



Radical Welcome Defined

What is Radical Welcome?

Radical welcome is first and foremost a spiritual practice. It combines the Christian ministry of welcome and hospitality with a faithful commitment to doing the theological, spiritual and *systemic* work to eliminate historic, systemic barriers that limit the genuine embrace of groups generally marginalized in mainline churches (young adults, the poor, LGBT people, people of color, people with disabilities).

What makes a church Radically Welcoming?

Radically welcoming churches understand that each group brings gifts and perspectives that help the whole congregation to fulfill God's dream and purpose. These churches seek to embrace everyone's voices, presence and power, with a special commitment to embracing groups who have been defined as The Other.

Who is "The Other"?

The Other is any group that is likely (or would reasonably expect) to experience patterns of historic, systemic oppression and marginalization in your congregation and/or denomination, especially given your church's dominant race, culture, language, generation, socioeconomic class, education level, sexual orientation and physical ability.

In your church, which of these groups hold power—that is, the ability to have authority or influence, and to have their story, culture, and voice shape the congregation? These groups are your power center.

Which groups do not hold this power?
Whose story does not yet shape the history, culture, worship
and identity of the church?
These groups are The Other for you.

Now you are invited to join Jesus in stretching your arms
and embracing these brothers and sisters,
and allowing your heart and your congregation's life to be transformed
by The Other's presence, gifts and power among you.

This practice is radical, and it is truly welcoming.

Radically welcoming communities aren't perfect, and may never truly "arrive," but they are becoming . . .

Hospitable: They seek to offer a gracious, warm space to all people, especially those who have been defined as "The Other." Every church has a different identity and thus a different margin, but these groups are often marginalized in mainline churches: people of color, poor people, children and young adults, gay and lesbian people (or depending on your context, bisexual and transgendered people), seniors without much money, and people with disabilities.

Reconciling: They build mutually transforming relationships with their neighbors, their neighborhood, and with brothers and sisters beyond their neighborhood—wherever Christ calls them.

Centered: They possess a clear, compelling sense of Christian identity. It is based on their cultural/ denominational heritage, *and* in an unapologetic calling to live out the dream of God as they have discerned it in light of scripture, tradition, reason and their unique context.

Open to conversion: They attempt to listen carefully to, make room for, share power with, and learn from The Other, and they are open to genuine conversion and transformation based on this encounter. Practically speaking, this results in a transformed understanding of who is inside and who is outside, what ministries the church undertakes, how they select leaders, how they do business, how they worship, what they claim as their mission and purpose, and how they partner with other groups.

Intentional: They engage in training, research, active listening and strategic planning—conscious, contextually appropriate efforts that address individual, congregational and systemic change.

Comprehensive: They recognize radical welcome is a way of being, one that is cultivated by church leaders through formation, worship, mission and other areas of congregational life.

Compassionate: They prioritize the work of creating “space for grace”¹: pastoral counseling, small groups, forums, and other settings where people can express and hold their dreams, stories *and* fears.

Faithful: They are not driven by the desire for diversity, growth, inclusion or getting it “right.” Rather, they are driven to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, who welcomes and heals all people and invites us to tell a new story of resurrection life together.

1. A term made popular by priest and consultant Eric Law, author of *Sacred Acts, Holy Change: Faithful Diversity and Practical Transformation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002).