



Moving Ahead Together

My Passion for Connection

- 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?

My Passion for Action

- What are the first or next steps I would take in my community to nurture radical welcome?
- Who could I partner with in my own congregation? (Think about people and ministries that could provide strong leadership or a wise perspective on radical welcome. How could you engage them?)
- Who could I partner with beyond my congregation? How could I develop the relationships to prepare for welcoming The Other, and even to meet marginalized groups where they are?
- What do I need to learn in order to take the next steps around radical welcome? Where could I acquire that wisdom, training or experience (consult *Radical Welcome* Bibliography, pp. 167–176)?

Welcoming The Other

What might develop in your community's life if together you opened the door to the dream of God? Here are some practices others have taken on as they made their way toward radical welcome. Note: This is an expanded version of the list on p. 156 of the book.

Identify who The Other is for your congregation

- What groups would be The Other in relation to your church?
- Why do you want to radically welcome these groups? Notice whether there are other marginalized groups on your doorstep. For instance, you may feel guilty for having no African-Americans when the majority of people of color in a one-mile radius are actually Brazilian or Cambodian. Or you may be focused on welcoming people of color first when there's already a disenfranchised, unchurched community of young people outside.

Understand your relationship with The Other

- Do your homework and learn how your congregation and denomination have interacted with particular marginalized and oppressed groups in the past and how they interact today.
- Engage members of marginalized, oppressed groups in conversation and find out what people in their groups say about your church and denomination now. What have your interactions been like to this point? If there has been little or no interaction, what would they likely assume about your community?
- Ask people what your institution would need to change in order to signal radical welcome to The Other. If they dare to venture inside, what activities, images, messages, music and events would make it crystal clear that you are making room for their voices, their presence, their power, at the heart of your life together?

Help the congregation to learn about The Other

- Develop cultural competence about The Other's language, history, religious expressions, arts, and style of leadership and engagement.
- Ask members of marginalized groups what issues most concern them and what programs and offerings the community needs from this church.
- Incorporate wisdom from the culture of The Other into the congregation's life, helping people to see how we can build and celebrate God's reign together.
- Conduct an inventory to look at the community through the eyes of The Other—what is exclusive and what is (or could become) radically welcoming?

Build a coalition of people who will lead change and plan together for change¹

- If possible, start with an existing group in the congregation already committed to the seed of a radical welcome vision (vestry or church council, welcoming team, social justice and service ministry), but be sure to expand the circle to include people who share the passion and have the respect of their peers (this will help to avoid marginalization of the change effort).
- Identify and engage leaders from the marginalized group—leaders who look forward to helping the community move toward deeper change and helping to ease entry for others coming from the margins.

Engage actively in communicating welcome to The Other

- Find out the current center of this group's common life: coffee houses, community centers, ethnic groceries, daycare centers, the dog park, the soup kitchen, the refugee center, music stores, schools and colleges.
- Meet people where they are rather than require that they find their way to you.
- Advertise and evangelize in ways that connect with The Other's culture and location, and be sure your stated welcome matches your reality (invite leaders from marginalized groups to shape this effort, offering insight into appropriate methods and activities).
- If you have no existing relationships with The Other, cultivate relationships in the surrounding community—think civic, political and cultural groups and broad-based community organizations—in order to increase your cultural competence, visibility and skill at welcoming and partnering with The Other.

Offer radical welcome to people coming from the margins into your church

- Over time, with deliberation, allow the gifts, voice and presence of people from the margins to transform the various elements of your congregation's life: its mission, identity, ministries, leadership and worship.
- Establish multiple points of entry to and relationship with your congregation: sponsor relevant community programs and events, offer hospitable space for community groups.

1. Gil Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1998); and Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2003).

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- As your community learns to embrace The Other, try to stretch and make room not only for the “safe” people on the margins, but eventually those whose presence, voice and power present a real challenge to the dominant culture. Imagine crossing not one but two or more lines: class *and* race (not just black and Latino educated professionals, but working class and even poor people of color), age *and* sexual orientation (not just middle-aged gay men and lesbians, but young and edgy “queers”), etc.
 - Undertake “diversity” moves (specific, strategic efforts that increase representation and visibility of under-represented groups), being sure to back these new leaders up with extra encouragement, capacity-building and support, and to communicate with the rest of the community about the values guiding such decisions.
 - Engage in parallel development, nurturing alternative worship and community spaces where the voice of The Other can flourish—but continue to create intentional opportunities for alternative and mainstream to come together and begin to transform the mainstream.