



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 all sexual orientations and gender identities (LGBTQIA+ people).

WHY?

By Celene Welch

As our congregation has discussed the possibility of becoming Reconciling in Christ, I've heard people ask, *Why? If we're already a welcoming congregation, why do we need to take this extra step?* My gut response has been, *Why not?*

Reflecting on these comments, I wonder: Have we (the RIC team) been making an assumption that members of the congregation are as aware as we are of the heartbreaking experiences of LGBTQ+ people who want to worship in Christian churches? The vast majority of churches are not only unwelcoming, they are hostile. In small groups and in worship, proclamations are routinely made that target this community as the world's worst sinners and an existential threat to Christ's kingdom. Scriptures are hurled like grenades.

Some churches say that they are welcoming in order to lure LGBTQ+ people into a community that then tries to "fix" them, or denies them full participation in the life of the church. At best, LGBTQ+ Christians in these communities are not allowed to serve in the ways that other members are, banned from singing in the choir or helping with Sunday school. At worst, they are encouraged to attend so-called accountability groups or bible studies that are meant to help them change their sexual orientations or gender identities—spiritualized conversion therapy, which the medical community has determined is both harmful and ineffective.

Because they are traditionally so marginalized in the church, LGBTQ+ Christians often give up on finding a safe, welcoming church. Many end up giving up on God.

Surely the people of Christ the Servant want to share the love of Christ with ALL who might come our way. In order to reach a part of that ALL, people in the LGBTQ+ community, we need to have our welcome made public alongside other affirming churches. Lutheran churches that are truly welcoming become "Reconciling in Christ" and are listed on the Reconciling Works website. Other denominations have their own designations and databases, and ecumenical groups such as Gay Church.org and Church Clarity.org collate this information to help LGBTQ+ Christians determine if there's a safe church community in their area where they will be truly welcomed for who they are.

Very few of those who have experienced open hostility from the church as a whole are going to visit multiple congregations in hopes of finding one with a welcoming statement on its bulletin, or visit individual church websites to see if there's a welcoming congregation in their area. Given Christ the Servant's history of welcoming people from this community, making our welcome more explicit can only mean more opportunities for ministry.