

Welcoming Ministry

TRAINING MANUAL and PLANNING HANDBOOK

WOW! Worship of Welcoming

training session, handouts and resources



Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.
The people of The United Methodist Church®



United Methodist
communications

The **Welcoming Ministry Training Manual and Planning Handbook** is a compilation of adapted, revised and updated portions of Living Our Promise: Trainer's Toolbox, Beyond 30 Seconds: Developing a Welcoming Congregation, "The Welcoming and Media Planner: A Guide for use with the advertising and welcoming ministries of your church," and "The 2001–09 Welcoming Training Manual for National and Local Trainers."

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This resource is the official training manual and planning handbook for developing a Welcoming Ministry in local United Methodist churches and supersedes the aforementioned publications. For updates and more information about materials mentioned or used in this resource, visit training.umcom.org.

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Overview



Since 2001,
we've been helping
the people of
The United Methodist
Church to live
our promise of
"Open hearts. Open
minds. Open doors."



Introduction

Since 2001, churches all over the country have taken to heart the denomination's promise of "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors." Welcoming resources and training have given churches new hope, new ideas and new challenges. Pastors have preached on the subject. Church councils have adopted vision statements reflecting the desire to live up to these words. Individual members have examined their hearts and minds to assess whether they can claim the promise as their own. During this time, careful analysis, soul searching and feedback from newcomers have challenged some of our churches and affirmed others.

Perhaps your church has experienced such changes. You've held training activities and small groups. You've preached the messages, played the videos and implemented the ideas. You've seen the lives of current members and newcomers changed, yet you've sensed complacency. Your team may be suffering welcoming burnout. The results of your efforts might not be as outstanding as you'd hoped. You see old behavior creeping back into the congregation and wonder, "What's next?"

We hope this **Welcoming Ministry Training Manual and Planning Handbook** will help. Building upon the ideas and exercises of key resources, this guide offers suggestions for sustaining a congregation's welcoming, inviting and discipling efforts. It incorporates all the training United Methodist Communications has done nationally since 2001 into one resource. It provides new ways of looking at existing materials and offers new suggestions for helping your entire congregation

embrace Welcoming Ministry fully. Our goal is to help your church live the promise of “Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.”

Here's a starting point: Think of welcoming as you would physical fitness. We all have some potential to be fit, but different people have different challenges in realizing that potential. Some are clumsier than others. Some have little motivation or limited willpower. Some have physical limitations and challenges. Some see no need to change. Even when someone overcomes these challenges, other hurdles can arise along the way. Plateaus occur when nothing seems to be improving. Reaching a target or goal can lead to slackening a regimen and starting to slip into previous habits. In these cases, simple tweaks can make a difference. A slight change in diet improves blood pressure. A targeted exercise tones an atrophied muscle. Just as it takes constant effort to maintain physical health and fitness, so it is with welcoming. A slight change in attitude improves openness.

A slight change in attitude improves openness.



A UMNS photo by Mike DuBose

**Welcoming is a
lifelong journey
for the whole
church community.**

Targeted training strengthens a welcoming conversation or enhances an invitation to participate in some spiritual activity.

Remember, like health and fitness is for individuals, welcoming is a lifelong journey for the whole church community. This resource offers ideas for building Welcoming Ministry training into some common situations in the life of your church. It can help you adapt ideas you've learned through training events and personal study in ways that fit into the existing structures and meetings of your congregation. Each session should take an hour or two with some options for expanding to multiple sessions and all-day workshops or retreats. With a few simple tweaks and new ideas, you may find your church re-energized (or set afire for the first time) about welcoming, inviting and discipling.

Welcome to the journey.



Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.

The people of The United Methodist Church®

Our Theological Foundation

Our spiritual forebears, John Wesley, Jacob Albright and Philip William Otterbein, shared a passion for evangelism. They worked and prayed for people to open their souls to God's grace, to be reconciled to God and one another and to become disciples in a community of believers. The process was understood as a symphony in three movements.

The first notes were proclamation and invitation. The second movement crescendoed to the new believer's acceptance of God's forgiveness and repentance. It resolved in the third movement: lifelong dedication to spiritual growth, compassionate outreach and disciplined living.

The earliest members of Wesleyan, Evangelical and United Brethren movements were known for the energy and innovation with which they invited people to Christ and welcomed them to their circle. They took every opportunity and used every means at their disposal to proclaim God's love.

**In our souls,
there is a desire and
upwelling of energy
that urges us to seek
more from life and
to develop meaningful
and trustworthy
relationships with
others and with God.**



**The mission of
The United Methodist
Church is to make
disciples of Jesus Christ
for the transformation
of the world.**



They spoke to the heart in practical ways, using the popular media of the day: print, song and preaching. They steadfastly refused to let their words be confined to the sanctuary and classroom. So God's Word was shared with the masses in the streets of England, the British Isles, the colonies in America and eventually around the world.

Today, The United Methodist Church faithfully carries our traditions to the 21st century. It emphasizes the first movement of the symphony of grace. Like the hymns and field preaching of 18th century England, the messages are designed to go beyond the people already in our congregations to invite all people to respond.

On behalf of the people of The United Methodist Church, we offer this invitation: "Our hearts, our minds and our doors are always open." It is an invitation to discover that United Methodists are an open, hospitable community of people. It is a promise that United Methodist congregations will welcome everyone to a rich experience of faith and work together to growing in spiritual well-being.

The message emerges from a core human experience—a sense of emptiness in day-to-day existence—shared in some way by everyone. For some, it is a feeling that our activities are meaningless or our jobs purposeless. Others express a fierce sense of self-sufficiency and independence that masks a deeper uncertainty. Some experience a sense of distance from people—a lack of intimacy in even the closest human relationships. Others feel trapped in emotional distress, unrelenting pain or crushing defeat. However this feeling manifests itself, it expresses a

basic reality: Humankind is frustrated and estranged from one another and from God. To this common life experience, we offer hope and invitation.

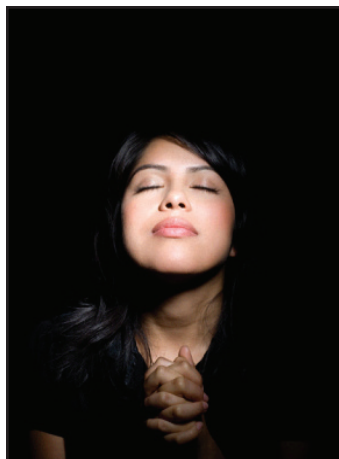
In our souls, there is a desire and upwelling of energy that urges us to seek more from life and to develop meaningful and trustworthy relationships with others and with God. This power and drive comes as a gift, unexpected and unmerited. It is an eternal presence—a grace and a power—available to everyone whether we are alert to its presence or not. It is a sheer gift from a loving God. It is the dimension of God's love that John Wesley called "prevenient grace."

That power is available to all people, everywhere. It invites us to search for understanding of life; it urges us to reach out to others and find community. It pushes us beyond our narrow self-interest to compassion and service to others.

**In a welcoming culture,
people are accepted for
who they are and are
supported in
sharing their gifts.**



Newcomers are trying to find a way into the life and ministries of your church.



A Few Working Definitions

Before we dive too deeply into developing, expanding and maintaining a dynamic Welcoming Ministry for your congregation, let's make sure we are all working from the same set of definitions and understandings of terms we will be using in this resource.

First, we will be talking about visitors. Visitors are people who attend a worship service or event at a church but are not likely to be regularly connected to the congregation (they live out of town, they have another church home, etc.). Remember, welcoming is not about growing your church, so visitors deserve special attention even if you never see them again.

