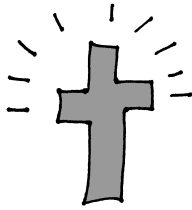

The Radical Welcome Book Discussion Participants' Guide



In preparation for the first session, please . . .

- Acquire a copy of the book, *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, The Other and the Spirit of Transformation*.
- Read the first two chapters of the book, “The Radical Welcome Journey” (pp. 3–10) and “Defining Radical Welcome” (11–26).
- Bring your calendar in order to schedule the two-hour final session, which includes program and meal.
- Commit to attending all sessions, for the full one hour. If you know you will miss more than one session, consider doing the book study when it is offered in the future.

Welcome to Radical Welcome

Radical Welcome is the practice of embracing the presence, gifts, voices and power of The Other: the oppressed, silenced people on the margins of your church and/or society. It is a spiritual practice, deeply rooted in scripture, theology and church history. It is an organizational practice, one that invites communities to re-imagine the structures of their common life to make room for the power and culture of The Other. It takes passion, honesty, intention and a comprehensive approach that addresses individual and institutional transformation.

Whatever your race, class, gender, sexuality or age, Jesus has invited us all, as his disciples, to love as he loves and to welcome as he welcomes.

But how do we become God's radically welcoming people? That's the question this resource—and the book on which it is based, *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, The Other and the Spirit of Transformation*—were designed to help congregations to explore.

This book study should help to build your capacity to embrace The Other and to lead your community toward transformation in the following ways:

- by deepening your understanding of the theological and biblical foundations for radical welcome;
- by framing an honest, facilitated conversation about inclusion, exclusion, The Other, power and other challenging topics associated with radical welcome;
- by sharpening your vision of just what radical welcome could look like in your context, looking at five specific areas of your congregational life (mission/vision, identity, ministries/relationships, leadership/feedback structures, and worship);
- by providing tools for dealing compassionately with the fear of change and fear of The Other;
- by helping you to identify blocks and build the resources and skills to lead your community toward transformation and welcome.

You aren't likely to finish and declare yourself "Radically Welcoming"! Rather, these resources should stir you and your community toward further training and intentional strategic planning as you walk the always new road to radical welcome. At the end of the book study, you should be hungry to participate in other workshops and trainings—including new ones based on the Radical Welcome material with which you'll now be more familiar—and to engage in the process of action and reflection in your community.

This book study is based on the discussion questions at the end of each chapter of the book (under the "Go Deeper" heading). It supplements these questions with a ritual frame and simple exercises that will help create the space for honest sharing and collaborative work.

Because the material builds on itself, and because the community dynamics can be sensitive, participants should covenant to be present for at least six of the seven sessions. It is also not advisable to attempt to conduct the study when you have less than 60 minutes to devote to each session (say, for instance, in the 45-minute Adult Formation break many churches host).

Here is an outline of the seven-session book study:

Session 1: The Radical Welcome Journey

- Topic: Introducing radical welcome, and why it presents such a holy challenge and opportunity for mainline Christian communities
- Readings: “The Radical Welcome Journey” and “Defining Radical Welcome”
- Goals: Discuss the book’s main themes and purpose, and establish a covenant for how discussion and reflection will proceed in the weeks to come

Session 2: The Theology of Radical Welcome

- Topic: Encountering the God who is constantly embracing and transforming the world, and seeing radical welcome as a spiritual practice
- Readings: “The Dream of God” and “Living with Arms Wide Open”
- Goals: Explore the theological and scriptural foundations for the practice of radical welcome

Session 3: The Picture of Radical Welcome

- Topic: Getting a clear picture of the “signs” of radical welcome in congregational life, including dealing with power, culture and identity, and how they intersect with the structures of church life
- Readings: “The Signs of Radical Welcome” and “Beyond Inviting and Inclusion”
- Goals: Examine the deep change necessary to become radically welcoming and then cast a vision of radical welcome for your community

Session 4: The Practice of Radical Welcome—Imagine with God

- Topic: Creating your own vision for radically welcoming community
- Readings: “Re-imagine Your Common Life”
- Goals: Construct picture of dream of radical welcome in your congregation

Session 5: The Practice of Radical Welcome—Making It Real

- Topic: Assessing the reality of radical welcome in your church
- Readings: “Check Your Reality”
- Goals: Compare reality of radical welcome in your church to your dream of radical welcome

Session 6: The Practice of Radical Welcome—Reckoning with Fear

- Topic: Understanding fear—how it manifests in individuals, congregations and entire traditions, and how we can hold it gently and effectively
- Readings: “Be Not Afraid” and “Reckon with Fear”
- Goals: Explore the fear (our own and others’) that surfaces in the face of radical welcome, and consider resources for holding fear with compassion

Session 7: The Journey Continues . . .

