



## PROJECT PREMISE

In a 2009 study, Rev. Dr. Rebecca Voelkel reports on research to determine the overall health of welcoming congregations, and whether undergoing an LGBTQ Welcoming Process leads to greater involvement in other social justice issues. Voelkel's survey of 1,200 welcoming and affirming congregations points to the fact that, as a result of an intentional process and decision to welcome and affirm LGBTQ people, congregations report:

- More openness to the plight of oppressed and marginalized people, specifically those in poverty
- More focus on environmental stewardship
- Greater involvement in homeless and hunger ministries
- More active justice advocacy
- Greater outreach to impoverished elderly people

Based on this data, Voelkel suggests that a Welcoming Process provides congregations the opportunity to clarify their mission, overcome fear, and take appropriate risks in other justice work. She concludes that "the Welcoming Process, when done well, is a deeply spiritual process for a congregation whose impact is felt far beyond LGBT[Q] issues."

(Rebecca Voelkel, *To Do Justice: A Study of Welcoming Congregations*. Washington, D.C.: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Institute for Welcoming Resources, 2009, p. 9. [www.welcomingresources.org](http://www.welcomingresources.org).)



## PROJECT INSPIRATION

Whether the planners were aware of Voelkel's research or not, a 2017 conference called "Love Now!" reflected its findings. Conceived and implemented by members of the Passaic Valley Classis (RCA) and hosted by Ponds Reformed Church in Oakland, New Jersey, **the event arose from a "What's next?" curiosity about the wider implications of being welcoming and affirming of LGBTQ people.**

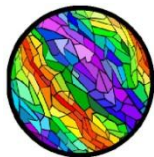
- *What did we learn by becoming welcoming and affirming?*
- *How can we build on what we've learned to create a broader ministry of hospitality?*
- *What do we still need to learn?*
- *How can we share these learnings with others in our classis or community?*

The outcome was a one-day conference at which Room for All was grateful to offer leadership. The event offered participants a forum to learn about other groups in their communities who may feel excluded by the church, and explore ways to respond with a wider welcome. A participant at "Love Now!" commented, **"Once you decide you're going to be welcoming, you'll be surprised at who comes to your door."**

**RfA's experience, and that comment, prompted us to ask, why wait for surprises? Why not be prepared? What if other welcoming and affirming RCA congregations could engage in an intentional opportunity such as this, to apply what they've learned as Room for All churches? What if they continued to listen and learn from other marginalized communities in their particular area to create a wider welcome? And why keep it a secret? Why not share this vibrant journey with other local churches?**

We asked the event organizers for permission to develop the concept for other welcoming and affirming congregations, or those that might want to be. This resource is the result. Thanks to their generosity, and supported by a grant from Marble Collegiate Church, Room for All is pleased to offer this practical and flexible event-planning prototype for other congregations to adapt within their own contexts. Our goal is to affirm the journey that welcoming and affirming churches have already taken, and to encourage them to share and apply the discoveries, knowledge, and skills gained along the way toward an outcome of ever-expanding hospitality—a wider welcome—where there's room for all.

*Welcoming congregations become spiritual communities whose work and ministry are more faithful to the breadth and depth of the heart of religious vocation—helping to remake the world as God would have it to be—more just and equitable and joyous—for ALL created persons and beings. (Voelkel, page 9)*



## EXPLORING “A WIDER WELCOME” WORKSHOP

**Before you decide to offer an event like this, take time to reflect on where you’ve been, where you are now, and where you’d like to be.**

1. Identify some people who were invested in your congregation’s decision to become intentionally welcoming and affirming of LGBTQ people, as well as those who benefited from the outcome. Perhaps there are newer members—LGBTQ or allies—for whom this was an important factor in their decision to become part of your congregation. Invite them all to a gathering to reflect on that process and the results.
2. At that meeting, identify what you did and why, some fears that you faced, what you learned (individually and collectively), what you might do differently, and the ways that welcoming LGBTQ people changed your life together.
3. Stop to celebrate your church’s witness, and give thanks. You have a story to tell, and you’re ready to write the next chapter!
4. Respond to Rebecca Voelkel’s research: Has becoming welcoming and affirming affected your awareness of wider justice and hospitality for other marginalized people or concerns in your community?
5. Talk together about questions such as:
  - *Do we truly welcome all, and do we want to?*
  - *How does privilege of race, class, gender, sexuality, or status prevent such a welcome?\**
  - *Can we apply what we’ve learned as a welcoming and affirming congregation to a broader ministry of hospitality? What do we need to lay down, and what do we need to take up?*
  - *How can we foster awareness in our community or classis to encourage a wider welcome?*
6. Invite the group to prayerfully consider planning and implementing a “Wider Welcome” awareness-raising event.
7. Once you have a few interested people, share the vision with others in your church or classis, form a core team, and you’re off!

