

Session 1: Assessment/Beginnings

Learning Objectives:

1. To Begin...

- discovering what we know
- discovering what we do not know
- exploring what we will do

2. To Create A Worthwhile Group Climate...

- establishing guidelines
- sharing fears, concerns, expectations
- discovering common ground

3. To Gain A Better Understanding Of Homophobia And Heterosexism

Session Summary:

This session is about setting the stage, building common agreements and trust, and looking ahead. After an introductory exercise about homophobia to pique interest, the rest of this session is basic to all anti-oppression curriculums and many other curriculums as well.

Background:

The first exercise is designed to give people the experience of having to suppress important information about themselves in everyday settings—against their choice. The idea is to mirror one major way in which homophobia and heterosexism work -- silence. Notice how easily people follow directions and notice their reactions. The questions tend to get predictable responses. Often someone forgets what is on their list, or ignores the rules, or finds a way to talk around something listed. Some people may say they enjoyed the creativity of the exercise. If this comes up, ask if this might be one reason why gays and lesbians are perceived by many to be more artistic and creative? Remind participants that when people are oppressed, often their lives come out in other ways—sometimes through art or music or drama. There

may well be some truth to the stereotype that gays and lesbians are creative. Allow for a lively discussion.

The other exercises are very similar to the revised welcoming congregation curriculum and are about establishing common trust and understandings. The last exercise is an attempt to build common understanding through definition and experience.

Materials needed:

1. Index cards—3 per participant
2. Pencils
3. Newsprint
4. Marker
5. Timer with second hand

Preparation:

- Arrange chairs in semi-circle.
- Have newsprint and markers ready. Prepare newsprint with ground rules, assumptions, the fears and gains chart, and the terms chart. You may want masking tape to post these sheets elsewhere.
- Have enough index cards and pens/pencils for everyone.

Workshop Plan:

Opening Reading/Hymn (5 minutes)

(You are invited to pick a reading and/or an opening hymn. Singing The Living Tradition is an excellent resource. Other options are a moment of silence, a prayer, or a brief check-in. You are encouraged to also begin with a chalice lighting. Please submit any readings and/or hymn choices that you have used successfully to the OBGLTC as feedback for possible inclusion in future editions of LWC.)

Activities:

10 List Exercise (45 minutes)

Tell participants that they are going to do an exercise that will help them get to know each other better *and* give them a taste of what they will experience in the weeks to come. Give each person an index card and a pencil. Tell participants that you are going to give them four questions that they will write down the answers to on their cards. They are not to share their answers yet.

Question #1

Write down the names of at least three people who are important to you.
(These should be people they know. They do not have to be alive now. They do have to be people. They may write more than three if they wish.)

Give participants a minute to complete the answer. Proceed to question #2.

Question #2

Write down the names of at least two places that are important to you.
(Participants get to define the word "place" as it has meaning for them. They may write more than two.)

Give participants a minute to complete the answer. Proceed to question #3.

Question #3

Write down in short form at least three significant life events that you tend to tell people about.

(Again, participants get to define this for themselves. You may wish to give an example like the birth of a child, having a commitment ceremony, or getting a raise. They may write more than three.)

Give participants a minute to complete the answer. Proceed to question #4.

Question #4

Look at your list. Think of at least two other things that are important to you that are not on the list. Write those down now.

(They may write more than two if they choose.)

Once the participants are done, tell them to form a group of four and to await further directions. Suggest they find people they know less well than others in the room if possible. If you have an odd number, groups of three work better than groups of five. The closer you get to equal groups the better.

Once participants are in their groups, tell them their first task is to pick someone to go first and to have that person hold up their hand when s/he is chosen. If need be, tell participants it is easier to go to first.

Once all groups have chosen someone, tell participants they are now going to introduce themselves to one another in the group. The first person will have two minutes to do so. Tell participants that there are two rules for their introductions:

1. The person introducing her/him/hirself may not stop talking during the time.
2. The person introducing her/him/hirself may not mention anything that is written on her/his/hir card during this time.

Ask for any questions. Time these two minutes carefully. You may wish to give a 1-minute warning. Tell participants to begin.

After the time is up, move immediately to the person on the left of the first speaker. Inform participants this speaker will have two minutes and thirty seconds to introduce her/him/hirself. Remind them they have the same rules as the first speaker. Tell them to begin.

Repeat this process adding thirty seconds to each speaker until you are done. If you have a group that is smaller (for example, one group of three beside two other groups of four), their last round should be a time when they ask each other questions about each other. Again, they may not mention anything on their card during this time.

When all groups are done, ask them to shift to face you, but not to leave the vicinity of their group.