The final session includes a community dinner and closing ritual.

- Topic: Summing up the journey so far and offering wisdom, encouragement and additional resources for those who seek to be God’s radically welcoming people
- Readings: “Where Do We Go from Here?” and “Conclusion” and “Moving Ahead” handout
- Goals: Share insights, identify next steps and commit to support each other’s journeys

What Congregations—and Which People—Should Participate in this Book Study?

You will find this study especially useful if one of these profiles fits you and/or your community:

- You have noticed the presence of marginalized people within or just outside of your congregation—whether they are various people of color, the poor, young adults, gay and lesbian people or a host of other groups silenced in or cast out of the church—and you want to make room for their presence, voices and (yes) their power.
- Your community has already begun the inclusion process, but it is clear that certain traditionally oppressed or silenced groups continue to feel unwelcome. Now you need tools to take a comprehensive, systemic approach that helps your community to set a fresh vision and then embrace the changes necessary to fulfill it.

-
- Your community has begun to embrace The Other, but you've met strong resistance and need to regroup and strategize for change that welcomes marginalized communities and expressions, even as it values the revered traditions and voices that have grounded your church's identity so far;
 - You are one of these Others, and you would like to be part of helping to spark deep change so that you and others on the margins can share your gifts and leadership and help to shape the life of the whole community.
 - Your congregation and the surrounding community *seem* homogeneous, but you want to find ways of building your cultural competence and opening your heart to The Other, whoever and wherever they may be.
 - You are among the brave few who are willing to admit that some elements of this transformation scare you, and now you want the chance to tell the story and find the resources to help your community to grapple with the fear of change and loss.
 - You are a change leader in your congregation, and you want to offer a compelling, pastoral witness to others, creating the support structures so that all can embrace the transformation God seems to be calling you toward as a community.

The overarching goal of this resource is to prepare individuals *and* their communities to discern and then organize for real change in the structures and practices of congregational life. It assumes participants are part of a congregational group, not merely individuals. For deepest impact, your community may take a strategic approach—more than posting a notice in the Sunday bulletin inviting any comers to attend a cool new workshop. Here are a few scenarios to help you to plan:

Scenario A:

The church council or other key leadership group invites a core group of leaders (including clergy and lay people) who would lead the change effort to read the book together. This group would ideally include leaders who would identify with “The Other” in your community and others who represent the center of congregational power. They report back to the leadership body and/or congregation, sharing their conclusions about next steps the congregation should pursue.

Scenario B:

A leadership team may have already gone through the book study, and now the church council or other key leadership group decides they will open the conversation to the wider congregation and even other churches. They ensure the participation of even more key leaders (including clergy and lay people) who are passionate about and capable of leading change. At the conclusion of the journey, participants report back to the leadership body and/or congregation, sharing their conclusions about next steps the congregation should pursue.

Scenario C:

Leaders in the regional church body (a diocese, synod, conference, or smaller grouping of congregations) study the book and discuss its implications for their churches and ministries. They might then encourage selected, local leaders (including clergy and lay people) with gifts and passion to lead change to host book studies in their home churches.

Scenario D:

Leaders in a particular ministry area host a book study for others involved in their ministry, making sure key leaders and clergy have signed on. At the conclusion of the journey, they craft a plan for how the ministry might move toward radical welcome, modeling the practice for the broader congregation.

These are just a few scenarios for organizing participation in the book study. In each case, it should be apparent that this is an intentional choice on the part of the congregation or ministry area, that a core group of leaders have been commissioned to participate, and that this group of leaders will be accountable to share their learning and help the congregation or ministry to move ahead together.

A few more words on who should participate:

- Every effort has been made to present the material in simple, clear terms. It should prove accessible to those who are new to the language of inclusion, welcome and transformation, as well as those who have experience and training in the area.
- Teens are welcome to participate. Most people who are high school-aged or older will be able to digest the material and contribute to reflections in each session.
- Newcomers to a community should be able to engage with ease, including the strategic planning for change in the latter sessions. These fresh voices may offer key insights from other churches or organizations they've seen struggling with some of the same issues.
- The conversation and planning will prove more fruitful if some participants identify with groups on the margins, according to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, generation, etc.
- By the same token, it is ideal to have some participants who reflect the traditional, empowered core of the community and perhaps even leaders from parts of the community that might prove hesitant or even hostile to radical welcome.