A second term we want to define is guests. Guests are people who attend worship or another event, perhaps at the personal invitation of someone from the church, who may reasonably be expected to return and get involved in the congregation. Those treated as "honored guests" are likely to return.

Thirdly, we will be referring to newcomers. Newcomers are people who are relatively new to a congregation—not yet members, no longer first-time guests—interested in connecting with the church and its members. Newcomers are trying to find a way into the life and ministries of your church, so it's important to remove barriers and serve their needs.

Welcoming Ministry

TRAINING MANUAL and PLANNING HANDBOOK

Finally, we will use the term unchurched or seeker. By unchurched or seeker, we mean anyone who has not attended a church activity, other than a wedding or a funeral, in the past six months. By this definition, unchurched people or seekers may be those who have previous involvement with church but now have little or no connection to a congregation.

**Welcoming is not
about growing your
church.**



A UMNS photo by Mike DuBose

**Welcoming has
everything to do
with how we make
people feel.**



Welcoming as Ministry

How does your church welcome people? Is the welcome little more than the initial encounter, or does the lifestyle of your church bring new people into Christian community, disciple them and send them out?

Welcoming has everything to do with how we make people feel. Are they comfortable—physically, psychologically and spiritually, from the appearance of the facility to the ease of finding the appropriate place; to being greeted and accepted yet not smothered; to feeling the joy and anticipation of the congregation and the experience of God’s grace; to a worship service that makes sense; to a sense of opportunities for personal and spiritual growth?

Remember a time when you have been a stranger and what made you feel cared for and accepted. Recalling those situations each time you meet someone new will make you sensitive. Welcoming starts with being attuned to the needs and hopes of people. When someone new walks through the door of a church, the first question is cultural: “Is there anyone here like me?”

The answer of the welcoming congregation is, “There are many like you. We welcome you no matter who you are.”

The second question is more personal: “Is there anyone here who is interested in me?” If the answer is no because the congregation is not prepared to receive the guest hospitably, then the newcomer will look elsewhere—or may not look again.

But when a congregation is involved in a welcoming ministry, the answer is “Yes, we are interested in you. Our hearts, our minds and our doors are always open to you.” The message is clear.

The pitfall for many churches is that we think we are friendly because we are friendly to each other. In developing a welcoming ministry, we must begin to see ourselves as others do.

Creating a welcoming and hospitable climate begins at the curb and continues into the heart of the congregation. The ministry of welcoming is not the responsibility of a few people or a committee. It is the responsibility of the entire church family. In a welcoming and hospitable church, the following “bare minimums” are firmly in place.

1. Greeters have the special ability to make everyone feel welcome and appreciated. They are the front line for welcoming God’s guests. They ask, “How can I serve you?”
2. Ushers are your hosts. They make sure guests and members are seated comfortably and to their liking and needs.
3. The congregation engages people they don’t know in conversation, even if those people are members. It’s as simple as, “Hi, my name is _____. I don’t think we’ve met. What’s your name?”

The pitfall for many churches is that we think we are friendly because we are friendly to each other.



A Welcoming Ministry is a vital missional initiative to share the Good News of God's redeeming love for all people.



4. The pastor and core leadership team creates a worship atmosphere that exudes the excitement of having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They make it a point to greet members and newcomers after the service.

What to Expect

A Welcoming Ministry is a vital missional initiative to share the Good News of God's redeeming love for all people, inviting them into one of our worshipping congregations. Our denomination's promise, "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors." is designed to attract newcomers, but to do so with your help. As you embark on this journey, here is what you can expect:

- You will be required to participate by personally asking friends, family and neighbors to join you in the life of your congregation, and a Welcoming Ministry will reinforce what you tell them about your church.
- Equally important, your congregation must fulfill the promise and indeed welcome anyone who walks through the doors of your church with open hearts and minds.
- You will be challenged to take the next step and create a discipleship system for newcomers.

Everything in this resource is aimed at helping you use communication to create a Welcoming Ministry that will fulfill our denomination's mission to make disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world.

Communication encompasses everything we do and say—or don't do or say—and even how we look. That's why this resource contains sections on welcoming and inviting, as well as discipleship. This resource will help you and your congregation:

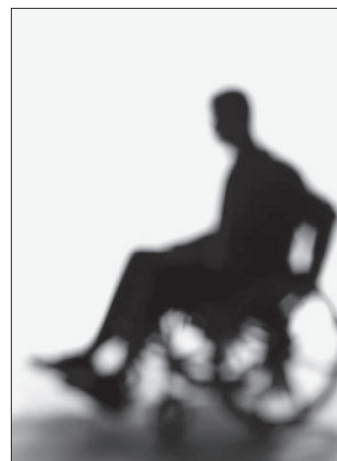
- Look at yourselves in light of what God has in mind for you and where you are;
- Create an environment in which visitors, guests, newcomers and seekers are comfortable and members are ministers of hospitality;
- Learn how and why to invite, welcome and disciple people.

Because you are reading this resource, you must be interested in building and revitalizing your church. You may be laity or clergy. In some cases you may be a member of a team selected to look into developing a Welcoming Ministry. Keeping that in mind, ideas in this resource will help you take four critical steps:

1. See potential for welcoming and inviting new members.
2. Get others on board.
3. Provide support for inviting and receiving visitors, guests, newcomers and seekers.
4. Implement a Welcoming Ministry that engages the entire congregation inside and outside the church.

The materials in this resource are not intended to be a substitute for responsive ministry, but rather tools to help ignite outreach ministry by creating a welcoming lifestyle, or culture, in your

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In a welcoming culture, people new to the congregation are accepted for who they are and are supported in sharing their gifts.



church. In a welcoming culture, people new to the congregation are accepted for who they are and are supported in sharing their gifts.

The key is commitment. The real start to developing your church's Welcoming Ministry is being committed to helping everyone grow in their abilities and willingness to reach out to others.

Because first impressions are lasting ones, people make up their minds about your church within the first ten minutes of contact. Long before the preacher preaches, people most often will have decided if they plan to return. Here are two key tips for developing and sustaining a Welcoming Ministry in your congregation:

Circle of 10: Greet anyone, member or guest, who comes within ten feet of you. Make a special effort to greet the people you don't already know within your Circle of 10.

Rule of 3: Try not to talk to other members for the first three minutes after the service. Talk only to those you don't know and to people that you know are guests. It takes guests about three minutes to exit the church after worship so it's important to make sure someone has made contact with them before they leave.

Training Sessions



**Make the room as
cheery as possible.**



A UMNS photo by Kathy L. Gilbert

General Guidelines for Training

While you will be focusing on one particular training session, be sure to review all the resources in this training manual and planning handbook, as well as the accompanying DVD, for additional materials and videos to enhance your Welcoming Ministry planning and training experiences.

Consider these helpful reminders as you prepare for each training session.

Suggested Materials and Equipment

1. Laptop computer for showing PowerPoint slides and video clips.
2. A DVD player. Optional if using the DVD player on a laptop computer for other visuals.
3. A TV monitor or LCD projector (2000+ lumens) and projection screen large enough for everyone to see clearly. The size of the group will determine the size of the screen needed. A general rule is two people per one inch of screen size (measured diagonally). Therefore, approximately 12 people can comfortably view a 24-inch screen. For large training sessions, consider multiple television screens or use a video projector and large screen. When using an LCD projector, be sure that you have inputs for both computer and DVD player (if the DVD player is separate from the computer). You will want to output the audio to a sound system instead of to the projector.

4. A few Bibles in different versions and translations often stimulates interesting discussion.
5. Writing and presentation materials: markers, newsprint pad or flip chart, scratch paper, crayons, pens/pencils, Post-It Notes, easel (for newsprint pad or flip chart) and tape.
6. Name tags and handouts for all participants.

