

*The Reconciling in Christ Team is a group of members (Suzanne Terry, Celene Welch, Nathan Graham, Chris Clarkson, and Pastor John Bell) tasked by the Congregation Council to explore whether it is time for Christ The Servant to be formally recognized as a 'Reconciling in Christ' (RIC) church. An RIC church is one that proclaims itself to be welcoming and inclusive to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities (LGBTQIA+ people).*

## **A Welcoming Congregation**

*Welcoming.* In the small group discussions the RIC team hosted in November, we asked people what they thought Christ the Servant's core values were. That word—"welcoming"—was always one of the first that gets mentioned, and it's something that has stood out to many of us upon coming to CTS, and to our friends and families when they visit. I remember my grandmother saying she could tell what a warm, loving church I'd joined just from being in the building, and she was so taken with our welcome statement that she took a bulletin home and made a point of showing it to guests.

**The point of the RIC designation is not that we become a "gay church" but that we make a commitment to be the Church more fully, to and for all people.**

While some of the language has evolved, that welcome statement has included LGBTQ+ people since Pastor Bell scribbled out the idea of it during lunch. And for us, it isn't a theoretical welcome. We have LGBTQ+ members who play important roles in the life of the church; you can find them serving on ministry teams, in choir, as ushers and assisting ministers.

This means that the proposition of becoming Reconciling in Christ does not represent a radical change of direction for CTS. Instead, it's an opportunity to build on our strengths, clarifying and further extending the welcome we already give (see our October and November articles for more on why this is needed). The point of the RIC designation is not that we become a "gay church" but that we make a commitment to be *the Church* more fully, to and for all people.

That is not something we can do without transparency, without unity, or without conversation. In the end, yes, becoming a Reconciling in Christ community requires a vote, but we as a team are not interested in pushing for one before the church is ready. We want to listen and gauge where we all are, to engage as much of our membership as possible, including those who are uncertain, those who have questions, those who are holding back because they are uncomfortable with talking about sexuality, or hold a differing view. We affirm that the process we've set up is for everyone and that every voice is important.

Please share your voice, whether by participating in a group event or speaking to one of the team individually. We want to know how to meet each member where they are. We are all learning together.