What Are the Expectations?

By signing on, participants covenant for the entire process . . .

- Attend all seven sessions, showing up on time and remaining for the duration of the gathering. No one should miss more than one session.
- Set aside plenty of time each week to read and reflect on the appointed chapter(s) and handouts (approx. 2–3 hours of preparation per gathering).
- Help to shape and then live into the agreement for listening to and honoring all members (see Session One).
- If you process things on paper better than out loud, get a journal and capture insights that seem significant to you, whether they come during your at-home prep time, during a session or just after a session. Find a way to engage deeply.
- Where appropriate, you might also conduct research in your community in order to gather further insights for reflection and planning.

What Do We Do When We're Finished?

This resource is not meant to serve as the final word on radical welcome. You may choose to take the journey further in these ways (by no means an exhaustive list):

- Go to www.radicalwelcome.org for information about having the Rev. Stephanie Spellers offer a Radical Welcome Workshop in your area. By June 2009, additional trainers will be available to offer the workshop.
- Organize ongoing meetings with the congregational local small group to check in on progress with stated goals, share stories, offer collective wisdom. The same is true if you're doing the book study with multiple congregations or ministries.
- Use the insights to shape your Annual Meeting, Parish Retreat, Leadership Retreat and other congregational gatherings.
- Craft a retreat for the rest of the church's leadership on radical welcome and the change toward which God may be drawing you.
- Provide the tools to ministry areas so that they can evaluate themselves and imagine steps they would need to take to move toward radical welcome.
- Host an anti-racism or anti-homophobia training in your community.
- Bond with other local leaders who share your desire to engage in radical welcome and see how you could combine resources for new ministries and programs.

In many ways, this workshop is only a bend in the road you've been walking with Jesus all along. It is not the beginning. And it is certainly not the end. Let it move you toward fresh, deeper, more focused commitment to the dream of God.

Final Words Before Departing . . .

Pay attention to the process

This is a journey where the path is as important as the destination. As you move forward you should seek not only to speak the language of compassion and transformation; you will need to embody those virtues in your verbal and non-verbal cues, attempting to speak and act out the new way of life, even as you reach out and invite others to join. The covenant outlined in the first session of the workshop provides a concrete process for living out those values; feel free to add to it as your group finds it appropriate.

Reflect and engage in a spirit of hope

How easy it would be for you to begin with what is wrong and dive into a vigorous, detailed examination of all the ways you have fallen short of the calling to be God's radically welcoming people! In early presentations of this material, I was shocked by how quickly people went to that self-critical space . . . and at how quickly they shut down or swung around in a defensive crouch to protect their churches and themselves from the perceived onslaught. They taught me that it's imperative to begin with hope, and to be crystal clear that the goal of this journey is not to indict, to stir guilt, or to become "fixers" (far from it!). Together, we are engaged in the great renewal and transformation which God promises for the whole of creation—together. We are discerning how God is already working in us all and how God has called us to new life, a life of radical welcome—together.

And so I invite you to break out of the sin/guilt/silence pattern into which so many fall when speaking of oppression, power and transformation. True, there will be times when each of us must examine who we are, what we have done and what we have left undone, and that's never easy. So practice awareness, and if you feel yourself falling into the old patterns of despair and paralysis—shrugging and saying "There's just nothing we can do right now, so why bother doing anything at all?"—unclench your hands, feel God's grace and abundant forgiveness, stay with hope and continue moving.

Please be utterly honest about your fear, your story and your privilege

Rooted in hope and the grace of God, you have a unique chance to tell the truth about your own experiences with radical welcome, change and fear, to glean wisdom and eventually experience healing and transformation. To go there, you'll need to be ready to reflect honestly on how you and your community participate in systems of inclusion and exclusion— and yes, we *all* participate in those systems. There is no way to be alive and not be part of those invisible yet powerful superstructures that protect and welcome certain people while demeaning and marginalizing others. Remember, too, that we have all been conditioned by the prejudices of our respective cultures, and that those assumptions and judgments still function today,

albeit in sometimes more subtle forms. We are none of us innocent, and there is no such place as a neutral space.

So you can choose to participate in these systems or to dismantle them. You can opt out and disavow any responsibility by saying, “I’m part of an oppressed group, so how could I marginalize someone else?” or “We’re good people. No one would feel unwelcome in our community, so why should we do all this work?” Or you can name your reality and accept your responsibility, and let that wisdom spur you toward becoming a positive agent of Christ’s reconciling, transforming spirit. I pray that you will choose the way of honesty, reconciliation and action.



