



# THE WELCOME TABLE™

“CULTIVATING OUR HUMANITY FOR THE COMMON GOOD”



## WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAY ABOUT THE WELCOME TABLE

“I came to understand that the only reason you’re not my friend is you haven’t heard my story.”

“It was educational and informative.... Even though we were mostly with strangers, we felt comfortable.”

“We learned that the best way to do evangelistic work is to train the locals to do it.”

## WHAT MAKES THE WELCOME TABLE UNIQUE

Many terrific organizations focus on systemic change without including relationship and trust building. As a result, their accomplishments often aren’t sustainable because community leaders refuse to continue working with those whom they do not trust.

Others focus on relationship building, but do not carry their successes into work for social justice and toward increasing the understanding of structural racism.

Relationship building and work for positive social change are the hallmarks of The Welcome Table, which bridges the divide between racial equity and racial healing.

## OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

A common problem in racial reconciliation work boils down to a simple question: How do you know when it’s working? The Winter Institute is at the forefront of developing a “Community Compass,” a matrix that aids in assessing a community’s progress in addressing and overcoming racial discord.

### 15 BY ‘15

Our aim is to build a service infrastructure that allows us to partner with fifteen Mississippi communities by 2015.

## HISTORY AND OVERVIEW

In 2006, the Winter Institute began a year of dialogue about race in Mississippi. During that year, many Mississippians made clear their understanding that racial discord has created obstacles for their communities’ development—social **and** economic—and their desire to address it.

The dialogue also revealed that communities didn’t know how to address these obstacles. People didn’t know where to start. Thinking they would say or do the wrong thing, well-meaning community members did nothing. From this deep need to build the capacity of citizens to engage in dialogue regarding race, The Welcome Table was born.

The Welcome Table creates a safe space for diverse community stakeholders to form healthy relationships via open, honest communication. Now in 11 communities in Mississippi and beyond, it is one of the Winter Institute’s signature programs, garnering attention and partnerships from reconciliation organizations as far away Northern Ireland and South Africa.

## OBJECTIVES

The Welcome Table assists partner communities to:

- Understand the importance of listening, storytelling and relationship building as prerequisites to producing real and measurable change
- Understand the consequences of the systems we have inherited in order to develop, together, community-specific initiatives to redress inequities
- Become equipped with the communications tools to accomplish the goals stakeholders identify together to improve their communities
- Share the process with members of their own and other communities

## IMPACT AND SUCCESSES

Examples of partner communities’ accomplishments after The Welcome Table:

Philadelphia, Miss., elected its first black mayor, realigned public funds to support local projects more equitably, and, through the Neshoba Youth Council, lowered teen pregnancy and improved school performance.

Tallahatchie County created historical markers acknowledging a shared history that had been denied and built a civil rights museum, both of which have motivated increased cultural tourism.

McComb, Miss., improved its school curriculum to include human and civil rights, which has motivated greater student civic engagement and higher test scores.

