

Congregational Assessment Overview:

Where are we? How long will the journey be?

In order to chart a course for considering a Welcoming Covenant and planning a Welcoming Community Network Ministry, it is useful for leaders to determine where they are starting. What are your congregation's present demographics, current attitudes and readiness to accept and affirm persons of all gender identity and sexual orientation? Then you can chart a course and evaluate the pace of progress that would be most helpful and productive. It might be tempting to skip over Congregational Assessment! As leaders, we think "we know" our congregation, its people and style, its history and outlook. But it will help the effectiveness of your planning to work through your awareness of some of the factors which would help to measure your present location and atmosphere.

Included below are three different sets of plans, based on three different starting points. Working with the Congregational Assessment Worksheet will help you decide which of the three congregations is most similar to your own. Based on that assessment, you can follow the resulting scenario, including a congregational study process. Of course, you can customize the process without following any model or scenario. Both the Congregational Assessment Worksheet and the scenarios presented below are provided only as suggestions and helps in designing your own process and journey.

Why is assessment necessary? The Welcoming Community Network process represents innovation in ministry for a congregation. To welcome people who are lgbt into the congregation is not radical or extreme in any sense -- being firmly rooted in the Gospel itself -- but neither is it the "status quo" for most congregations. To move forward with a Welcoming and Affirming Ministry, or any other innovative ministry, requires thoughtful planning and interpretation.

Because every congregation is different, we begin with three model plans, based on the assessment of three very different starting assessments.

Three Different Starting Locations, Three Different Journeys

At the Wall ready to tear down the barriers that separate us
The congregation's leadership feels the congregation is really quite ready to declare itself Welcoming Community Network, based on some key factors:

- There are some gay and lesbian members already, most of whom are visible and active in the congregation's life
- Some members think that the congregation is already a WCN congregation.
- The general mood of the membership is quite welcoming of all kinds of people. They really mean "everybody" when they say it.
- Those who are "gung-ho" about WCN also want to start some groups, activities and ministries that would really serve the GLBT communities.

On the Horizon with the Peaceable Kingdom in site

The church leadership wants to know more about the WCN program, especially how it relates to congregational life and attitudes, because they realize several things about the church:

- The congregation as a whole needs education on major issues (not just a small group who usually show up for adult classes and do the most talking at congregational meetings):
- The congregation has been responsive on other social issues, and there is general interest and trust when any new ideas or programs are suggested.
- Members seem to feel a lot more confident when given the opportunity to learn more about things and have their questions answered and their views appreciated.
- Congregational life is already "busy" with other things, so it may take time for members to give this much attention or energy.

In the Wilderness with a challenging journey ahead

The leadership is interested in the WCN program, but is not at all sure the congregation is "ready," based on these observations:

- People do not always know or express their true feelings about important issues, and sometimes complaints will surface later;
- There are some GLBT people in the congregation, but they are very private about it, and others may not even know they are here;
- The congregation says it welcomes everybody. But the truth is, it takes a long time for visitors and newcomers to really feel at home.
- The Pastor and leadership think a "go slow but be open-minded" approach is best, with a strong emphasis on education and listening for negative feelings being expressed, so that Welcoming Community Network doesn't become a divisive issue.

None of these congregations will sound exactly like yours! Every community is different, every congregation unique. So use these scenarios only as rough guideposts for determining which of three basic approaches your congregation should talk.

Basis of the Three Congregation Scenarios

The descriptions above are grounded in some key predictors of congregational trends. Here are some possible factors or criteria you may want to consider:

- Presence of some GLBT people already in the congregation.
- Congregational awareness of GLBT people in the surrounding community
- Openness of the congregation to strangers, visitors, newcomers
- Level of readiness to consider new programs, initiatives and ministries
- Current perception of the WCN program and GALA
- Responsiveness to other important social and community issues
- Responsiveness to regular educational opportunities
- Responsiveness to new service opportunities
- Members' responsiveness to innovation and variety in worship life
- Level of trust between the Pastor(s), leadership and the rank-and-file membership

- Existence of an effective evangelism program
- Any expression of prejudices, stereotypes, negative energy in congregational groups, organizations or cliques
- Any history (within 10-15 years) of serious division, dissent or controversy regarding other issues
- Leaders' assessment of the preparation, style and "thoroughness" required to promote ownership of new ideas and directions.

