



Christ the Servant Lutheran Church

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

October 13, 2021

People of Christ the Servant,

I had been at Christ the Servant about a year, when one day at lunch, I scribbled a welcome statement idea for our worship folders. In very specific terms it expressed that no matter who you are, or what your reason for being here, we would give you the same welcome that Jesus gives. The welcome was heartfelt and theologically sound, but I was a little nervous about how it would be received. In a few of the congregations I have served, such a bold proclamation would have received pushback. This congregation's response, however, spoke volumes about our communal DNA and how we see the church's mission. Those who had been abused by other congregations found a home here, and those who have joined the congregation since have been of like mind. We are a community of grace and hospitality. A couple years ago, the stewardship team conducted a comprehensive ministry audit. The group interviewed as many members as possible as they sought to understand the congregation's strengths, growing edges, and call to ministry. One finding was that several individuals were interested in becoming a Reconciling in Christ (RIC) congregation. The designation identifies congregations that are a safe space for LGBTQIA+ people of faith. In too many faith communities, these members of our family in Christ are met with judgement and emotional abuse. Even congregations that express welcome have been known to do so under the intention to "fix" what they see as defects. The RIC designation acknowledges that a congregation has studied the social, theological, and scientific aspects of LGBTQIA+ identities and is ready to fully affirm and include faithful people of any sexual orientation or gender identity. It goes beyond words of welcome to express a mutual understanding of full inclusion, and it affirms a commitment to accept people for who they are and affirm their place in the body of Christ.

The Congregation Council has named a team to lead the congregation in the discernment process as we determine whether this ministry designation is a good fit for Christ the Servant. Serving on this team are Nathan Graham, Suzanne Terry, Celene Welch, Christopher Clarkson and John Bell. Over the course of the program year this group will lead the congregation in Bible study, conversation, and prayer as we journey together to discover where God is leading our community.

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Map of the Journey

1. Community recognition of the journey.
2. Small-group discussions, in-person and virtually.
3. Educational opportunities on sexual orientation and gender identity, and the discrimination faced by LGBTQIA+ people.
4. Educational opportunities exploring scripture and sexuality/gender.
5. Exploratory survey of drafted welcome statement.
6. More discussions/educational opportunities depending on survey response.
7. Vote on whether to adopt the welcome statement and become Reconciling in Christ (RIC).

This process does not have a pre-determined end. It would be far better for the congregation to reject the designation than to be disingenuous and end up causing further harm to those with whom we are seeking to reconcile. The team thanks you in advance for candid and perhaps uncomfortable conversations as we faithfully discern where the Gospel leads us.

Below, you will find the dates for our first small group discussions. We are offering both on-site and online options. Please go to www.ctsdenton.org and look for **Reconciling in Christ Sign Up** on the home page in the Upcoming Events section. For those without internet access, you can call the church office to sign up for one of the on-site groups.

On behalf of the full Reconciling in Christ Team, the CTS Council and for our faithful neighbors who have been hurt by churches because of their LGBTQIA+ identity, I thank you for your prayers and participation.

May the peace of the Lord be with you all,

Pastor John E. Bell

Meeting Dates:

- 11/1 - 7 pm onsite 20 participants
- 11/4 – 2 pm virtual
 - 7 pm virtual
 - 8 pm virtual
- 11/6 - 2 pm onsite 20 participants