



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).

The Holy Bible and *being* WELCOMING!!!

The Holy Bible and WELCOMING are connected. This connection manifests in the actions and person of Christ Jesus. Ever since I first rolled through the doors of CTS, I have felt the welcoming heart of this Servant church. But the measure of "welcome" is more than how we perceive ourselves; it is how others are received by us.

There are three aspects of this Biblical, gospel, Christ-modeling welcome I would here like to lift up:

First, a Christ-like welcome is overt, not covert, which means it is on full public display come hell or high water. It is a welcome that is bold and confident, not shy or reluctant. It is Jesus unafraid to eat, mingle, travel and celebrate with all people, no matter the cost, and with no thought to how others will view this.

Second, this welcome is specific in its focus. It is Jesus paying attention to the lamed, those bruised, the poor, the ones rejected, and those judged unclean. In short, the Biblical, Christ-modeling welcome is specifically geared to include those on the outskirts of so-called-'normal'-society, on the fringe of acceptability. It is a welcome that goes out of its way to specifically welcome these people, so the universal character of God's love, God's welcome, God's inclusion, God's grace is grasped.

Third, welcoming in a Biblical, gospel, Christ-modeling fashion is more than just "being welcoming" or friendly; it is affirming. Jesus doesn't just welcome the excluded, Jesus affirms their value. It is the parable of the GOOD Samaritan (outcast) for

a reason... an affirming reason. This sort of welcome doesn't just welcome at the door, it affirms another's place within all aspects of our community. This is Jesus declaring, "For the one who is least among you all is the greatest."

"Reconciling in Christ" is a designation bestowed on churches determined to be friendly, welcoming and safe for LGBTQIA+ people.

An RIC Congregation understands the gift received *with* this oft-ostracized community, *as* a Christ-like welcome occurs. It understands the need to be public, determined, specific and unequivocal in our welcome and in such to treat and value others as we treat and value ourselves. Even more, understands that to affirm those considered 'least' or 'displaced' or 'stranger', is to affirm Christ's own self.

Prayer:

Holy God, by your Spirit help us to see that to "welcome each" and to "welcome all" is right, our duty and our joy. Increase in us the joy of your salvation.

Grant Oh Jesus the promise of Scripture: that to welcome, affirm, nourish, shelter and believe in others, demonstrates we welcome, affirm, nourish, shelter and believe in you.

Amen.