**“ONA 101: The ONA Process “ workshop**

**2023 Gateway ONA Convocation**

**March 4, 2023**

**Commonly-held Understandings:** by all of us AND the “Building an Inclusive Church” materials:

* We love our churches, & don’t want anything adverse to happen to it if we can avoid it.
* An ONA process will be seen as “change” in the church, & therefore generate fear in some folks.
* Ideally, we would like to have our church grow in membership, at least not decline.
* We would like to attract younger families, especially those with children.
* We want a positive vote/affirmation to be ONA at the end of our process.

**An ONA process is a FAITH-FILLED & faithful process.**

* An ONA Process needs to be grounded in Scripture, based on how Jesus taught us to be welcoming.
* Prayer frames the full process.
* Keep focused on who God is calling your church to be in your community.
* A Core Team of congregants leads the process, not the pastor.
* ALL voices in the congregation need to be heard & truly respected in this process, especially the ones who have concerns. Those concerns help to form your ONA process. *Be thankful* for all voices raised.
* You can peacefully disagree on some issues, then pray that the Spirit moves everyone to a point of greater understanding. DO NOT DEBATE.
* *This takes TIME*. It cannot be rushed. It needs a planned & intentional process.
* It takes TIME for the Spirit to move within the congregation, & within its individuals.
* An ONA process should be unifying & a time of spiritual growth in the congregation.

**Focus** on “Who is God calling us as a church to be in this community”, NOT what does any individual think/feel about being ONA.

-This is about WHO WE ARE as a congregation of Christians, in our community.

**“We already welcome everyone.”** Why do we need to do this ONA process?

**The time is now.**  This is all very personal, & personal stories:

* Personal stories from congregants: of their fears, of their prior encounters/experiences, etc.
* Personal stories from LGBTQ persons, especially in our current political & cultural times.
* Hold all stories in confidence, in our hearts, & honor them.
* THIS IS HOLY WORK. Rooted in our faith. Guided by the Spirit.

**Vocabulary matters:** Open & AFFIRMING.

* L
* G
* B
* T
* Q
* I
* A

**The ONA Process**

“Building an Inclusive Church: A Welcoming Toolkit” (from Welcoming Resources) is designed as a guide for a small group of congregants who wish to facilitate a Welcoming Process in their local congregation. There are four important assumptions:

1. A Welcoming Process needs to be well-thought out, planned and drawing upon wisdom from other congregations that have done a process of their own.

2. A Welcoming Process needs to be grounded in the culture and “personality” of the congregation.

3. A Welcoming Process needs to be based in relationship-building with the pastor, the formal lay leadership, the informal lay leadership, and the rest of the congregation. This is known as “relational organizing,” and one of its key components is listening deeply to what God is saying and doing – in the individual and in the congregation.

4. A Welcoming Process is a spiritual opportunity for the congregation to grow in membership, stewardship and vitality. As such, it should always be presented in the context of the life of faith of the congregation.

Follow the wisdom presented in the Toolkit. However, in the end, crafting a Welcoming Process is more of an art than a science. Therefore, the *assessment of your congregation* – its culture and personality, its theological roots, its likely pace with Welcoming issues – is vital.

**The ONA Process:**

Step 1. Leading the Process

Step 2. Gathering Information

Step 3. Outlining Your Process

Step 4. Building Relationships

Step 5. Making it Official

Step 6. Setting the Frame & Providing Educational Opportunities

Step 7. Writing Your Welcoming Covenant (UCC) or Open & Affirming Statement (DOC), *which must include the specific welcome to persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities.*

Step 8. Conducting an Exploratory Survey

Step 9. Holding the Vote

Step 10. Celebrating & Publicizing

Step 11. We’re Welcoming… Now What?

*Take as much time as you need: a successful ONA process is an extended time of prayer, dialogue, study and discernment. Don’t rush to a decision. Be thorough and give the congregation enough time to assimilate and discuss new information.*

RESOURCES:

[www.welcomingresources.org/welcoming.xml](http://www.welcomingresources.org/welcoming.xml)

* + “Building an Inclusive Church: A Welcoming Toolkit” = *the 64-page book, to download, FREE*.
  + “Building an Inclusive Church Trainings”. *Attend one of these with your core leaders, if possible.*

Scroll down further for LOTS of additional resource materials.

[www.openandaffirming.org/ona](http://www.openandaffirming.org/ona)

Open and Affirming Coalition of the UCC, with everything you need to know about ONA & the process.

www.openandaffirming.org/ona/how/covenants

About ONA covenants, including several examples of Welcoming Covenants.

Barbara Biedenstein

ONA Consultant for The ONA Coalition (UCC)

gbead@msn.com