SESSION 1

The Radical Welcome Journey

Session Goals:

- Introduce group and establish a covenant for how discussion and reflection will proceed in the weeks to come
- Outline the 7-session book study—its methods, purpose and goals
- Clarify your hopes and expectations
- Introduce the concept of radical welcome

Participant Prep:

- Read and reflect on book chapters: “The Radical Welcome Journey” and “Defining Radical Welcome”

Opening the Gathering

15 minutes

Opening Prayer

Gather near the altar. The facilitator says the Opening Prayer, or the group says it together:

Christ, whose insistent call
disturbs our settled lives:
give us discernment to hear your word,
grace to relinquish our expectations,
and courage to follow empty-handed
wherever you lead,
that the voice of your truth and love
may reach to the ends of the earth.
Amen.¹

1. Janet Morley, *All Desires Known: Inclusive Prayers for Worship and Meditation* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1994), 29.

Welcome

15 minutes

Introductions include:

- Name and town where you spent most of your formative childhood years
- Congregation or ministry with which you affiliate
- One hope you have for your participation in this book study

Try the Mutual Invitation Process²: Mutual Invitation is a process designed by Eric Law of the Kaleidoscope Institute to facilitate communication across cultural and personal styles. This process slows the pace of sharing and ensures that, rather than always having the quickest thinkers and speakers go first and dominate the conversation, each person receives an invitation to speak and be heard. It also decreases the self-focus that can sometimes happen when the sharing proceeds in a line or circle and we all tend to get more anxious as our turn draws near.

Using Mutual Invitation, you should proceed as follows:

- A volunteer or leader goes first. Upon finishing, the speaker can invite another person to share.
- When the next speaker has finished, he or she then asks another person. The process continues until everyone has been invited.
- Upon being invited, a person can say “no” or “not yet.” He or she should still invite another person to continue the sharing process. And he or she can also be invited to share later in the process.

Introduction to Our Journey and Community Covenant

10 minutes

Introduction

Community Covenant³

- We will start on time and end on time.
- We will allow each person an equal amount of time to speak.
- We will listen to each person without interruption, both in one-on-one or group conversations.

2. www.ladiocese.org/ki.

3. Guidelines are based on those used by Visions Inc., a training group that helps organizations to dismantle internal oppressive structures; and in *Good News: A Congregational Resource for Reconciliation* by Steven Charleston (Cambridge, MA: Episcopal Divinity School, 2003).

-
- We will try on new ideas and processes.
 - We will honor the feelings of others as genuine and sincere.
 - We will agree not to shame, blame or attack others or ourselves.
 - We will take responsibility for our own learning, not relying on others to inform us about areas where we may lack personal knowledge.
 - We will maintain confidentiality. This means we may share ideas we have heard, but we cannot share other people's personal stories or congregational stories without permission.
 - Others?

Can we all agree to uphold this covenant, to help with honoring these shared commitments, and to not take personally any effort to guide us back into alignment with the covenant?

What is Radical Welcome

10 minutes

Deepening the Conversation

18 minutes

Considering the day's readings and participants' personal experiences—and referencing the handout for Session 1: Radical Welcome Defined—reflect on any of these questions:

- How would you describe the practice of radical welcome in a congregation or ministry? What happens when individuals and congregations practice radical welcome?
- When have you seen radical welcome in practice? When have you wished it had been practiced?
- What is *not* radical welcome? Identify some tempting, easy definitions that don't actually capture radical welcome as you understand it.
- Reflect again on the definition of The Other on page 14. In what parts of your life are you a target, and where are you non-target? Who is The Other in your life?
- When have you been radically welcomed? When have you walked into a place and found your voice, gifts and culture appreciated and valued and included, perhaps despite your expectations? Reflect on that experience. If you cannot

recall such an experience, then reflect on how it would feel to be welcomed in this way.

- When have you felt left out? When have you entered a community or situation only to discover no room for your voice or your identity? Reflect on that experience. If you cannot recall such an experience, then reflect on how it would feel to be excluded in this way.

