

Radical Welcome Session 1

Lord! How did we get here?



Purpose: This session is a friendly start to the Radical Welcome Sessions.

- It asks the group to own the time-line of their church.
- It's a good way for people to get to know one another and reflect on changes, outreach and welcome

Note: This exercise is key to the Radical Welcome course. Explain the purpose of the session in advance to relevant leaders: the congregation will be reminiscing, reflecting, storytelling and exploring who they are. It therefore gives a great opportunity for a social occasion, and could easily incorporate a meal or coffee and cakes, and become a celebration of the start of the church's journey towards radical welcome. To do it well generally takes at least an hour and a half: if you need to restrict it to an hour then you'll have to cut down on anecdotes, which would be a real pity since people's stories and ideas give you a picture of the personalities in the congregation.

You might want to consider running this as a Saturday or Sunday afternoon session – it works best when it includes everyone – and yes, we mean everyone – the oldest and the youngest as well as everyone in-between.

Session Outline and Timings:

45 minutes – 1 hour	<p>Setting up the space. Ensure that the room you are using is thoroughly prepared. Check that the practicalities are sorted. (Washing line, flip chart, projector if you are using one.) Think carefully about where people will sit.</p> <p>Take note of the items you will need as outlined in the sheet.</p>
20 minutes	Welcome and Introduction
10 minutes	Worship
50 minutes	Group Activity – pegging the line
10 minutes	Closing prayer

❖ Preparation (45 minutes – 1 hour)

For this session you will need:

1. The congregation or group
2. The facilitator
3. A flip chart or data projector for displaying instructions
4. A very long washing line
5. A stack of A5 paper
6. Thick marker pens
7. Clothes pegs

Organisation

In advance of the day, publicise the event well – seeking to encourage as many as possible to attend. Try to include a celebratory meal as part of this session.

Write the following captions in **big, bold capital letters** on single sheets of the flip chart or for use on a data projector (one question per page/slide. A PowerPoint slide show for use in this session is available free as a resource for use in Radical Welcome).

- How did we get to today?
- What are this church's own particular traditions and habits?
- What are the significant events in the history of our congregation?
- Who and what has influenced us most over the years?
- Happy times and sad times?
- Any big changes?
- What is the style of worship? Has it changed?
- In what ways do we (and don't we) fit in with the locality/community?
- Does exclusion ever happen inside the congregation?
- Who have we found it easiest to include? Why?
- Who have we found it most difficult to include? Why?
- When did we feel God accompany our church most closely?
- Why are we starting to explore radical welcome?

On the day

1. Get someone (with the authority to decide what can and cannot be touched!) to fix your washing line very low – not more than thigh-height at this stage – across the space where you're working and make sure that it's visible to everyone. The washing line would ideally be left up for the duration of the course.

It may be appropriate to take a photograph of the washing line and use this perhaps on the church website.

2. Set up your flip chart or projector where everyone can read that too.

The session

In this first session, it is important to model inclusion right from the start: invite the oldest members to sit at the front where they can see and hear everything. Explain that they will probably be needed most of all, so you can't have them stuck at the back.

❖ Welcome and Introduction (20 minutes)

Welcome everyone to Radical Welcome.

Give an opportunity for people to introduce themselves – either to each other if a small group, or perhaps to the people around them if the group is larger. Try to make this light hearted – maybe encouraging them to share just one good thing about the day so far. Give everyone the outline sheet that explains Radical Welcome.

Give time for people to ask questions

❖ Opening Worship (10 minutes)

Use a format that is appropriate to your group and tradition.

Use silence and either sing or listen to a piece of music. Song suggestions are on the Inclusive Church website in the resources section.

Include: **Reading:** Luke 15:11-32.

Prayer: Searching God: to you no one is lost no one is left behind no one is the price to be paid for the greater good. Give us the same restless desire the same fierce joy which finds grace in every child of earth and makes a community open to all.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, who loved the world and did not count the cost.

Amen.

❖ Group Activity – Pegging the line. (50 minutes)

The exercise involves bringing the 13 statements/questions to the group and encouraging a response to each one in turn.

These responses are pegged on to the washing line.

Don't do the writing and pegging yourself. If there are no children, ask for two adult volunteers; you'll need them – once people start contributing it all gets quite busy.

