

The Reconciling in Christ Team is a group of members (Celene Welch, Nathan Graham, Chris Clarkson, Nancy Johnson, Suzanne Terry, and Pastor John Bell) tasked to explore with the congregation whether it is time for Christ The Servant to commit to becoming a 'Reconciling in Christ' (RIC) community. An RIC church is one that proclaims itself to be welcoming and inclusive to people of

A Conversation with Reconciling Works

Celene Welch

Thirty households/individuals responded to our survey regarding the possibility of becoming a Reconciling in Christ congregation. Several said they would like more information regarding the public partner commitments expected of RIC congregations by Reconciling Works, the certifying organization.

In response, the RIC Team hosted a Zoom meeting with Reconciling Works' Director of Program and Engagement, Ashlei Buhrow, on Monday, September 19. Ten CTS households were represented in the session. A recording of Ashlei's presentation is available on the church website (on the Reconciling in Christ page).

Ashlei gave an overview of Reconciling Works and their mission. Her presentation included a history of the organization, which was formerly known as Lutherans Concerned, and their relationship to the ELCA. She touched on the changes they have seen within the church over the years, her experiences with both welcoming and unwelcoming congregations, and the major steps involved in becoming RIC.

Pastor Dennis Schurter appreciated Ashlei's cartoon interpretation of a portion of Luke 15, the Parable of the Lost Sheep. From that parable, she shared this thought that I found to be important: "We're not complete without each other." Suzanne Terry said, "I really loved Ashlei's gracious answers on why the designation is important even if you're already doing the work of welcoming." Beth Willoughby was inspired by the idea that "an open heart and an open mind allow the spirit to move."

Among the questions asked and answered after the presentation (some of which came from survey responses), members inquired about the commitment to consider LGBTQIA+ persons and/or persons of color when we next enter into the call process. We would not be making a commitment to call such a person, but rather demonstrating willingness to consider them, to not rule their ministry out because of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

The requirement for congregations that become Reconciling in Christ to make a financial commitment to Reconciling Works also provoked curiosity. There is no specific amount required; rather, this is a commitment to affirm the work of Reconciling Works. It is an example (as is all our giving) of matching treasure and heart. Jesus tells us that where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. A financial commitment to ministries that matter to us are a logical extension of our heart's commitment.

A number of people have asked why it is important for a congregation that has been welcoming in practice to become official in that welcome. Part of the answer is that while our pastor and lay leadership have led us into welcoming practices, the congregation has never made a commitment as a body to an explicitly welcome and affirm LGBTQIA+ Christians who are so often shamed and rejected by other churches.

In his [sermon](#) on Sunday, September 25, Pastor Jim Rowe shared that of the 40 plus campus ministry groups at UNT, only two ministries are reconciling, affirming the value of each person, including those who identify as LGBTQIA+. Lutheran Campus Ministry is Reconciling in Christ and that designation has led LGBTQIA+ students to find a place of acceptance and safety that they do not find in other groups. Pastor Jim's sermon is also available to stream on the CTS website.