Closing the Circle

7 minutes

Calendar Check

The Next Session

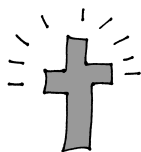
- **Read** the chapters “The Dream of God” and “Living with Arms Wide Open”
- **Reflect** on the questions at the end of each chapter
- **Select an object** or image that represents your image of God

Closing Prayer

The gathering closes with check-ins and a community blessing:

Live without fear: your Creator has made you holy,
has always protected and loved you,
and knows you as only a parent can.
Go in peace to follow the good road
and may God’s blessing be with you until we meet again.
Amen.⁴

4. Adapted from *A New Zealand Prayer Book* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1989).



SESSION 2

Theology of Radical Welcome

Session Goals:

- Consider biblical and theological images of God as the first One who engages in transformation, relationship and welcome
- Craft a picture of God, and of yourself and your church as the people of God
- Look at radical welcome as a practice of surrender and embrace—toward God, toward The Other, toward change

Participant Prep:

- Read and reflect on book chapters: “The Dream of God” and “Living with Arms Wide Open”

Supplies Needed:

- Basic altar set-up
- Flip chart or white board

Opening the Gathering

5 minutes

Opening Prayer

Participants place their offerings—objects or images that represent their images of God—on the altar at the center of the space as they arrive. Then the group says the Opening Prayer together:

Christ, whose insistent call
disturbs our settled lives:
give us discernment to hear your word,
grace to relinquish our expectations,

and courage to follow empty-handed
wherever you lead,
that the voice of your truth and love
may reach to the ends of the earth.
Amen.

Session Preview

The facilitator then reviews the topic and goals for the session.

Stirring the Pot

10 minutes

Reflect on the following questions in pairs (3 minutes per person):

- What insight, story or example from the readings stood out most to you?
- How did it connect with your own story?

The Biblical Roots of Radical Welcome

15 minutes

The facilitator guides the group through the “Biblical Roots of Radical Welcome” handout.

Deepening the Conversation

25 minutes

Considering the day’s readings and participants’ personal experiences, reflect on any of these questions (or a question from the “Stirring the Pot” section in the beginning):

- What is the image of God you see in the biblical passages? Describe this God. How does this image of God compare with the God you grew up with? The God you worship now?
- What is the image and how is it calling upon us as the people of God, as informed by these biblical passages? How does this picture of us and our calling compare with the understandings you grew up with, or the ones you operate with now?
- According to these passages, who were “The Others” for the biblical writers? For Jesus? Who are the similarly marginalized and oppressed groups in relationship to your own congregation, ministry or wider denomination?
- What associations do the words “conversion” and “surrender” bring up for you? Are the words promising? Limiting? Confusing? Why?

-
- Do you know someone who exemplifies this radical openness to God and The Other? What have you seen or experienced in this person's presence? What allowed him or her to live this way?
 - When have you had a difficult yet transforming encounter with someone who challenged your sense of comfort? What happened? How were you tested? How were you changed? Did the experience affect your relationship with God? If so, how?
 - When have you seen your church relinquish its carefully crafted plans and expectations? What happened? How were you tested? Did you change? How? How did the experience affect your faith?

Closing the Circle

5 minutes

The Next Session

- **Read** the chapters “Beyond Inviting and Inclusion” and “The Signs of Radical Welcome”
- **Reflect** on the questions at the end of the chapters
- **Select an object** or image that represents a “sign” of radical welcome

Closing Prayer

The gathering closes with check-ins and a community blessing:

Live without fear: your Creator has made you holy,
has always protected and loved you,
and knows you as only a parent can.
Go in peace to follow the good road
and may God's blessing be with you until we meet again.
Amen.



SESSION 3

The Picture of Radical Welcome

Session Goals:

- Learn more about the role of power, culture and identity in becoming radically welcoming
- Get a clear picture of the “signs” of radical welcome as they manifest throughout the structures of the congregation’s life
- Begin to cast a radically welcoming vision for your own congregation

Participant Prep:

- Read and reflect on book chapters: “Beyond Inviting and Inclusion” and “The Signs of Radical Welcome”

Opening the Gathering

5 minutes

Opening Prayer

Participants place their offerings—objects or images that represent a “sign” of radical welcome—in the center of the space as they arrive. Then the group says the Opening Prayer together:

Christ, whose insistent call
disturbs our settled lives:
give us discernment to hear your word,
grace to relinquish our expectations,
and courage to follow empty-handed
wherever you lead,
that the voice of your truth and love
may reach to the ends of the earth.
Amen.

Session Preview

Stirring the Pot

10 minutes

Reflect on the following questions in pairs (3 minutes per person):

- What insight, story or example from the readings stood out most to you?
- How did it connect with your own story?

