



The Reconciling in Christ Team a group of members (primarily: Suzanne Terry, Celene Welch, Nathan Graham, Chris Clarkson, and Pastor John Bell). We have been meeting over the last year, asked by the Congregation Council to explore whether it is time for Christ The Servant Lutheran church 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 (LGBTQIA+ people).

As we continue on this journey, we will be hosting conversation with all members so we reach an answer to whether we, as a body of believers, wish to become an RIC congregation. This is a significant decision. A decision which will flow from the faith we have. This faith is grounded in the Biblical story

A reflection from Celene Welch

I served as Lutheran Campus Pastor at UNT and TWU for 16 years and was always impressed by and grateful for Christ the Servant’s investment in our ELCA ministry to students. In the spring of 2017, Lutheran Campus Ministry became a Reconciling in Christ organization. We first discussed the possibility of extending an explicit welcome to those in the LGBTQ+ community with the board and later among the students. Both groups were unanimously supportive. One of the board members said, “I can’t imagine working with students and not being welcoming.” Our students did a study that included biblical and sociological information, then wrote a welcome statement:

As followers of Jesus, we believe that we should be a community that is open to everyone. Acknowledging that LGBT+ individuals have often been excluded by both the church and society, we affirm and welcome those of all gender identities and sexual orientations. Whether you identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, asexual, or something else, you have a place here.

After our statement was approved by Reconciling Works (the Lutheran organization that certifies congregations and organizations as affirming), we included it on the information card that we gave to incoming students during summer orientations.

At our first gathering that fall, a new student told us that she had not signed up with any student organizations during the summer, but that she had taken information from as many religious groups as possible. She planned to visit a variety of groups to find the right one for her. When she read through the materials, she decided that she would visit LCM first because “the welcome statement was so explicit” and so prominent in our materials that she felt we must be serious about welcoming her.

She quickly became one of our most active participants and brought friends—LGBTQ+ friends—who were intrigued by the idea of a faith group that *wanted* them to come and accepted them for who they were. The mutual ministry that occurred proved a blessing to the ministry and to me personally.

Christ the Servant is a welcoming church. Visitors from my former congregation told me that their time at CTS was the most welcoming church visit they’d ever had, and there have been LGBTQ+ members of the church as long as I’ve been a member. Isn’t it time to make our welcome explicit to even more people seeking a loving and nurturing congregation?