

Inclusive God: Looking Forward

So far we have explored how different groups of people have felt marginalised by the Church, because of their ethnicity, economic status, sexuality, gender, disability or gender identity. We have also had a taste of how some church cultures use scripture and tradition to maintain the status quo, even without realising it at times. And, we have seen how Jesus was radical in his inclusion, affirming and blessing those that his society, culture and religion typically excluded.

But what about our own experience in Church? What sort of Church culture are we part of? And where do we go from here?

Typically, there are three basic kinds of congregation:

The inviting congregation:

The visitor is expected to become like the congregation, leaving outside their culture, beliefs and identity. Sometimes this is enforced consciously, at other times it is a sign of complacency.

Typical attitude: Birds of a feather flock together. They also lock together. *"This is who we are and we're not changing."*

The congregation is mainly concerned with growth – and will implement measures to achieve this which tend to be formulaic and will not ask awkward questions of their church culture.

The inclusive congregation:

Anyone who comes to this church will be welcome, but anyone truly “different” are unlikely to become genuine partners. Newcomers may contribute to church life, but this is not sustained, and the main congregation is unaffected.

Marginalised people are offered a place inside the church but on the terms that those who have power in the church keep it and remain largely unchanged.

Only “acceptable” newcomers allowed...

The church has begun to hear, “welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Romans 15:7)

The radically welcoming congregation:

The congregation is a community with open doors and open hearts; newcomers share in mission, leadership, worship and ministries. All voices and gifts are present, including those who are “different”.

The mission and purpose is for liberation, justice and reconciliation of all creation.

God has graciously, prodigally welcomed you, because it is in God's very nature to seek you out and welcome you home when you feel the least worthy. Stephanie Spellman commenting on the Prodigal Son Luke 15: 11-32

Radical Welcome

The Journey: Inviting – Inclusion – Radical Welcome

	Inviting	Inclusion	Radical Welcome
The Message	"Come, join our community and share our cultural heritage."	"Help us to be diverse."	"Bring your culture, your voice, your whole self – we want to engage in truly mutual relationship."
The Goal	assimilation: community invites new people to enter and adopt dominant identity	incorporation: community welcomes the marginalized groups, but no true shift in congregation's cultural identity and practices.	incarnation: community embodies and expresses the full range of voices and gifts present, including The Other
The Effort	Systems and programs in place to invite and incorporate newcomers into existing structures and identity. Rejection or marginalisation of those who do not assimilate.	Stated commitment to inclusivity; but less attention to on-going programs, systemic analysis or power; emphasis on individual efforts	Systems and programs in place to invite and welcome people, including those from the margins: to ensure their presence. Gifts and perspective will be visible and valued; and to ensure that these new communities, gifts and values influence the congregations identity, ministries and structures.
The Result	Healthy members (perhaps with some members who claim marginal identity) but institution and its membership is overwhelmingly monocultural.	Revolving door with people coming from margins only to stay on fringe or leave; institutional structure remains monocultural, with some pockets of difference.	Transformed and transforming community with open doors and open hearts; different groups share power and shape identity, mission, leadership, worship and ministries.

What kind of congregation are we?

If this congregation wanted to become truly inclusive and radically welcoming, what could you do to help your congregation to shift gears and deepen its commitment?

Where can we get help? What signals do we need to send to our communities outside the church walls? What next?

**Remember, we are on a journey,
the road is open-ended,
and none of us are “perfect”**

In fact, you could say that ideals of “perfection” are what closed hearts and minds in the first place...

The Inclusive Church Network

Churches and individuals are invited to join Inclusive Church, to promote greater inclusion and accessibility for all. And to help individuals find an inclusive faith community.

<https://www.inclusive-church.org/>

Source Materials for this session:

Inclusive Church; The Radical Welcome Course <https://www.inclusive-church.org/resources/radical-welcome-course/>

A brave faith: What does it mean to be an inclusive church?

<https://abravefaith.com/2020/06/11/radical-welcome-what-does-it-mean-to-be-an-inclusive-church/>