Beyond Inviting and Inclusion

15 minutes

The facilitator guides the group through the “Moving From Inviting and Inclusion to Radical Welcome” handout.

Deepening the Conversation

25 minutes

Considering the day’s readings and participants’ personal experiences, reflect on any of these questions (or a question from the “Stirring the Pot” section):

- Look again at the signs of radical welcome associated with each part of congregational life. Have you seen or heard about churches that demonstrate these signs of radical welcome?
- What was it like to be in such a community? Did they welcome in some areas and not in others? Did they welcome some groups and not others? What was the story behind their willingness to welcome?
- Have you seen communities that do not demonstrate signs of radical welcome? What was it like to be in such a community? Did they welcome in some areas and not in others? Did they welcome some groups and not others? What was the story behind their lack of welcome?
- Take another look at the “Moving Beyond Inviting . . .” handout. If you’re headed to inviting or inclusion but dream of radical welcome, what could you do to help your congregation to shift gears and deepen its commitment?

Closing the Circle

5 minutes

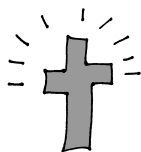
The Next Session

- **Read** the chapter “Re-Imagine Your Common Life”
- **Reflect** on the questions at the end of the chapter
- **Select an object** or image that represents some gift that radically welcoming The Other would bring to your church and/or to your life

Closing Prayer

The gathering closes with check-ins and a community blessing:

Live without fear: your Creator has made you holy,
has always protected and loved you,
and knows you as only a parent can.
Go in peace to follow the good road
and may God’s blessing be with you until we meet again.
Amen.



SESSION 4

The Practice of Radical Welcome— Imagine with God

Session Goals:

- Imagine the radically welcoming dream of God in even greater detail
- Consider the steps your congregation might take to live into that dream

Participant Prep:

- Read and reflect on book chapter: “Re-Imagine Your Common Life”

Opening the Gathering

5 minutes

Opening Prayer

Participants place their offerings—objects or images that represent a gift radical welcome would bring to your church and/or to your life—in the center of the space as they arrive. Then the group says the Opening Prayer together:

Christ, whose insistent call
disturbs our settled lives:
give us discernment to hear your word,
grace to relinquish our expectations,
and courage to follow empty-handed
wherever you lead,
that the voice of your truth and love
may reach to the ends of the earth.
Amen.

Session Preview

Stirring the Pot

10 minutes

Reflect on the following questions in pairs (3 minutes per person):

- What insight, story or example from the readings stood out most to you?
- How did it connect with your own story?

The Dream of Radical Welcome

20 minutes

Reflect on the “The Dream of Radical Welcome” handout. Take 10 minutes to look over the handout and write your own thoughts. Then discuss in pairs for 10 minutes (5 minutes each), using the principles for active listening.

Deepening the Conversation

25 minutes

Considering the day’s readings and participants’ personal experiences, reflect on any of these questions (or a question from the “Stirring the Pot” section):

- What might radical welcome look like in your community? Take these considerations into account:
 - Who is “The Other” for your community?
 - Whose voice and culture would bring a fresh, if challenging, perspective to the way things have been? (Don’t just think ideology, but think especially of groups systemically oppressed and disempowered by the church and society. A hint: you will surely think of more than one group.)
 - How would your congregational life change if the groups now on the margins came closer to help to shape your common life?
- Look at the five areas of your congregational life and the suggestions and strategies in each (throughout the chapter). Where has your community already begun this work? Where is your community most ready to make fresh moves? What is the deeper work that you would eventually take on over a longer term?

Closing the Circle

5 minutes

The Next Session

- **Read** the chapter “Check Your Reality”
- **Reflect** on the questions at the end of the chapters
- **Select an object** or image that represents a barrier to radical welcome in your congregation or ministry

Closing Prayer

The gathering closes with check-ins and a community blessing:

Live without fear: your Creator has made you holy,
has always protected and loved you,
and knows you as only a parent can.
Go in peace to follow the good road
and may God’s blessing be with you until we meet again.
Amen.



SESSION 5

The Practice of Radical Welcome— Check Your Reality

Session Goals:

- Examine the history and reality of your church and tradition and how they limit and/or support the effort to radically welcome
- Compare this reality to the dream of radical welcome, and begin identifying areas for change

Participant Prep:

- Read and reflect on book chapter: “Check Your Reality”

Opening the Gathering

5 minutes

Opening Prayer

Participants place their offerings—objects or images that represent some barrier to radical welcome in your own congregation—in the center of the space as they arrive. Then the group says the Opening Prayer together:

Christ, whose insistent call
disturbs our settled lives:
give us discernment to hear your word,
grace to relinquish our expectations,
and courage to follow empty-handed
wherever you lead,
that the voice of your truth and love
may reach to the ends of the earth.
Amen.