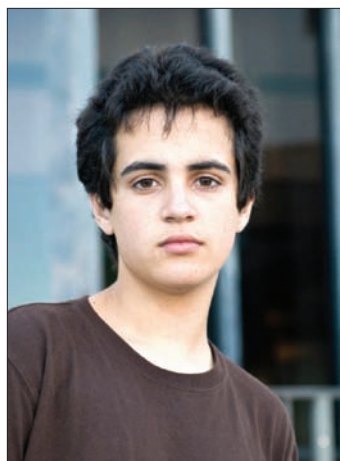
Room Setup

- Depending upon the number of people in the session, arrange chairs and tables either classroom style (for a large group) or in a horseshoe (for a small group).
- Hang “Welcome!” banners around the room (ones you either make or purchase).
- Have “Welcome, we’re glad you’re here!” signs directing people to the room.
- Make the room as cheery as possible.
- Have music playing in the room as people enter.
- Model welcoming behavior by having at least one person at each door welcoming guests and instructing them what to do, where to sit, etc. Keep in mind that your group will be asking the same questions that others will be asking when they visit your church: “What’s going to happen to me here? Is there anyone here like me?”

Model welcoming behavior by having at least one person at each door to welcome guests.



Personally invite those people you especially want to be part of the session.



- Use the “Comfort Checklist” (see pages 236–237) to evaluate the environment for each training. You will want to make your members as comfortable as possible.
- Make sure the trainers or facilitators connect with each person in the room. Model everything you will be training others to do.
- Consider using an icebreaker activity while waiting for everyone to arrive. A common one is “personal bingo,” in which everyone has a prepared handout with attributes listed in squares (“Has at least three indoor pets,” “Has hazel eyes,” etc.). Participants go around the room seeking out people with those attributes and having them sign that square. The game’s goal is usually to get all the squares signed; however, the real objective is to get people to interact.

Preparation for the Sessions

1. Decide the details of the session:
 - Where it will be, when you will have it.
 - What people will participate on the training team and as trainees.
 - How long you want the session to be.
 - Whether you’ll do the session multiple times to involve more people, etc.
2. Determine whether you want to serve refreshments and who will be responsible for those arrangements.

3. Personally invite those people you especially want to be part of the session. Send reminders (postcards, emails, etc.), especially for training sessions involving teams and church leaders.
4. For sessions open to the entire congregation, publicize the training in church publications, announcements, etc. In this way, you may gather people who might be interested but are not on your list of people to personally invite.
5. Pray for the training session to be successful. Set a goal for the desired number of participants, and pray about it. A few days ahead of the training, get the sign-up list and pray for each person by name.
6. Look through the material in advance, at least several days ahead of time, so you can locate all the items you will need. Supplement these outlines with other ideas and information you believe would work well with your congregation.
7. Involve other team members in leading the training. Ask them to read Scripture, be role play partners for training participants, help present some of the material, etc. Be sure to contact people ahead of time to ask them to help.
8. Preview the videos before the training, and note what points you want to make if participants don't mention

Pray for the training session to be successful.



Remember to use your creativity and adapt the ideas to your local context.



them first. Cue the video clip(s) so you don't have to search for the right segment during the session.

9. Read the Bible passages and consult Bible study materials to prepare discussion comments.
10. Prepare handouts for all participants, with a few extras ready in case people attend but haven't registered in advance.

Remember to use your creativity and adapt the ideas to your local context. Above all, remember that your efforts help to fulfill our promise of "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors."

Suggested Guidelines for Group Discussion

Engaging participants through discussion where ideas and experiences can be shared is a key component of your training sessions. Listed here are suggested best practices to get the most from discussions.

- Focus on discussing the points, not criticizing the person
- Allow people to finish their thoughts without interruption.
- Watch for the movements of the Spirit in conversation—God is waiting to lead us in a new direction.
- Listen, listen, listen.
- What's said in the group stays in the group—no outside chatter or gossip.
- Everybody participates; nobody dominates.

WOW! Worship of Welcoming

A 1–2 Hour Worship or Workshop Experience

Prepare the congregation for a special-invitation Sunday and get the most return on your training efforts by making welcoming the topic of worship for one Sunday or more. You'll reach the majority of people in your congregation at one time by using the tools of Welcoming Ministry to pull together a service that teaches and allows practice opportunities in a worship setting.

This outline offers options to help you make welcoming the topic of worship during several Sunday services. If you want, you could address the topics as a short series that helps prepare the congregation for an upcoming special-invitation Sunday. For instance, you could use these ideas to prepare a series titled "The People of The United Methodist Church" with three themes in as many weeks: "Open hearts," "Open minds," and then "Open doors."

The goals of this session are to:

- Reach most of your congregation, all at one time, with important teaching about welcoming.
- Through messages, music, and media, encourage your members to live up to the promise of "Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors."
- Cast a vision for a new way of behaving as welcoming people in your church and in the world.

Cast a vision for a new way of behaving as welcoming people in your church and in the world.



Use large visuals, such as banners.

These ideas carry the message of welcoming to the entire congregation.

This outline offers many options for creating a worship experience that touches multiple generations while delivering the important message that all people matter to God and that we, as God's people, are called to welcome everyone as children of God.

Preparing to Lead this Session

Listed here is a suggested outline to assist you in a special invitation worship service. This outline and suggestions could also be reinterpreted and adapted for one or more training sessions. The provided "scripts" can either be used verbatim or paraphrased to communicate the intended message. Feel free to adapt this suggested plan to meet your time frame, church's needs and participants' interests, knowledge, skills and attitudes.



A UMNS photo by Heidi Robinson

1. Review the "General Guidelines for Training" on pages 38–42 as you prepare to lead this training session.
2. Pray for guidance.
3. Review the materials for this special worship service with your pastor and worship committee. Supplement this plan with other ideas and information you believe would work well with your congregation.

4. Involve other members of your Welcoming Ministry team. Ask them to present some of the material and help with other tasks related to the service, such as technical support for showing videos, etc.
5. Preview any videos associated with this session and note what points you want to make if participants don't mention them first.
6. Prepare handouts for all participants and team members who will help with the session.
7. Prepare the sanctuary. Think of ways to change the look and feel of the sanctuary, adding warmth and reinforcing the message of "welcome." Here are a few ideas:
 - Use large visuals, such as banners. You can have new banners made or purchase the "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors." banners from United Methodist Communications.
 - Add welcome mats and/or signs to the entrances; a simple sign printed from a computer, nicely handwritten, or embellished in calligraphy would be good; involve the children and add a "homey" feel by having the elementary-age Sunday School classes make colorful welcome signs with crayons or markers.
8. Provide name tags (remember markers, too) for this service if you don't normally have them for your

Think of ways to change the look and feel of the sanctuary, adding warmth and reinforcing the message of "welcome."



A UMNS photo by Mike DuBose

Provide name tags for members and visitors to wear for worship.

congregation. Greeters and ushers could lead people to a table in the back of the sanctuary, where they can make their tags. See how the tags go over and assess whether you want to make the name tags a permanent addition to your Sunday morning experience.

9. If your worship space has moveable furniture, rearrange the seats in groupings of 8 to 10 in semi-circles or circles; consider using round tables to allow for discussion if you offer practice options for welcoming conversations.

Worship Options

The General Board of Discipleship offers assistance with worship planning through The Center for Worship Resourcing. The center provides worship leaders with quality United Methodist music, liturgy, and preaching resources for faithful and vital local church worship. For more information, gbod.org/worship. In addition, this resource offers several “Worship Liturgies” on pages 286–293.