Have the group discuss the exercise using the following questions:

1. How did it feel?
2. What was hard about it?
3. Was there anything you liked about it?
4. What was the point of the exercise? (If necessary, ask how this exercise relates to homophobia and heterosexism in our society? Take some time when it comes up (or bring it up if necessary), to talk about how silence is a leading way that oppression is kept in place; that bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people often understand the oppression they live with as a silencing of their lives. One of the interesting things of this exercise is that if the entire group is all one sexual orientation—regardless of what it is—you may have a harder time getting to this point of the exercise. In only three of the 40 times this exercise was piloted was someone from the group unable to articulate this point. Twice it was with two groups of heterosexuals, once with a group of gay men.)
5. How many people accidentally forgot and said something on their list?

6. How many people talked around something on their list?
7. How many people decided to say something on their list regardless of the two rules?
8. What would it be like to have to do this exercise for 2 hours instead of two minutes? Two days? Two weeks? Two months? Two years? Two decades? A lifetime?
9. What have they learned from this exercise?

Invite participants to return to their groups for five minutes and “come out” mentioning anything to the group that they did not have a chance to say earlier. Specifically use the phrase “come out” in the directions.

Invite the participants back into a large group.

Agenda (5 minutes)

Present the agenda on newsprint for the session. Let them know what is coming up for the remainder of the evening. Briefly discuss each item. Allow for any questions about the agenda *only*. Other questions should be handled during the overview.

Agenda
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opening• 10 List Exercise• Ground Rules for Sessions• Overview of Living the Welcoming Congregation• Assumptions of all participants• Fears and Gains• Terms--Homophobia, Heterosexism, Biphobia, Transphobia• Closing

Tell participants that the rest of the night is about setting the structure and basic knowledge for the curriculum. We will agree on ground rules, take a look at the overall curriculum, look at the assumptions made of the participants, examine what we hope to get out of the curriculum, and understand some basic terms.

Participation Guidelines/Ground Rules (10 minutes)

Discuss and ask for group agreement about the guidelines for all participants to follow throughout the course of the workshops. Put up on newsprint.

1. Respect anonymity. Ask for confidentiality. *(It's fine for people to process the workshop with others provided no identities are revealed. If people feel like they would like to say something that stays completely in the room, they may ask for the group to hold these remarks in confidence.)*
2. Set own boundaries for personal sharing.
3. Speak from personal experience. Avoid generalizing.
4. Respect differences between others, between yourself and others, and even inside yourself.

5. Use effective communication skills. *Examples: "I" statements. Letting people finish thoughts. Allow opportunities for all to speak, particularly introverts.*

Overview of Living the Welcoming Congregation (15 minutes)

Put up the following Overview on newsprint for all to see. Explain that the curriculum is set up in 5 stages: Assessment, Discernment, Analysis, Action, and Reflection.

Add that while most of the time will be spent on Action (of which there are 3 potential paths) the other stages are integral to the whole.

**LIVING THE WELCOMING
CONGREGATION**

Assessment:

Session 1 Assessments/ Beginnings

Session 2 Where are We? Where Am I?

Discernment:

Session 3 If I Am Here, What Next?

Analysis:

Session 4 If This Is What We Need To Do, How Might We Do It Best?

Action:

Session 5 Setting the Structure For Your Work

Sessions 6 -10 Pick a Path and do Sessions 6 – 10 within the path. See chart below
(Eg. For the Individual/Personal path, do Sessions 6A – 10A)

Optional Session

Working with Children and B/G/L/T Issues
(This session can be inserted at any point, or used as a workshop that the LTWC group offers for the congregation)

Reflection:

Session 11 Being an Ally

Session 12 Us and Them Jeopardy!

Session 13 What Was Our Story of This Work?

A. Individual/Personal		B. Congregational		C. Community	
6A	Individual History	6B	Congregational History and Change	6C	Community History and Change
7A	Assessment/ Beginnings	7B	Taking A Tour of the Congregation	7C	Panel Discussion
8A	Linking The Oppressions	8B	How Change Happens In Our Congregation	8C	Effective Social Action and Public Witness
9A	Bisexuality	9B	Using What We Have Learned to Plan for Change	9C	Planning a Course of Action
10A	Transgender, Gender, And Identity	10B	Implementation	10C	Implementing the Plan in Your Community

Story

What was our story in this work and learning?

Explain that the work of sessions 1-5 will lead to sessions 6-10. Sessions 11 & 12 will give further opportunities to reflect, learn and have fun. Session 13 will ask us to examine and reflect on what we have done together and look at possibilities for the future.

Explain further that the big decision will be whether to focus this time with the curriculum on the group as individuals, as a congregation, or on the community. Add that one of the designs of the program is flexibility so that the curriculum may be repeated without being repetitive. This time you may decide to do individual work. The next time may be about work in the community. The third time may be about the congregation or different work individually or in the community.