Session Preview

Stirring the Pot

10 minutes

Reflect on the following questions in pairs (3 minutes per person):

- What insight, story or example from the readings stood out most to you?
- How did it connect with your own story?

HOW RADICAL IS YOUR WELCOME?

How Radical is Your Welcome?

20 minutes

Reflect on the “How Radical Is Your Welcome?” handout. Start by taking 10 minutes to look over the handout and write your own thoughts. Then discuss in pairs for 10 minutes (5 minutes each), using the principles for active listening.

Deepening the Conversation

20 minutes

Considering the day’s readings and participants’ personal experiences, reflect on any of these questions (or a question from the “Stirring the Pot” section):

- Create a congregational timeline. When was your congregation most vital? Who was in the neighborhood and what did it look like? How did the church connect with the wider community? How has the church’s vitality shifted since this time? What is your relationship with the neighborhood now? Why has it shifted?
- Think of the stereotypes, the history and the cultural inheritance attached to your tradition. What are the barriers to radical welcome inherent in your congregational and denominational history? Conversely, how do your history and traditions actually equip you for transformation and radical welcome?
- In what ways does your congregation send a culturally exclusive message? Who might walk to your door, or enter your church on a Sunday, or engage in your ministry area, and not feel valued or visible? Picture the outcasts, the strangers, The Other who have been systemically oppressed and disempowered in society and in the wider church. What would change if you welcomed this group?
- Return to the five-part image of the church’s “bodylife”: its mission and vision, identity, ministries and relationships, leadership and feedback systems, and worship. What elements of your church’s bodylife are the most entrenched and

least welcoming to the gifts and cultural perspective of marginalized groups?
Where have you begun to move toward the dream of radical welcome?

- What are some strategies you've read about or considered that would help you to bridge the gap between your reality and your dream?

Closing the Circle

5 minutes

The Next Sessions

- **Review** arrangements for final session
- **Review** the chapters “Be Not Afraid” and “Reckon with Your Fear”
- **Reflect** on the questions at the end of the chapters
- **Select an object** or image that represents something that helps you to sit with your fears

Closing Prayer

The gathering closes with check-ins and a community blessing:

Live without fear: your Creator has made you holy,
has always protected and loved you,
and knows you as only a parent can.
Go in peace to follow the good road
and may God's blessing be with you until we meet again.
Amen.



SESSION 6

The Practice of Radical Welcome— Reckoning with Your Fear

Session Goals:

- Explore the fear of change and fear of The Other—how they manifest in individuals, congregations and entire traditions.
- Pay special attention to the fears that surface as your community embraces change and welcomes The Other
- Identify local resources for healing and reckoning with fear

Participant Prep:

- Read and reflect on book chapters: “Be Not Afraid” and “Reckon with Your Fear”

Opening the Gathering

5 minutes

Opening Prayer

Participants place their offerings—objects or images that represent anything that helps you to sit with your fears—in the center of the space as they arrive. Then the group says the Opening Prayer together:

Christ, whose insistent call
disturbs our settled lives:
give us discernment to hear your word,
grace to relinquish our expectations,
and courage to follow empty-handed
wherever you lead,
that the voice of your truth and love
may reach to the ends of the earth.
Amen.

Session Preview

Stirring the Pot

10 minutes

Reflect on the following questions in pairs (3 minutes per person):

- What insight, story or example from the readings stood out most to you?
- How did it connect with your own story?

The Sound of Fear

20 minutes

Reflect on “The Sound of Fear” handout (first side only). Please keep your comments on the fears to one minute or less, so that all can share.

Deepening the Conversation

20 minutes

Considering the day’s readings and participants’ personal experiences, reflect on any of these questions (or a question from the “Stirring the Pot” section):

- What are your personal fears around radical welcome? What are your congregation’s fears likely to be? Then delve deeper with these questions:
 - What does it feel like to recall this fear? What does it conjure in my mind, in my body, in my spirit?
 - What is the effect of fear on my ability to welcome and embrace?
 - What practices help me to sit and work with my own fear and resistance?
 - What practices and conditions open me up again, help me to trust and take risks?
- Look at the reverse side of the “Sound of Fear” handout. Do you see a practice or suggestion that would help you to bring compassion to your fear or the fear in your congregation? How might you put it to use?
- Imagine a member of your church came to share his or her fears with you. Considering your own experience and insights you gained from the readings, what could you say or offer to someone struggling with this fear?
- What is your holding environment and how could you develop it further? In other words:
 - What practices and resources in your congregation could create the space and opportunity for people to express their fears?