Service Outline and Suggestions

This outline follows a pattern presented on pages 16–32 of The United Methodist Book of Worship. Please refer to that resource for more information and details. It offers many ideas, sample prayers, and other suggestions. With minor variations, this format works for both traditional and more contemporary worship experiences.



A UMMS photo by Mike DuBose

Entrance: As people come together for worship, this time can include greetings, music, prayer and praise.

- Gathering: informal greeting, announcements, welcoming guests, quiet meditation.
- Greeting and Hymn: greeting from the leader; processional hymn or upbeat music.
- Opening Prayers and Praise: a collect, prayer of confession and words of pardon, or litany, then response from the congregation.

Ideas for Gathering and Greeting

During informal and formal times of gathering and greeting within the service, offer times for the congregation to welcome others. Here are a couple ideas to try:

1. Illustrate the "Circle of 10" at the passing of the peace or greeting time with a 10-foot string, ribbon, or rope. To show the length, have someone hold an end and stand in place while you circle around (or vice versa). Explain what you are doing as you do it, then encourage everyone to participate by using these or similar words:

We'd like to try something new this morning for our time of greeting. _____ (Name) is helping me show something called the "Circle of 10." I'm making a circle

Holy God, loving and open, you desire all people to be in relationship with you.



**Loving God, you know
the workings of our
minds and the secrets
of our hearts.**



A UMNS photo by Kathy L. Gilbert

with a radius of ten feet around _____ (Name) to help you visualize how far that is. Now, here's your part: We want you to speak to everyone within your 'Circle of 10' that you don't already know. Your friends will understand if you pass them by to speak to a guest. Don't be shy. Okay. Go!

2. Greet guests from the lectern even if you don't have any newcomers that day. This announcement signals that we expect to see new people every Sunday and reminds the congregation to look for newcomers. Be sure not to put the guests on the spot, but call attention to the fact you're glad they are there by saying something like this:

Good morning, my name is _____. Welcome to _____ church. If you are a guest here for the first time, we're glad you chose to be with us today. The words to the songs are in the books in front of you (show hymnal), and the prayers are printed in your program. I hope you will pick up a guest packet at the welcome center in the back of the church (or wherever yours is located) after the service. We also have a time for coffee and conversation in the room just outside our worship area (or wherever yours is located), so please feel free to stop by. If you need anything, please ask an usher or someone sitting nearby.

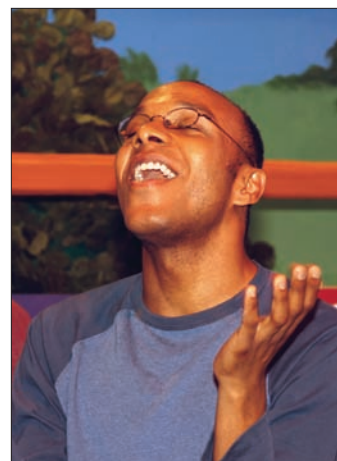
3. Option if using the "Welcoming Tips" handout (see page 282): During the announcements, call attention to the handout and encourage the congregation to try the ideas.

Sample “Collect” Prayers

The United Methodist Book of Worship defines a collect as a short prayer with five distinct elements, including an address to God, recognition of God’s attributes, the petition itself, the intended result, and a final doxology. The two prayers below follow this format. Perhaps you can use them as inspiration for additional collect prayers.

1. Holy God,
Loving and open, You desire all people
to be in relationship with You.
Help us to be like You, open to others with our hearts,
minds, and doors,
that we may share Your grace and peace
as we help others know You
through Christ. Amen.
2. Loving God,
You know the workings of our minds
and the secrets of our hearts.
Change those parts of us that keep us from living up to the
promise that You desire, for us and for Your church,
so we may become Spirit-filled people
who welcome all who seek You
through Christ. Amen.

**Change those parts
of us that keep us
from living up to
the promise that you
desire for us and for
your church.**



A UMNS photo by Mark Foltz

We all have different gifts. Some are more obvious than others, but all are important.



A UMMS photo by Heidi Robinson

Possible Hymns and Anthems

The United Methodist Hymnal and its supplement, The Faith We Sing, offer many songs that complement a message of welcome. The “Worship Liturgies” in this resource (see pages 286–293) offer ideas for opening hymns from those resources.

Work closely with your music director to select anthems the choir could offer to enhance the tone of welcoming during the opening moments of worship.

Proclamation and Response

Scripture lessons can be presented through reading, preaching, music and other arts; responses to the Word include commitments, offerings, etc. Both church leaders and congregants can present various parts of the proclamation and response, which are as follows.

- Prayer for Illumination: Bless the reading of the Word (see the “Worship Liturgies” on pages 286–293 of this resource).
- Scripture: Read the passages for the day (perhaps the lectionary readings).
- Sermon (Message): Interpret one or more passages through word, illustration, and other means; children’s message optional.

- Response: Invite the congregants to Christian discipleship, commitment to ministry, consecration, etc.
- Concerns and Prayers: Share joys and concerns, pastoral prayer, litany, etc. (can be during Opening Prayers and Praise, too).
- Confession, Pardon, and Peace: Confess sins, show signs of reconciliation (confession and pardon can be during Opening Prayers and Praise).
- Offering: Present monetary and other gifts; share Communion or music when appropriate.

Children's Sermon Idea

In congregations that have children's sermons, it will be important to explain and illustrate welcoming so all can understand. In this way, you will help the children realize that they, too, can help welcome others, especially other children they don't know. One way of voicing this is to ask the children if they have ever had a birthday party. You can then get a show of hands and see if they get excited; meanwhile, try to keep them focused. Some other questions you can ask:

- What kinds of things did you and your parents do to get ready for the party: maybe clean the house or put up decorations? Get a few comments from children.
- What did you do to make the other children know you were glad they came to your party? Get comments.

**Our gifts are
to benefit the church,
not ourselves.**



A UMNS photo by Mike Dubose

The first biblical example of hospitality (Genesis 18) sets the tone for responding as God's people to guests in our midst.



- What do you think you would do for someone you don't really know, so they feel welcome at your party? Any ideas?

See if anyone says anything. If not, prompt with these thoughts: Maybe you could be sure you talk to them so they don't feel left out, or let them know the names of the other kids. What else could you do? (Pause for responses.) You know, Sunday morning at church is kind of like a party, a celebration for people who love God. Have you noticed that there are sometimes people at our celebration that we don't know, maybe children who are new here? What can we do to make sure they know that we want them here? (Pause for responses.)

Thank the children for their ideas, and close with this or another short prayer: Thank You, God, for making us feel welcome at Your party Help us do the same for others. Amen.

Scripture and Sermon Options

These Scriptures might prove especially useful for teaching welcoming in a worship setting, particularly as a three-part series:

1. Genesis 18:1–15: Open Hearts. Abraham and Sarah receive three visitors. This first biblical example of hospitality sets the tone for responding as God's people to guests in our midst. Using this text, you could explore some of these ideas about welcoming:

- Offer hospitality to everyone.
 - Going too far in welcoming a stranger.
 - Welcome people just to show hospitality, not to get something in return.
 - Remember that all people are important to God.
 - Care for the stranger as you would for Christ.
 - Be generous with time, attention, food, kindness, etc.
 - Strangers may have surprises for us, gifts we receive just by knowing them.
2. Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12: Open Minds. In letters to the church at Rome and the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul offered insights and instructions to help the congregations as they struggled to unify believers of diverse backgrounds. Paul used the metaphor of the body to describe the church and offered direction for harmonious living as the body of Christ. Using either text, you could explore some of these ideas about welcoming:
- We all have different gifts. Some are more obvious than others, but all are important. With welcoming, some people may feel intimidated by others who seem more comfortable or more adept at welcoming people. Rather than envying those people, we can seek to learn from them and emulate their example. Remember that our gifts are to benefit the church, not ourselves. Some people deserve special attention and honor. That includes guests, whom we welcome as if we're welcoming Christ.