It's probably better, in most cases, to go through the workshop headings one at a time – although, naturally, you'll have a feel for what suits the gathering. You'll find you get some overlap of answers – but that doesn't matter at all. There is no ideal washing line – each church is remembering and reflecting differently.

When you have set up each question for them, wait patiently. Don't be afraid of silence. Some people may not be used to examining themselves or their church.

Others may be feeling shy. Some may have anxieties about radical welcome and are waiting to be reassured. Keep the silence going until someone breaks it with an answer or a question.

It is much better, as the washing line gains confidence, for them to feel in charge of the washing line – after all, it's their story. But in the event that they slow up, or miss something that you feel to be crucial, there are questions you may want to ask. You will, no doubt, feel your way to your own lines of enquiry but here's a prompt for each heading.

- **How did we get to today?**
Prompt: Why are you here today?
- **What are this church's own particular traditions and habits?**
Prompt: Do you do things differently from other churches in the area?
- **What are the significant events in the history of our congregation?**
Prompt: World events or national ones or just happenings in your church?
- **Who and what has influenced us most over the years?**
Prompt: Are you a "people" influenced or a "tradition" influenced church?
- **Happy times and sad times?**
Prompt: Any really happy or really sad times (personally or locally) recently?
- **Any big changes?**
Prompt: Do you think this church is changing? Society has changed, do you think this church has too?
- **What is the style of worship? Has it changed?**
Prompt: Do people like new things here? What do you think about the changes?
- **In what ways do we (and don't we) fit in with the locality/community?**
Prompt: Any significant changes in the last 5 years? Who's been leaving the area? And who's been arriving?

- **Does exclusion ever happen inside the congregation?**
Prompt: Radical welcome is all about including those outside and inside. Are you sure you welcome everyone? Could anyone be being left out?
- **Who have we found it easiest to include? Why?**
Prompt: Can you remember a great success in welcoming someone new?
- **Who have we found it most difficult to include? Why?**
Prompt: Any disasters?

By the time you reach the final two questions it is unlikely that prompts will be needed.

- **When did we feel God accompany our church most closely?**
- **Why are we starting to explore radical welcome?**

As facilitator – while they are describing their history, you’re trying to get a feeling for the church. So listen for:

- Who says what
- Who says a lot
- Who says nothing
- How they say it – angry? Proud? Timid?
- Whether they talk about feelings
- Or most about events
- Or most about buildings and “things”
- Or most about God
- Or all four
- Does there seem to be a group with no voice (do they need you to prompt them?)
- Who wants a neat, chronological washing line?
- And who doesn’t care
- Who speaks personally
- Who seems to speak “on behalf of the church?”
- If any subjects get “closed downs” and by whom
- Which are the happiest, most harmonious moments of the session
- What subjects (if any!) the whole gathering seems to agree on
- What subjects seem to cause pain?

❖ Closing the session (10 minutes)

Once you have been through all the headings on the flip chart / projector, give people a chance to visit and look at the washing line, and if appropriate, raise it up higher so that it can be seen and preserved until your next session. Bring the session to a close by thanking everyone for their contributions and participation. Remind them this is their story. It is unique and there is no other congregation quite like this one – and as God has been there with them so far, so God will be with them in the future.

End with the reading again (Luke 15:11-32)

Because the passage may be familiar – it may be helpful to use a different translation than the one you usually use, for example Word on the Street or The Message

Followed by this prayer.

Lord, as you know every flower of the field,
Every sparrow on the wing,
Every grain of sand, so you know, intimately,
What went into building up this church,
Brick by brick, soul by soul.
You are the foundation of this church,
The Will behind its building, the Love that holds it together
You know the stories this church remembers
and the stories long forgotten.
You love the people they remember and the ones they missed out.
You are the strength and Gentleness, which kept them going;
You are the Mind which they must make up to follow you in new ways.
We feel your call to be new,
To be transformed,
To be rebuilt more closely in your image.
Love us Lord, as we stretch out our arms wider to the world.
Amen.

Sharing the Peace:

All Stand Leader: Not an easy peace,
Not an insignificant peace,
Not a half-hearted peace,
But the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with us now.
Let us share it with each other.

Radical Welcome is a programme devised and produced originally for the United Reformed Church (UK).

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