**\* Has your congregation or classis already done educational work about such topics as recognizing privilege, anti-racism, intersectionality, or consciousness around intent vs. impact? Just as you may have engaged in intentional efforts to understand sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, consider that education about concepts such as these is implicit in creating a wider, more hospitable welcome to all God’s beloved.**



## PLANNING GUIDELINES

**Pick and choose from these possibilities, adapt them to what seems right for your setting, and have fun planning “A Wider Welcome!”**

1. Identify your goals for this event. What do you hope to achieve, and who is your audience? Keep in mind that this event may hold benefits for your own congregation’s hospitality ministry as well as that of the wider community or classis, including churches that may still be exploring a process toward LGBTQ welcome and affirmation.
2. Brainstorm about the diversities represented in your community (racial, ethnic, immigrant/refugee, sexual/gender, socio-economic, educational, professional, ability, age-related, environmental/geographic, etc.).
3. Which groups are in the majority/minority? Who is marginalized?
4. Are there organizations and/or ministries that serve, represent, or advocate for those communities?
5. Who are knowledgeable people from these communities, organizations or ministries who could share their information and experience as workshop leaders? Prioritize your list.
6. Based on this list, your budget, and your building, decide how many different workshops you can offer. Will any be offered more than once? Give yourselves permission to start small, or to dream big, including seeking a better-equipped church or facility to host the event, if necessary.

### A FEW WORKSHOP IDEAS

*Developmental Disabilities*

*LGBTQ Identities*

*Aging & Eldercare*

*Mental Health Awareness*

*Environmental Justice*

*Racial Diversity*

*Homelessness & Poverty Concerns*

*Migrants, Immigrants, Refugees*

*Others?*

7. Before you proceed with contacting prospective workshop leaders, **SELECT A DATE, typically three months in advance.**
8. Prepare a clear description of what you will need to communicate to prospective speakers. What do you want them to accomplish, in what length of time, and how many times? How much can you pay?
9. Invite speakers accordingly. Based on their acceptances, draft a schedule for the event (see page 6). For publicity and registration purposes, give speakers a deadline for providing a brief description of their particular workshop.
10. Based on honoraria and other anticipated expenses, plan a budget for the event. Can you offer a sliding scale for registration fees? Would someone underwrite the event?



## PLANNING WORSHIP

**This day is rooted in God's abundant hospitality; we encourage you to include opportunities for worship!**

1. Depending on the schedule you select (see page 6), here are some worship options:
  - 30-minute opening worship with homily, 15-minute closing debrief & prayer
  - 15-minute opening devotions, 30-minute closing worship with homily
  - 15-minute opening and closing
2. Who will be the worship leader(s)? Who will provide musical accompaniment? Who will select hymns? Who will be responsible for the sound system?
3. If you include a homily, brainstorm about options: one of your own pastors, or a guest? Consider an LGBTQ minister; or, if your congregation is primarily white, a person of color.
4. Will there be an offering? How will you designate it?
5. Do you need a printed order of worship, or someone to run a projector or sound system?



## YOU'RE ALMOST THERE!

**FOOD:** Depending on your chosen schedule and registration fees, plan a menu\*, decide on volunteer vs. catered, buffet vs. sit-down, etc.

**CHILD CARE:** Will it be offered? What's the age range? Cost? Caregivers?

**PUBLICITY:** Designate a good communicator to handle publicity for your church website, social media, bulletin/newsletter announcement or flyer to other churches in your community and classis, local media, word of mouth, all of the above! (See page 7 for the "Love Now!" flyer.)

**REGISTRATION:** Decide on the most efficient way(s) to collect sign-ups and workshop selections. A Facebook event or other online format? Pay at the door? Payment methods? Registration deadline? **\*If you're including a meal, be sure to ask about dietary restrictions.**

**FACILITY NEEDS:** Check with workshop and worship leaders about their equipment needs. If necessary, borrow or rent easels, projectors, screens, etc. Assign workshop locations according to the number of people signed up for each.