Paul used the metaphor of the body to describe the church and offered direction for harmonious living as the body of Christ.



One person's open heart and mind can lead to change in many lives.



- Do not treat others as if they are inferior or have the attitude that someone is more loved than anyone else. No matter who comes through the doors as a guest, we are called to welcome them, not judge them.
 - Welcoming requires humility and willingness to serve others rather than building up ourselves at their expense.
3. Acts 10:23b–48: Open Doors. The Church began with Jews who converted to Christianity as they believed in Jesus. Because Jewish law forbade contact between Jews and Gentiles, this episode became a pivotal moment in what the church considered acceptable in spreading the gospel and interacting with those who would make them “unclean.” Using this text, you could make these points about welcoming:
- One person's open heart and mind can lead to change in many lives.
 - It's important for us to be open to others with whom we might not normally associate. By closing ourselves off to others, we may miss a tremendous opportunity to serve God, grow as Christians, and help others know Christ.
 - Peter's life and witness led Cornelius to turn to him to explain more about God. An invitation to discuss spirituality offers a welcoming opportunity.

- It sometimes helps to have others with us for support, both in welcoming and in being welcomed. Peter took fellow believers to meet this Gentile; Cornelius had his family with him when he met the believers.
- Welcoming requires reaching out to others and going to them, not just expecting them to come to us.

Multimedia Options

For a more contemporary worship experience, here are some ideas to enhance the Scripture presentation with multimedia elements:

1. Several videos included in this resource could enhance a contemporary worship experience that teaches welcoming. Consider these options:

- "A Tale of Two Churches." At about eight minutes, this would take an investment of time in worship but could pay big dividends in illustrating welcoming. Since it focuses on Scriptures of welcoming, you could use it in place of a sermon, and then allow congregants to discuss the clip in pairs or small groups.
- "Reunion," the short clip (1:20), could be used as an introduction to a sermon or, again, as a discussion-starter for the congregation.
- To add an element of humor to worship, consider using "Real Church TV" (2:45) to accompany the message.

Welcoming requires reaching out to others and going to them, not just expecting them to come to us.



A UMNS photo by Henri Giles

It's important for us to be open to others with whom we might not normally associate.



A UMNS photo by Paul Jeffrey

You could do part of the sermon and then show the clip in the middle before using it to bring home your final points about welcoming.

- Perhaps the most poignant clip, “Out of the Ashes” (3:01) tells the real-life story of a man, now deceased, whose life changed for eternity because of the welcome he received at a United Methodist church. You could use this clip at the end of a sermon to highlight that welcoming really can change lives forever.
2. Many contemporary films offer excellent illustrations of topics relevant to welcoming. Be sure you have the proper licensing to show film clips in your church. United Methodist Communications can assist you with purchasing the license. Call UCom Customer Service at (888) 346-3862 for information about ordering a CVLI (Christian Video Licensing International) license. Here are just a few film examples:
- [While You Were Sleeping](#) offers several examples of the main character, Lucy, being welcomed into a family, even though she is a stranger.
 - [Keeping the Faith](#) shows the interaction of Jews and Gentiles in a modern-day setting, and also illustrates ways in which a young priest and a young rabbi introduce some contemporary attitudes and elements to their worship settings.

- The Count of Monte Cristo explores issues of faith, revenge, and redemption, as a man loses years of his life, falsely imprisoned. Through his relationship with a priest, the man confronts his anger with God and, ultimately, finds his way back to God.
- Chocolat looks at a small, French town through the eyes of a newcomer. Though at first the townspeople don't know what to make of this free-spirited woman, they end up being transformed by her influence on the community.
- Pay It Forward gives a modern-day spin to the Parable of the Sower, and shows in poignant ways how one life touches another and another, as we seek to do something to help another with no expectation of anything in return.

More Music Ideas

These ideas would be especially appropriate for the Proclamation and Response portion of worship.

Suggestions from The United Methodist Hymnal:

- 393 "Spirit of the Living God"
(an invitation for the Spirit to change the heart)
- 399 "Take My Life and Let it Be Consecrated"
(a commitment to serve)

An invitation to discuss spirituality offers a welcoming opportunity.



**Change my heart,
 O God.**

- 432 "Jesu, Jesu" (an invitation for Jesus to teach us how to love and serve others)
- 440 "Let There Be Light" (a song about open hearts and minds)
- 454 "Open My Eyes, That I May See" (seeing and doing God's will)
- 530 "Are Ye Able" (letting God transform our spirits to be a beacon to others)

Suggestions from The Faith We Sing:

- 2086 "Open Our Eyes" (to prepare hearts for the message or for pastoral prayer)
- 2152 "Change My Heart, O God" (a response to the message, this song says just what the title indicates)
- 2160 "Into My Heart" (an invitation appropriate for a response to the message)
- 2165 "Cry of My Heart" (devotion and following where God leads)



Special Music to Complement the Sermon

Many contemporary Christian groups have written and recorded songs to help Christians remember that there's a world full of seekers we need to reach beyond the fellowship

of believers. Check your local Christian bookstore for ideas. Many stores have listening stations for previewing songs and CDs, along with knowledgeable staff members who have a passion for contemporary music. Here are some special music options exploring the theme with a contemporary feel:

1. "If We Are the Body" (by Casting Crowns, © 2001-2003): This 2003 contemporary Christian hit addresses the hurtful signals that churches sometimes send to people who come seeking God while challenging Christians to reach, heal, and love people in the name of Christ. To listen to the song and obtain more information, visit CastingCrowns.org.
2. "Saving Grace" (by Grant Cunningham and Matt Huesmann, ©1998): Recorded by the group, Point of Grace, this song offers a picture of a young woman, Grace, who would "never darken the door of any church; she would say what for... no one there would care for me" as a way to remind listeners that we need to go where Grace is to show that God is real and that we do care.
3. "Shine" (by Peter Furler and Steve Taylor, © 1994): A hit for the Newsboys, the song encourages us to shine as a light and "make 'em wonder what you've got."

The Great Thanksgiving and Communion

This time in worship offers thanksgiving to God for mighty acts through Christ or, through communion, reenacts Jesus' actions in the upper room with the disciples the night before He died on the cross.

**Hospitality is not
about what you do,
it is about who you
are becoming.**

—Father Daniel Homan
from Radical Hospitality: Benedict's
Way of Love



**Thank you, God, for
these gifts, which we
now return to you.**



A UMNS photo by Mike DuBose

In services without communion, offer a prayer of thanksgiving (see several options in *The Book of Worship*) and/or *The Lord's Prayer*.

In services with communion, offer the Great Thanksgiving, *The Lord's Prayer*, Bread and Cup.

Music to Accompany Communion

People from United Methodist churches all over the country have written songs based on our promise of "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors." One is available through Cokesbury as an audio recording or sheet music. Visit Cokesbury.com if you are interested in ordering it and using it for worship. Also, ask your annual conference staff if they know of songs written by people in your area, or if you have talented staff or members who would be able to write a song, ask them to put their gifts to task for the effort.

Another song idea from [*The Faith We Sing*](#): 2268 "As We Gather at Your Table" (especially appropriate for a Communion Sunday that focuses on welcoming).