Explain that this design is in part the reason for the title “*Living the Welcoming Congregation*” and it goes beyond the *Welcoming Congregation* in depth, process, outcome, and focus. Another reason for the title is to help instill the belief that the work of dismantling oppression is not a project but an ongoing commitment to justice. Take a moment and invite reflections from the group about this. Take the conversation a step further and ask participants to think aloud for a moment about how this work would be religious work. You may wish to record these on newsprint.

Ask for any other questions. Summarize and end by saying, the structure is provided, but in many ways they will provide much of the actual material themselves.

Assumptions

(10 minutes)

Discuss the following assumptions (have them on either a handout or newsprint). Invite questions and comments if you wish.

- We have all learned homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia from our culture—stereotypes, fears, misinformation, and hatred are examples of this.
- Our culture encourages us to believe that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality and bisexuality.
- We have very few opportunities to talk openly, ask questions, and explore feelings about sexual orientation and gender identification and our society’s response.
- Blaming ourselves is not helpful or useful. Taking responsibility for learning accurate information is useful.
- We can all help each other. No one person is an expert on bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender issues.
- Assuming people’s sexual orientation is generally not a good idea.
- Our culture is designed for us to assume a person’s gender.

Fears and Gains

(15 minutes)

Distribute 2 index cards to each participant.

Ask them to reflect and then write on fears they may have about doing *Living the Welcoming Congregation*. Be purposefully vague, so that people have the freedom to respond personally, institutionally, or as a member of the larger community.

On the other card have the participants reflect and write on what they hope to gain from *Living*

the Welcoming Congregation. Again, the vagueness of this language will produce a variety of responses.

Tell them that the cards will be read aloud anonymously. No one will be identified or singled out. Also, tell people that if they have no response to one or the other question they should write that on their card.

Collect all cards when done, and redistribute them so that each person has one fear and one gain. You may want to tell participants that they may get their own card but this is okay.

On newsprint create a chart of the fears and gains, which is divided into three categories: personal, congregational, community. As people read the cards aloud, record the statement succinctly in the best category into which it fits. Use your judgment.

Fears		
Personal	Congregational	Community

Gains		
Personal	Congregational	Community

Take a look at where the fears and gains tend to be focused. Ask people for comments. You may also encourage them to suggest other fears and gains that now occur to them if they so choose. Look for trends, clumps, and gaps. These charts may be good to post for the entire congregation to see.

Terms (15 minutes)

Ask people to find a partner. Tell them you are going to ask them a series of questions to discuss. Each question will have two minutes for responses.

1. Describe a time when you have seen someone exhibit prejudice toward someone who is bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender.
2. Have you noticed a way in which bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people are treated differently than heterosexual people in your community? If yes, how are they treated differently?
3. What are some common prejudices people have toward people who are bisexual?
4. What are some common prejudice people have toward someone who is transgender?

On a sheet of newsprint, as shown on the next page, ask for a few answers to each of the questions to post. Write in 3-4 quickly for each.

Homophobia (#1)	Heterosexism (#2)
Biphobia (#3)	Transphobia (#4)

Have participants look at the examples of homophobia and read the definition of homophobia (below) to them. Ask if the examples match the definition. In what ways does the definition match or differ?

Repeat for the other three boxes with the same questions.

Explain to participants that we often know what these words mean not only through definitions and words, but actions as well. These words are a beginning for us to understand our work over these twelve weeks together.

Ask for any questions and move to the closing.

Definitions

Biphobia, n.: The fear and/or oppression of bisexual people, by heterosexual, gay, and/or lesbian people.

Heterosexism, n.: Cultural, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices based on heterosexuality as the only acceptable, healthy sexual orientation.

Homophobia, n.: The irrational fear, hatred, or intolerance of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender people. Homophobia also includes uneasiness with behavior that does not conform to cultural gender-role stereotypes. Homophobia can manifest itself in fear of being gay, fear of being perceived as gay, or fear of being associated with gay people. Homophobic behavior can range from laughter at “queer” jokes to violence against bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender people. Homophobia helps maintain sexism as well as heterosexism.

Transphobia, n.: The fear and/or oppression of people perceived as being transgender and/or not conforming to cultural gender-role stereotypes.

Closing Reading/Hymn (5 minutes)

(You are encouraged to find a suitable one. The difference between the Opening and Closing is that we suggest that one reading and/or one hymn is selected to be used as the closing for all sessions. The Opening may vary from session to session.)

Suggested Hymns

Suggested Readings

Add Your Suggestion

Ask participants to hold hands as they are willing, able, and comfortable.