

Momentum 04
Community Engagement and Advocacy
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Workshop Summary:

The church in America has for far too long had a singular idea of hospitality. It is an idea rooted in the understanding that we are the ones who are ready and willing to welcome the world into the church, or in other words, the church is seen as the welcoming host as the world is seen as the grateful guest. A cursory scan of our hymnals reveals a collection spanning more than 250 years of songs, liturgies and theological underpinnings whose vast majority sees the church's rightful place as "hosting the party." A few of the key phrases and ideas that reflect this understanding are "open doors," "all are welcome at the table," and "gather them in."

However, while this dominant understanding of church as host and world as guest has served us for over two century, as we move into a post-Christendom world this understanding of hospitality has rapidly become a liability for the faithful church. When we operate in this mindset it causes our community engagement and advocacy to appear like a "bait and switch." Our outreach (as good intentioned as it is) seems like a quid pro quo in exchange for church attendance. And yet, culture has moved on. The more we continue to see ourselves as the welcoming hosts the more we will continue to throw a party that no one is interested in attending.

The time has come for the church to reclaim its pre-modern and faithful understanding that we are the guests of the world and of all the tables Christ has prepared in our midst. The more we recover in thought, liturgy, word and practice the understanding that we are the guests of the world the more we will finally again be the Methodist movement.