Sample Great Thanksgiving Prayer

It would be good to thank God for receptive hearts and open minds here. For a non-Communion service, you can use this prayer as a lead-in to *The Lord's Prayer*:

Thank You, God, for these gifts, which we now return to You. May we use them to follow the example of Christ, who showed us how to welcome others into our hearts by loving all people in Your name. Help us to remember the words of Jesus as we seek to open our minds and hearts to 'the least of these' and minister to them as if serving Christ himself.

Sending Forth

- Bless people as they go forth for ministry.
- Hymn or dismissal with blessing: Congregation stands to have the leader bless and send them into the world for ministry.
- Going forth: Perhaps a closing song or informal greetings among those gathered can precede the congregants' exit.

Closing Hymns

For these hymns, from The United Methodist Hymnal, think "Great Commission" and send people out to spread their new welcoming hearts and spirits in their neighborhoods, workplaces, and so on:

568 "Christ for the World We Sing"

571 "Go, Make of All Disciples"

585 "This Little Light of Mine"

593 "Here I Am, Lord"

Help us to remember the words of Jesus as we seek to open our minds and hearts to "the least of these" and minister to them as if serving Christ himself.



A UMNS photo by Shaun Lane

As you depart through these open doors, may the example of Christ guide you to have hearts with room for others.



A UMNS photo by Linda Worthington

Dismissal with Blessing (Benediction)

At the conclusion of this worship experience, it would be good to encourage the congregation to live in ways that welcome others and invite people to know more about the hope and faith that we have through Christ:

As you depart through these open doors, may the example of Christ guide you to have hearts with room for others and minds ready to receive a message from God through them. Go in peace.

Rule of Three

Teach or remind members of the “Rule of Three” as you dismiss them. If you’ve used the “Welcoming Tips” handout during the service, you could refer to it as the “Rule of Three” or simply use the words below:

Before you leave, take the next three minutes to speak to people you’d like to get to know. Especially remember to talk to those who are guests today.

Handouts



Comfort Checklist

Because we are so accustomed to our own environment, some of these things may seem like trivial matters, but when visitors, guests, newcomers or even members enter God's house, if these things are lacking they will be noticed. For those that attend regularly, things like leaky faucets, squeaky doors, burned-out lightbulbs and dirty carpets tend to be unnoticed after about four weeks of constant exposure. However, others, especially first-time visitors, will notice right away.

Use this checklist to create a plan to make the building a safe and welcoming haven for members and guests.

- _____ Every sign is in good repair. The messages are clear and timely. Someone in a passing car can read outdoor signs from any angle.
- _____ Directional signs are adequate to move people into and through the building easily.
- _____ The grounds, exterior and interior are in good repair (no weeds or peeling paint).
- _____ There are "visitor" or "guest" parking spots.
- _____ There is adequate parking, and it is easy to navigate. Consider having an "umbrella brigade" to help on rainy or snowy days. If your church has off-site or parking from a distance, consider a door-to-door shuttle service.
- _____ Entrances are clearly marked and well-lighted.
- _____ There is an information table where people can ask questions.
- _____ Bulletin boards and other visual displays are timely and interesting.

Comfort Checklist (continued)

- _____ Greeters are stationed at all entrances.
- _____ The sanctuary is aesthetically pleasing with ample, comfortable seating.
- _____ Lighting inside the building creates an atmosphere of celebration and warmth and is sufficient for reading.
- _____ The temperature inside the building is comfortable, not too hot or cold.
- _____ There is music playing as people gather for worship or other gatherings.
- _____ Members, as a whole, display a genuine, ongoing attitude of friendliness to everyone.
- _____ There is a special time for fellowship before or after worship and other gatherings.
- _____ In general, there is little or no church-speak or jargon used in our printed materials and verbal instructions, such as "program" instead of "bulletin," etc. so visitors are not confused by unfamiliar words.
- _____ There is a good sound system.
- _____ There is childcare in a safe, clean environment with qualified staffing.
- _____ There are clean, well-stocked restrooms.

Welcoming Tips

Here are some ideas that might make it easier for you to welcome others to our church. Feel free to come up with other ideas or adapt these on your own. These are just to get you thinking about welcoming as a personal ministry, right there in the pew, and a lifestyle for our church.

Circle of 10: Greet anyone, member or guest, who comes within ten feet of you. Make a special effort to greet the people you don't already know within your Circle of 10.

Rule of Three: Please do not talk to other members for the first three minutes after the service. Talk only to those you don't know or people you know are guests. It takes guests about three minutes to exit the church after worship and we need to make sure someone has made contact with them before they leave.

Don't know what to say to a guest? Here are a few conversation starters:

1. Offer a handshake and say, "Hello. My name is _____, and you are ...?"
2. Wait for a response and repeat the person's name so you make sure that you get it right and so you can more easily remember it.
3. If you think you know the face but can't recall the name, try this approach:

"Hello, I'm _____. I believe I've seen you here before but I don't know that we've had the opportunity to meet. What is your name?"

4. Don't be embarrassed if you're greeting a member and don't know that person's name—or be offended if someone doesn't remember yours. We need to offer grace to one another, just as we would to new people.

Resources



Worship Liturgies

The resources provided here can be used as worship texts or as starters to stimulate the development of your worship resources. All of them should be carefully selected and appropriately adapted for use in your church's setting. These resources represent varied liturgical styles. No single church will find all of the resources useful.

While there are some "performance" suggestions included with these resources, each planner will need to consider basic performance issues, such as pace and pauses, silence before and after prayer, whether to print the texts in bulletins or to use these resources in a spoken context, and other considerations.

Calls to Worship/Greetings

For use at the beginning of the worship service.

1. The love and peace of Jesus Christ be with you.
And also with you.
Once we were strangers with no hope and without God in the world.
Here Christ gathers us to share as the household of God.
Thanks be to God.
(based on Ephesians 2)
2. In the name of the God who gathers us,
let us welcome each other.
In the name of the God who illuminates and feeds us,
let us give ourselves to the Word proclaimed and shared.
In the name of the God who sends us,
let us rest in God that we may go in the power of the Spirit.

Worship Liturgies (continued)

3. In the name of the Creator, who loves us, we open our hearts.
In the name of Jesus Christ, who gathers us, we open our minds.
In the name of the Holy Spirit, who stirs our imaginations, we open our doors to the God who dwells among us.

(A hymn or song of praise and gathering would be appropriate following this call to worship.)

4. The love and peace of Jesus Christ be with you.
And also with you.
The risen Christ is with us!
Thanks be to God.
(adapted from The United Methodist Hymnal and The United Methodist Book of Worship)
5. Hail! Lord Jesus, risen from the dead!
Hail! dawn treader and death defier!
Hail! tomb opener and stone roller!
Hail! blessed triune God.
We delight to give ourselves to you
in the mystery of your mercy and presence.
6. Lord, open our lips,
and we shall declare your praise.
Open wide our hearts,
and we will see and hear and bless one another
in the name of your son, Jesus Christ.

Worship Liturgies (continued)

See also the following texts that may be adapted as greetings or used as calls to worship: Psalm 118:19, Psalm 139:3–23 and Jeremiah 29:13.

Using a concordance or an electronic Bible search tool, create your own greetings and calls to worship, searching words like: open, search(ing), alone or lonely, belong, longing, desire, etc.

Suggested Opening Hymns

This is a limited list of opening hymns appropriate for the emphasis of Welcoming Ministry. Planners should consult the hymnal indexes in exploring the fuller possibilities. See especially “Opening Hymns” on page 948 of The United Methodist Hymnal.