—What structures, programs and practices would help your congregation to respond to people’s fears with “compassionate awareness”? To “tell a new story” to their fear (in other words, to hear other people’s experiences with similar fears, to reconnect with the dream of God, and to discover resources in your shared tradition)?

Closing the Circle

5 minutes

The Next Session

- Review arrangements for final session
- Read the chapters “Where Do We Go from Here?” and “Conclusion”
- Reflect on the questions at the end of the chapters
- Reflect on the questions in the “Moving Ahead” handout
- Select an object or image that represents your dream of radical welcome (*be sure you bring something you are willing to give away*)

Closing Prayer

The gathering closes with check-ins and a community blessing:

Live without fear: your Creator has made you holy,
has always protected and loved you,
and knows you as only a parent can.
Go in peace to follow the good road
and may God’s blessing be with you until we meet again.
Amen.



SESSION 7

The Journey Continues . . .

Session Goals:

- Build community by sharing a meal and closing ritual
- Commit to your own next steps toward becoming radically welcoming
- Lay out your congregation's next steps on the road to radical welcome

Participant Prep:

- Read and reflect on book chapters: “Where Do We Go from Here?” and “Conclusion”
- Reflect on the questions in the “Moving Ahead” handout

Opening the Gathering

5 minutes

Participants place their offerings—objects or images that represent their dreams of radical welcome—on a visible side table as they arrive. As a blessing, offer the following prayer, or another, if a member of the group feels called to offer a prayer:

Christ, whose insistent call
disturbs our settled lives:
give us discernment to hear your word,
grace to relinquish our expectations,
and courage to follow empty-handed
wherever you lead,
that the voice of your truth and love
may reach to the ends of the earth.
Amen.

Sharing the Meal

Time to be determined by the group

Enjoy the meal—this group has come a long way together! If the group desires, this might be a time to invite people to share around the following questions, using the Mutual Invitation Process:

- Given today's readings, what wisdom would you share with your community to help others to move carefully, deliberately, strategically, and yet *passionately* toward radical welcome?
- What do you need to do to prepare personally for becoming more radically welcoming to The Other?

Our Passion for Connection

20 minutes

Personal Reflection

Each person should take 5 minutes to reflect quietly on these questions.

- Which of The Others do I feel called to help my community to embrace?
- Why do I care? What story or experience with The Other fuels my passion?
- What barriers and signs of exclusivity is this group likely to encounter in my church or denomination?
- What gifts might we share with The Other?
- What has my congregation lost because we lack relationship with The Other?
- What would we gain if we embraced The Other?

Small Groups

Break into small groups of equal numbers. Using Mutual Invitation, each person gets two minutes to share a testimony. To craft your testimony, complete the following sentences:

- I want to help my church to radically welcome . . .
- I care because . . .
- If these friends entered my church now, they might feel excluded by . . .
- If we embraced The Other, I believe we would share . . .
- If we embraced The Other, I believe we would gain . . .

Our Passion for Action

30 minutes

Take five minutes to review the “Moving Ahead” handout, this time the “Our Passion for Action” section.

- What are the first steps—or the next steps—you would take in your community to nurture radical welcome?
- Who could you partner with in your own congregation? Think about people and other ministries that could provide strong leadership and a wise perspective on radical welcome. How could you engage them?
- Who could you partner with beyond your congregation? How could you develop the relationships to prepare for welcoming The Other, and even to meet marginalized groups where they are?
- What do you need to learn in order to take the next steps around radical welcome? Where could you acquire that knowledge, or those relationships?

As a large group, use the Mutual Invitation Process to share for two minutes each, structuring the conversation by completing these sentences:

My congregation has already begun to radically welcome The Other by . . .

Over the next six months, we need to . . .

In order to foster our movement toward radical welcome, I will . . .

In order to widen the engagement in our congregation, I will . . .

In order to widen the relationships with our neighborhood, I will . . .

Covenant to Walk Together

25 minutes

Leaders guide the closing ritual, which may conclude with the following blessing.

Live without fear: your Creator has made you holy,
has always protected and loved you,
and knows you as only a parent can.
Go in peace to follow the good road
and may God’s blessing be with you until we meet again.
Amen.