

# TO DO JUSTICE

## A Study of Welcoming Congregations

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## A Study of Welcoming Congregations<sup>1</sup>

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The past twenty-five years have seen exponential growth of Christian and Unitarian Universalist congregations that have named themselves Welcoming of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities.<sup>2</sup> This growth is the result of prayerful, intentional work by clergy and lay leaders within local congregations and by leaders of Welcoming Church Programs within many denominations.<sup>3</sup> The fruit of this labor is a vibrant and growing movement that has helped congregations become more vital, less conflicted and more focused on their mission of hospitality and justice.

In reaction to this growth and vibrancy, an equally intentional but more covert effort has arisen to attempt to quash the power of the Welcoming Programs and to advocate for homophobic, trans-phobic and heterosexist Church policy.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The title of this report is taken from Micah 6:8... *And what does God require of you but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.* The use of the language of “Welcoming” refers to congregations that have gone through an intentional process regarding their welcome of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons which includes education, a vote and a public statement of welcome. These congregations are recognized and “rostered” or listed by an outside organization—usually a “Welcoming Church Program” which operates within a particular tradition. For example, the Reconciling Ministries Network rosters congregations within the United Methodist Church. Each program has its own language for a Welcoming congregation—“Reconciling,” “Open and Affirming,” “Welcoming and Affirming,” etc. It is important to note that many of these Welcoming Church Programs are over twenty years old and the criteria for Welcome have changed. Therefore, some of the congregations that are listed have only done intentional educational work around lesbian and gay persons. Each of the welcoming programs is working with those congregations that have not engaged transgender issues to do so. In particular, the Institute for Welcoming Resources’ new resource *transACTION* is currently being used to do such educational processes. A free downloadable version of the curriculum is available at [www.WelcomingResources.org](http://www.WelcomingResources.org).

<sup>2</sup> In the last five years alone, the number of publicly Welcoming congregations listed on the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force’s Institute for Welcoming Resources website ([www.WelcomingResources.org](http://www.WelcomingResources.org)) has grown almost three-fold. While an official Welcoming Program does not currently exist in other religious traditions, a project within the five major movements of Judaism (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist and Renewal) is in the planning and testing phases.

<sup>3</sup> For a list of these programs, see Acknowledgements.

<sup>4</sup> One of the prime movers in this anti-welcoming movement is the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD). Using largely secular money sources and covert community organizing techniques, the IRD has sought to dismantle denominations (American Baptist Churches), take over leadership (Southern Baptist Churches) or significantly disrupt the welcoming gains in many denominations (the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ and the Presbyterian Church (USA)). There are several books documenting these phenomena including Howell, Leon, *United Methodism @ Risk: A Wake-Up Call*, [Kingston, NY: Information Project for United Methodists, 2003] and Culver, Sheldon, and John Dorhauer, *Steeplejacking: How the Christian Right is Hijacking Mainstream Religion*, [Brooklyn: IG Publishing, 2007].