In The United Methodist Hymnal:

- 158, “Come, Christians, Join to Sing”
- 328, “Surely the Presence of the Lord”
- 334, “Sweet, Sweet Spirit”
- 388, “O Come and Dwell in Me”
- 560, “Help Us Accept Each Other”
- 617, “I Come with Joy” (when there is Holy Communion)

In The Faith We Sing:

- 2018, “Honor and Praise”
- 2019, “Holy”
- 2039, “Holy, Holy”
- 2046, “Womb of Life”
- 2236, “Gather Us In”

Worship Liturgies (continued)

Opening Prayers

For use before or after an opening hymn or song. For additional opening prayers see [The United Methodist Book of Worship](#).

1. God of our journeys—of far countries and homecomings—
you gather us here with all of our longings and questions.
Look not on our doubts but upon our yearning to be with you.
Overcome in us poisoned images that alienate us from you.
Bring us near to you in the truer light of Jesus
eating with sinners and holding children on his lap. Amen.
2. The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Let us pray:

(a brief silence for entering into awareness of God's presence)

O God, holy and mighty,
like a strong runner, you do not tire or collapse in exhaustion.
In this moment of truth telling,
we confess that we are stressed out and weary.
We can't seem to catch our inner breath.
We want to stop running but we don't seem to know how.
Gather us into your holy peace and rest,
to retreat from the pressure of doing,
and to be with Jesus
who took his disciples into the desert to pray. Amen.

Worship Liturgies (continued)

Litany of "Open hearts. Open minds. Open Doors."

An act of confession

Voice 1: I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. (Revelation 3:15–16.)

Voice 2: I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me. (Matthew 25:42–43.)

Voice 1: Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. (Revelation 3:20, 22.)

Voice 2: Christ stands at the door, knocking.

Left side: Sometimes our hearts are open, but we do not feel.

Right side: Sometimes our eyes are open, but we do not see.

Left side: Sometimes our doors are open, but we do not connect.

Right side: We are lukewarm on the inside and cold on the outside.

Worship Liturgies (continued)

All say or sing the ancient Greek prayer of the church or its English version:

Kyrie, eleison. Lord, have mercy.

Christe, eleison. Christ, have mercy.

Kyrie, eleison. Lord, have mercy.

Note: This is a time of mystery and openness to the Spirit; a time of yearning to be more alive to God and others than we are. Singing opens our spirits to the transforming grace of Christ. Kyrie means “Lord” in Greek and eleison is interpreted as “have mercy.”

There are several wonderful and simple ways to sing this prayer in The United Methodist Hymnal (UMH) and in The Faith We Sing (TFWS).

UMH 483 (sing several times)

UMH 484 (sing several times)

TFWS 2275 (to the familiar Dvořák melody)

Following the Kyrie, all pray:

Lord, help us to live what you desire in and through us.

Help us to hear and see and touch you in the need of those around us.

Thank you for your forgiveness and fresh starts. Amen.

Worship Liturgies (continued)

Prayers for Illumination

1. Holy One, open to us the door of your Word
that we may enter into the way of wisdom
with open hearts and minds
and welcome what you say to us today. Amen.
2. Word of life, open our hearts and minds to hear
what you say to us today through scripture and sermon,
that we may be a people open to your presence in others
here and in the world. Amen.

The Peace

Passing the peace of God is an act of blessing and giving the peace of Christ to one another, and is distinct from greeting one another. Congregations can learn to practice blessing and declaring the gift of God to one another, not only in the ritual context but in daily living. It is an ancient and biblical practice (Luke 10:5, Luke 24:36, John 14:27) among Christians.

If this is a new practice, consider introducing it with the story of Jesus stilling the storm in Mark 4:35–41 and his saying to the storm, “Peace, be still”).

Leader: The peace of Christ be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Let us offer one another signs and words of peace and reconciliation.

Here clasp hands with others around you and say to one another: The peace of God be with you.

Worship Liturgies (continued)

Welcome

Greeting one another in informal ways during the gathering of the people or at some point during the early part of the service is a simple way to reach out to all who have come and to be sure that those who are newly present are greeted. It is different from sharing the peace of God, though it is an expression of the love and care of God.

Affirmation of Faith

These affirmations in The United Methodist Hymnal are strongly linked to the strategic statement for our brand promise of “Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.”

883, “A Statement of Faith of The United Church of Canada”

886, “The World Methodist Social Affirmation” (the “Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy ...” could be sung, using UMH 482, 483 and 484). You can download a musical setting of this affirmation from the General Board of Discipleship’s website (gbod.org/worship/music/social.html).

887, “Affirmation from Romans 8:35, 37–39”

Field Assignment Ideas

Individual Field Assignment Ideas

Use these individual field assignment ideas to expand your training plans, to enhance the knowledge and skills of your Welcoming Ministry team and to engage small groups.

1. On Sunday, find an unattended door somewhere in the church building. Welcome and direct people from that site.
2. Go to visit another congregation on Sunday to see how it feels to be a stranger there. See what you can learn from their good ideas or practices (or even from their not-so-good ideas and practices).
3. Begin a welcoming ministry in your pew on Sunday, talking to everyone you don't know within ten feet and introducing new people to others around.
4. Hang out in the parking lot before church to offer help to a newcomer to get to worship, Sunday school, childcare rooms, etc.
5. For three minutes after worship on Sunday, talk only to people you don't know. One exception: If friends come up to you, introduce the newcomers to them, too.
6. Sit beside someone who's sitting alone in worship and make an effort to get to know him or her, then introduce that person to others who share some of his or her interests or characteristics.
7. Take a single friend, neighbor, or co-worker to lunch and ask about his or her struggles, joys, fears, challenges, and needs to develop compassion.

Field Assignment Ideas (continued)

8. Talk with newcomers from the past six months to find out what they're looking for from life. See whether they share any common ideas that could lead to the forming of a new group or ministry.
9. Carefully read the classified advertisements in the weekend papers, paying special attention to the personal ads, and tell about what you find.
10. Arrange for a local mental health professional to talk to Sunday school classes or some other church group(s) about addiction, self-destructive habits, etc., and how to work with people with those struggles.
11. Find out about the dates of fund-raising events in your community and lead the congregation's participation by putting together a calendar and communication plan to get people involved.
12. Try one or more of these activities to take your welcoming efforts outside the walls of the church:
 - Visit a home-bound, nursing-home bound or hospitalized member before next session.
 - Volunteer at a homeless shelter for the remainder of the study.
 - Collect donations to give to a community cause.
 - Ask someone from outside the church to help you with a community service project (Make A Difference Day, Habitat for Humanity, a local telethon, etc.).
 - Organize a "fix-it-up" day to help single women, widows, and home-bound members with home projects they can't do by themselves.

Field Assignment Ideas (continued)

13. Investigate the demographics of your community; assess whether your church reflects the diversity of the community; report your findings and some recommendations to your church leadership.
14. Visit a congregation that is predominantly a different race or nationality and report back to the Welcoming Ministry team what it felt like to be in the minority.
15. Go to a church service of a different denomination, perhaps a Catholic or Orthodox congregation or a Pentecostal church, and tell the Welcoming Ministry team about your impressions of their religious practices in comparison to your church's practices.
16. Invite someone (or a few people) from a different race/religion/ethnicity to come to the Welcoming Ministry team and discuss differences and common connections.
17. Analyze your church's publications to see the balance of articles about families, children, youth, singles, etc. See if there is an imbalance in addressing the interests of the groups and whether the language might exclude certain groups.
18. Take someone of a different race, religion or ethnicity (from work, your neighborhood or social group) out to lunch and talk to them about your similarities and differences. Ask about things that you've always wanted to know but were afraid to ask about your similarities and differences to gain understanding and compassion.
19. Spend 30 minutes in solitude, to reflect upon your day and think about what your life means; write your observations and thoughts in a journal.