In addition, some demographics circumstances may contribute to an overall profile of your congregation's awareness of and responsiveness to social and community factors. Some of these measures are:

- Congregation's size, age demographic measures; perception of members' political tilt (liberal to conservative);
- The urban/suburban/rural setting of the congregation;
- The presence of identifiable GLBT community within a meaningful radius from the congregation's geographical locus; and
- Perceived or significant changes in the demographics of the surrounding neighborhood and community.

Use the Congregational Assessment Worksheet

We strongly recommend that you use:

- the [Congregational Assessment Worksheet](#)
- and its accompanying [Scorecard](#)

If you are working with a Seed Group or WCN Task Force, print a copy for each person; let each member of the group or task force complete the Worksheet independently; and as a group, discuss your findings and average the counts of all the worksheets.

On the basis of this Assessment discussion, review the three models.

Thinking Through the Assessment Results

For Discussion in your Seed Group:

- What are the advantages or disadvantages of moving through the WCN process very quickly? Or very slowly?
- Did the Congregational Assessment tool make the congregation seem more conservative, or more open-minded than you had thought?
- Are there local issues, people, congregational history, or specific concerns -- that might impact the course and pace of the Welcoming Community Network process -- which need to be discussed before this process moves forward?

The Congregation Journey Scenarios in Detail

In the following four columns, we show how the Longitudinal View might play out in each of the three Congregation Journey Scenarios.

Again, this is not a strict plan -- you are free to adapt according to your local conditions. Select one of the three Congregation Journey Scenarios, and plot your own course of action alongside.

Longitudinal View Steps (people responsible)	At the Wall	On the Horizon	In the Wilderness
Initial Inquiry (Seed Group)	Small group explores and decides it is times to move forward with WCN status; group generates ideas and determines whom to talk to. One person accepts responsibility to talk to other leaders and the Pastorate.	Seed Group talk over feasibility of WCN, how to use Welcoming Community Planner.	Seed Group talk over major issues; decide to meet again and continue conversation as a Seed Group.
Early Planning (Seed Group)		Next meetings: invite guests from community, GALA Chapter to talk to Seed Group. A plan of persuasion is drafted and refined.	Discuss issues; watch at least one video; discuss congregational openness and readiness; try using WCN Congregational Assessment Worksheet.
Permission to Proceed (Pastorate)	The de facto WCN "czar" gets pastoral agreement to explore WCN, reports back to small group what plans are being considered.	Seed Group speaks to Pastor, invites itself to Leadership Team meeting to present a request to continue with planning.	Schedule a Saturday session to discuss what it means to become completely welcoming and affirming. Schedule next meeting with GLBT members, then consider approaching the Pastor(s) and/ or Leadership Team for permission to continue.
		Pastor(s) authorizes a Task Force to bring back a workable plan for Congregational Study.	Open idea with Pastor(s) and members of Leadership Team; return next month with a "go-slow" but workable plan to continue.

<p>Presenting a Process (Report to Pastorate)</p>	<p>A Welcoming Covenant is drafted for Pastorate to get a better idea. A short set of Study Modules is selected.</p>	<p>Task Force selects leader and secretary; maps out a time-line: selects 5-6 month set of Study Modules most workable for congregation; recruits speakers, orders materials and videos.</p>	<p>Pastorate approves the "go slow" plan and appoints formation of a diverse Task force to plan, guide and evaluate a Congregational Study</p>
<p>Preparing Members for Study (Task Force)</p>	<p>Announcements are put in newsletter and Sunday bulletin about coming Congregational Study and meeting to make "the Decision."</p>	<p>Task Force recruits speakers, orders materials and videos; maps out publicity; puts information on congregational web site; begins making Sunday announcements. Plan vignettes for use in worship service</p>	<p>Task Force lays out detailed plan to raise awareness, create Visitor Center, add content to congregational web site; Task Force lines up monthly worship service talks, alternating with vignettes. Task Force also drafts newsletter articles about various WCN issues for next 6 months. All to be approved by Pastorate.</p>
<p>Congregational Study Process (Task Force)</p>	<p>A six-week series of Adult Class are held to talk with GLBT people, talk about Bible and WCN program. Sermon series with focus on hospitality, evangelism, openness to strangers, etc.</p>	<p>A 24-week process of 4 Study Modules is set up.</p>	<p>A 40-week process of 5 Study Modules (maybe 6 if there is interest in a Retreat). Time off from entire issue is scheduled from Thanksgiving to New Year.</p>
<p>Evaluation of Study (Task Force)</p>	<p>Informal Evaluation in Task Force about success of Study and interest in moving ahead. Since the congregation already has some GLBT members, attitude expressed is "Let's roll!"</p>	<p>Half-day Saturday Task Force de-briefing scheduled at Study's conclusion: conversation about what was learned, what didn't happen, what further homework might be done before "the Decision" meeting.</p>	<p>Task Force review of Study progress; results in adjustments and additions to Modules: all-congregational "hearings"; also will order and provide additional videos and resource materials. Straw Poll is sent out by mail to all members.</p>