**ARRANGE FOR PEOPLE TO SET UP, TAKE DOWN, AND CLEAN UP.**

**GIVE THANKS, ARRIVE EARLY, AND TRUST GOD'S WELCOMING SPIRIT TO LEAD THE WAY!**

## SAMPLE SCHEDULES

### Saturday

8:30 – 9:00	Check-in, Continental Breakfast
9:00 – 9:30	Welcome and Opening Worship (with homily)
9:45 – 10:45	Workshops Session 1
11:00 – 12:00	Workshops Session 2
12:15 – 1:00	Lunch
1:15 – 2:15	Workshops Session 3
2:30 – 3:00	Closing Plenary (highlights, takeaways, thanks) Prayer, Benediction

### Sunday Afternoon

OPTION 1:	Begin with a light brunch following morning worship.
1:00 PM – 1:15	Welcome and Opening Devotions
1:30 – 2:30	Workshops Session 1
2:45 – 3:45	Workshops Session 2
3:45 – 4:15	Coffee Break
4:15 – 5:15	Workshops Session 3
5:30 – 5:45	Closing Plenary (as above)
OPTION 2:	Instead of opening with a meal, close with a light supper.



**IF YOUR IMAGINATION EXPANDS, YOU MIGHT EVEN CONSIDER A FRIDAY EVENING AND SATURDAY SCHEDULE!**

**Congratulations on your decision to explore ways your congregation may be called to extend “a wider welcome” for all God’s beloved. If this event nudges your awareness, we encourage you to reflect and listen together about the next step toward “*helping to remake the world as God would have it to be—more just and equitable and joyous—for ALL created persons and beings.*”**

**LET US KNOW IF WE CAN HELP!**



[info@RoomforAll.com](mailto:info@RoomforAll.com)



# NEED INSPIRATION? Here's the flyer for the October, 2017, "Love Now!" Event

(Thanks to Rev. Nathan Busker and the "Love Now!" planning team.)

# LOVE NOW!



## A CONVERSATION ON OPENING HEARTS AND MINDS

*Saturday, October 21*

### Love Now Conference

Saturday, October 21st @ Ponds Reformed Church  
341 Ramapo Valley Road, Oakland, NJ 07436

8:30 am to 3:30 pm

\$20, \$25 after Oct 8th

Includes continental breakfast and lunch.

8:30 am	Coffee/Check In
9:00 am – 9:30 am	Opening worship
9:45 am – 10:45 am	Session 1
11:00 am – 12 pm	Session 2
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm	Lunch
1:15 pm – 2:15 pm	Session 3
2:30 pm – 3:30 pm	Closing

### Rev. Joanne Van Sant

#### Broadening the Parameters For People With Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

According to the study by the Collaborative on Faith and Disability, 84% of people with disabilities say their faith is important to them. So how do we provide an inclusive experience in our communities of faith for people with Intellectual and Developmental disabilities? In our time together we will discuss challenges and solutions that will enhance each of our community's ability to be welcoming and inclusive. We will exchange ideas and creative approaches we already use and build new approaches for these uniquely abled people.

### Marilyn Paarlberg

#### From Pique to Peak - First Steps on the Climb to LGBTQ Inclusion

Becoming an LGBTQ-affirming congregation often starts with restlessness; a rankling that perhaps the church's "all" doesn't yet mean all. When that pique is carefully nudged and nurtured, the result can be a sacred journey toward fuller embodiment of God's love.

To Register for the conference go to:  
[www.pondsnj.org](http://www.pondsnj.org) or call 201-337-6744  
Deadline is October 15th

### Participants Can Choose 3 Workshops

#### Rev. Randy Van Doornik - Respect, Compassion, Community - Welcoming people in poverty to ministry

Issues such as racism, class division, geography and even theology often hinder the Church in mission & ministry among the very poor. We will respond to these challenges by discussing some foundational principles guiding a church's approach to ministry among people living in deep poverty.

#### Rev. Nathan Busker & Sandy Khabbaze The Blessing of the Other. A Story of Working with Refugees

What happens when a church declares it is open and affirming? The leaders will share their stories of how an open and affirming posture opened up ministry opportunities the church never imagined.

#### Cameron Van Kooten Laughead - Entangled and Embodied: Unpacking the Intersecting Identities We Hold

"Intersectionality" is not a new term, but is one that's met more and more frequently, and with some confusion. What is it and how does it apply to me (or to my neighbor?) Are you sure I'm someone with intersecting identities? (The answer to that last one is Yes!) This workshop will help us each unpack our own identities, how they connect within ourselves and to others, and how/when we can use these identities to advocate with oppressed persons.

#### Rev. Andy Rienstra - Mental Illness a Family Story

How does a family deal with their 20-year old daughter who is diagnosed with Schizophrenia? Rev. Andy Rienstra will share his personal story over the past 37 years with his daughter.