

September 19, 2021

3. Opening the Door to Christ — **Galatians 2:11–21 NRSV**

As you consider “Opening the Door to Christ,” try asking: *Is our church welcoming?* and *Would a person attending for the first or second time give the same answer?* A quick “of course” response to the latter by your group’s participants may indicate you have your work cut out for you. At times we’re blind to how we may be “turning to a different gospel” (Galatians 1:6). Admitting that our “outward appearance and common behaviors [sometimes] take precedence over the shared inner core values of the heart” (*S&L Leader*, p. 14) may be difficult for church “insiders.”¹

The issue Paul was addressing in his letter to the Galatian church was how to integrate Gentiles into their fellowship. Likewise, Christians in every era have struggled to discern welcoming, unifying standards for such practices as music, clothing, modes of baptism, governance, food, and so forth. I’d venture to say that many norms were established either by the wisdom of influential leaders (like Paul); consensus of members gathered around the Word (as we Anabaptists try to do); or generalized, unspoken attitudes derived from popular culture (maybe not the best method).

This study challenges us “to wrestle with the meaning of belonging to Christ” (*S&L*, p. 14). Wrestling isn’t easy! As you help participants honestly, openly grapple with whether the door to your church is open to *all* believers, you may want to confess your attitudes and whether they reflect the church’s core beliefs.

For example, I confess to looking down on the visitor who shouts over the worship music as if it were elevator Musak; the parent whose crying baby drowns out the sermon; the girl in the front row of the worship team wearing short shorts; the sound system operator who can’t balance the microphones. What behaviors irritate your participants and tempt them to close their heart’s door?

If I were teaching, I might:

- have participants search the internet for variants of “the welcoming church” or “making church welcoming” and see what issues pop up.
- lead a longer than usual prayer time, asking God to reveal our individual and corporate cultural biases.
- close by re-asking the opening questions above and wondering aloud whether anyone’s answers have changed. Does Christ, indeed, “live in [us]” (2:20)?

—Helen Tellez

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¹. “Most church members don’t see their churches clearly. In almost all of Thom S. Rainer’s consultations, church members perceive their church to be friendly. But . . . he found that the guests typically saw church members as unfriendly. The perception chasm existed because the members were indeed friendly . . . to one another.” *Becoming a Welcoming Church*; Rainer, Thom S.: 9781462765454: Amazon.com: Books



Helen Tellez has been a writer, editor, and copy editor for church and secular organizations for more than four decades. Formerly from northern Indiana, she now resides in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, with her husband, José, where they run a clothing alterations business. Being married to José for 18 years has opened her eyes to the world beyond rural, white America, and she is grateful for the changes in her Christian perspective.

Resources for this session

Salt & Light Videos

These teaching videos are great for leader preparation or introducing each session. They are available on [MennoMedia's YouTube channel](#). **Joe Yoder** is the presenter for Unit 1, Belonging to God. He attends East Goshen Mennonite Church in Indiana.