<p>Congregational Decision (Membership)</p>	<p>Congregational Meeting is held after worship; Pastor explains WCN is a way to extend ministry to more people. Brief discussion; Members approve Welcoming Covenant by overwhelming margin.</p>	<p>"The Decision" is placed on agenda of a Congregational Business Meeting under new business. Discussion is strong but persuasive. Members approve Welcoming Covenant by more than 2/3 vote.</p>	<p>Vote is scheduled well in advance for a special meeting; a Voter Packet is mailed out with summary of Bible study issues, Study evaluation, Straw Poll results and additional resources for personal study and prayerful reflection. Welcoming Covenant is approved by majority; follow-up discussion on how to reach out to the minority.</p>
<p>Implementation (Task Force and Members)</p>	<p>Welcoming Covenant is posted near the front door of the church after the Decision meeting. Task Force schedules a 4-week series of Welcome/Amnesty/Diversity Café events to celebrate.</p>	<p>Welcoming Covenant is posted in prominent place. Task Force schedules a Planning Day for annual WCN Sunday, implementation ideas</p>	<p>Welcoming Covenant is posted near the main entrance, first WCN Sunday planned. Task Force schedules a Planning Day for implementation events.</p>
<p>Outreach in Mission (Task Force and Members)</p>	<p>Task Force arranges local news releases to media and series of advertisements in GLBT-related press. Pastorate establishes permanent WCN Committee to guide future outreach and ministry efforts.</p>	<p>News release and advertising announce coming WCN Sunday worship celebration and brunch.</p>	<p>Planning Day recommends future events over next six months. Pastorate approves an In-Reach plan for ministry to those who still have misgivings about WCN ministry.</p>
<p>Customization (WCN Committee and Pastorate)</p>	<p>WCN Committee designs own celebration for Welcoming and Affirming events, plans for frequent intercessions, GLBT ministry fair, dinner.</p>	<p>Pastorate asks for volunteers to plan Welcoming and Affirming Day with special worship, reception.</p>	<p>Pastorate suggests a regular WCN Ministry committee (with some GLBT representation), working under Evangelism Committee, to come up with appropriate ministry goals, seeks volunteers.</p>

<p>Evaluation of Ministry (WCN Committee and Pastorate)</p>	<p>WCN "czar" reports to Pastorate that the overall process unfolded according to plan; clear response of members is positive and enthusiastic.</p>	<p>Task Force prepares a 2-page summary Evaluation Report of entire process for reporting to the congregation.</p>	<p>Original Task Force and WCN Ministry Committee hold joint meeting to evaluate entire process, report back to Pastorate, draft brief Report to all members, and WCN Program.</p>
<p>Upgrades and Changes (WCN Committee and Pastorate)</p>	<p>WCN Committee asks for funding in modest Annual Budget.</p>	<p>WCN Committee decides to meet every 2nd month, stay in touch with WCN for ministry ideas, launch a Book Club, monthly GLBT brunches.</p>	<p>WCN Committee codes to start advertising congregation's ministry in both GLBT and mainstream publications; hold quarterly events and annual film/video series.</p>
<p>Continuing Education (WCN Committee)</p>	<p>Plans for annual Welcoming Class series, periodic newsletter articles and sermons to highlight ongoing ministry with GLBT people.</p>	<p>Two pastoral care teams conduct home visits with some members who opposed WCN status.</p>	<p>WCN Committee decides to keep GLBT/Christian literature and bibliography available in vestibule; to invite feedback from rank and file members; and to ask WCN for ongoing education resources.</p>