lots of interest and we plan to extend our studies of sexuality 	
<p>19. What percentage of adults who attend worship typically come to an adult forum or other adult educational opportunities? (answer 3 if your congregation doesn't offer adult educational opportunities.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 5% to 10% or less 2 10% to 20% 3 20% to 30% 4 30% to 50% 5 More than 50% 	
<p>20. Is your congregation a member of a region that has declared itself Open & Affirming?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 No, the matter has never come up in our region 2 No, it was discussed at the regional level and defeated 3 Yes, but we never hear anything about it in the region 4 Yes, and the region has a committee charged with encouraging congregations to consider becoming Open & Affirming program 5 Yes, and the congregation is open to educational efforts provided by the region 	
<p>21. Do you have a female pastor?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 No, and we never considered one 2 No, but we have considered calling one 3 Not at present, but we did in the past 4 Yes, as part of a multiple-clergy team 5 Yes, senior (or solo) pastor is female 	

<p>22. Does your town/city/state have a non-discrimination policy for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities?</p> <p>1 No, and the idea has never been discussed in the congregation</p> <p>2 No, it was brought to a vote in our town/city/state, but the congregation gave no opinion and it did not pass</p> <p>3 No, it was brought to a vote in our town/city/state, but the congregation had mixed views and it did not pass</p> <p>4 Yes, but the congregation had mixed views when it passed</p> <p>5 Yes, it was brought to a vote and passed, and the congregation largely supported the measure</p>	
<p>23. Does your pastor use examples including people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in sermons?</p> <p>1 No, never</p> <p>2 Maybe once or twice but it caused a problem in the congregation</p> <p>3 Yes, without comment from the congregation</p> <p>4 Regularly, without comment from the congregation</p> <p>5 Often, with positive comment from the congregation</p>	
<p>24. Have the youth of your congregation expressed an opinion on becoming Open & Affirming? (If no youth group, select 3.)</p> <p>1 Yes, and they are solidly against</p> <p>2 No, have not heard a thing</p> <p>3 Yes, their view is positive but the adults of the congregation have mixed views of this</p> <p>4 Yes, their view is positive and the adults are listening</p> <p>5 Yes, they supported Open & Affirming at regional and general youth events and have returned with an interest in O&A for this congregation</p>	
<p>25. Size/type of church?</p> <p>1 Corporate church with average worship attendance over 800</p> <p>2 Corporate church with average worship attendance 400 to 749</p> <p>3 Program church with average worship attendance 200 to 399</p> <p>4 Pastoral church with average worship attendance 76-199</p> <p>5 Family-sized church with average worship attendance 75 or less</p>	
	Total

What Does the Total Score Mean?

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

We suggest

- 25–75: the St. Cautious pace
- 76–100: the St. Moderatus pace
- 101+: the St. Adventurous pace

See page 22 of the *Toolkit* for tips on discussing and using the results of your Congregational Assessment.

An Open & Affirming journey is a time for building up a welcoming community. A declaration that a congregation is O&A is one stepping stone of many, not an end point. A church that welcomes all will continue to find new neighbors to meet, invite, affirm, and include.

May it ever be so.