Field Assignment Ideas (continued)

20. Hang out at a health club (bookstore, coffee shop, etc.) to listen to conversations among the other people and, if appropriate, engage in conversation. Use your active listening skills.
21. Write letters to people who are home-bound, in nursing homes, or in the hospital, expressing God's love for them.
22. Write notes to newcomers that offer welcome and encourage their return.
23. Look for opportunities to discuss someone's joys/struggles/fears related to their relationships with others and with God.
24. Keep a journal to write down new thoughts and ideas that are inspired by your experiences with Welcoming Ministry.
25. Write a letter to someone who showed God's love to you, thanking them for their gift.
26. Show God's love to someone else (perhaps a youth or a child you love) through the gift of your time.
27. Investigate the services offered by others in the community for disaster assistance—find the holes and develop a plan for the church to fill them.
28. Volunteer for a crisis hotline.

Field Assignment Ideas (continued)

29. Be trained as a disaster volunteer or a First Aid giver, to be prepared to serve in times of need/crisis.
30. Correspond with people serving in the armed forces.
31. Develop a thank-you writing project with your Sunday school—especially the elementary classes—to acknowledge people serving in helping professions (police, firefighters, nurses, teachers, etc.).
32. Find out about Stephen Ministry training and explore whether you have the gifts to be involved in the ministry.
33. Reach out to offer assistance to a single parent in your congregation who could use a break or a “parent’s night out.”
34. Spend some time getting to know your neighbors and find out what they do on Sundays (remember, don’t invade their privacy).

Field Assignment Ideas (continued)

Team or Small Group Field Assignment Ideas

Your team or small group can have a major impact on your church, serving as ministry models and setting the tone of welcoming for the entire congregation. Remember what Margaret Mead, the renowned anthropologist, said about the power of small groups:

“Never doubt that a small group of faithful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

What will your team or small group do that will change your world?

1. Each team or small group member goes to a different church on the same day as a “Mystery Guest” (see pages 226–229) and later gather for lunch to discuss your experiences and what you can do to improve your congregation’s welcoming ministry based on what you learned.
2. Each team or small group member chooses a different part of the Welcoming Ministry materials to use to help the congregation:
 - Someone starts work on the Communications Plan Worksheet (see pages 302–303).
 - Someone reviews the Comfort Checklist (see pages 236–237).
 - Someone uses the Walk-through Assessment to review the church grounds, etc. (see page 266)
 - Someone begins evaluating the church’s printed materials (see pages 304–305).

Field Assignment Ideas (continued)

3. Every team or small group member commits to take turns serving as greeters for evening activities at the church (directing people to rooms, answering the phones, etc.), especially on nights when community activities take place there.
4. Every team or small group member agrees to be available to serve in welcoming ministries for the church at special “high-traffic” times—such as Christmas Eve/Easter/Open House—to answer phones, direct people, be sidewalk or parking lot greeters, distribute door hangers in the neighborhood, etc.
5. The team or small group sponsors a joint worship service or discussion group, complete with a fellowship meal, with a congregation of a different denomination, race, or ethnicity.
6. The team or small group organizes a scavenger hunt with a purpose: to gather information about how your community perceives your church.
7. Commit, as a team or small group, to be available to help “as needed” at the church when a crisis or tragedy hits your community or congregation (e.g. help serve meals or be ushers during a church-related funeral).
8. Investigate the three greatest needs in the community by interviewing police, school guidance counselors/teachers/principals, county agencies for youth and aging, local United Way officials, etc. and then develop a plan to present to your administrative board or council on ministries to start new ministries that address those needs.
9. Work as a team or small group on a Habitat House.

Field Assignment Ideas (continued)

10. Begin planning for how the church can become a haven for the community in times of crisis (e.g. become a Red Cross shelter, collect money for relief efforts, open the church for prayer, have special services, etc.) – basically a crisis response plan for the church, complete with plans to open the doors, welcome people, and serve the community.
11. Work with the church leadership to determine how the church helps people to explore their gifts and then express them through appropriate ministry opportunities; if the congregation has no mechanism for connecting people to fulfilling ministry, lead the efforts to create a structure/system of ministry.
12. Have the congregation write love letters to the church and then present them on a special occasion (church anniversary, church conference, etc.).
13. Plan a special memorial service for those who want to remember loved ones and those who pointed them toward God.
14. Work as a team or small group to create an action plan to move forward with other groups using the Welcoming Ministry materials, implementing a Welcoming Ministry in the church, becoming a Welcoming Certified congregation, and becoming more welcoming as a congregation.

Communications Planning Sheet

Develop a communications plan for each step of the way: Initial introduction, classes, special welcoming/inviting event(s).

1. What is our vision for the future?
2. What is the purpose of communicating the plan? What attitude, behavior or action do we want the congregation to adopt?
3. Who are our target audiences in the congregation? People who have similar needs, such as high school students, active members over 55, parents, etc.
4. What messages will have the most effect on each audience? What “need” or “value” do they have around which we can form our messages? In other words, how would you convince them of the importance of participating in any activity?

Communications Planning Sheet (continued)

5. What communications vehicles will we use that will best communicate to our members?
Letters, sermons, newsletter, bulletin inserts, bulletin boards, e-mail, phone calls, personal contact, balloons, teaching events, existing small groups, special small group meetings, etc.

6. When will we use each of these methods?

7. Who will do what, when?

8. How will we know if we are on the right track?

Evaluating Your Church's Printed Materials

Church Bulletin (Order of Worship), a.k.a. "Program"

1. Is everything we do in the service listed and are all the terms easily understood by unchurched attendees?
2. Are the words to the Doxology and the Lord's Prayer printed, or are references given as to where they may be found?
3. Is the page on which the scripture is found in pew Bibles noted?
4. What improvements are needed?

Church Newsletter

1. Is the newsletter readable? Is the print clear?
2. Are there ways the design could be improved to be more reader-friendly?
3. Does the newsletter have a clear purpose?
4. Do the articles reflect the life of the church in interesting, compelling ways?
5. Are the church name, address, phone numbers, Web address and times of services included?
6. What improvements are needed?

Evaluating Your Church's Printed Materials (continued)

Church Information Brochure

1. Is the brochure attractive and eye-catching?
2. Is the information inclusive and up-to-date?
3. Does it answer, "How could this church be important to me?"
4. What improvements are needed?

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“welcoming” into the search box) offers helpful suggestions about ways to make worship itself more welcoming for people with disabilities, and provides several other suggestions for additional reading and further exploration.

Movies and Videos that Exemplify Welcoming

City of Angels. This film contains some thought-provoking ideas about free will, how we feel the presence of God, and the existence of angels in our everyday lives.

It’s a Wonderful Life. If you want to keep with the Christmas theme of this session’s lesson, watch this holiday classic and think about the circumstances of George Bailey’s life. Pay special attention to his prayer and the answer to it. Consider how God speaks to us through the circumstances and people of our lives.

Prince of Egypt. Check out this animated version of the story of Moses; pay particular attention to the way the encounter told in Exodus 3 is depicted.

UMTV Videos and Member Profiles. These 2–3 minute video clips are available from umc.org/videos and demonstrate how United Methodists are in ministry and mission around the world. Many show how churches are living a welcoming lifestyle and are ideal for training, workshops and worship settings.

While You Were Sleeping. Discuss what it would feel like to be the main character, Lucy, a stranger being welcomed into a family. Consider also what it would be like to be the new family of someone who has no family.

The Wizard of Oz. Consider how the diverse collection of main characters became like a family. Watch how they found, together, that they had all along what they were looking for—but wouldn’t have discovered on their own.