



NEW TO THE RECONCILING IN CHRIST (RIC) CONVERSATION

WELCOME!

At the Synod Assembly in 2024, the Central States Synod adopted a resolution to become a Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Synod. We often think about this as being about welcoming members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and it is, but being an RIC Synod is far more than that.

At its heart, this resolution is about committing ourselves as a Synod to a deep Gospel value—to embrace all people as beloved of God as we live out our mission: United with Christ in Baptism. Traveling the way of Jesus. Joining God’s reign of justice and radical love in the world.

GETTING STARTED

Starting the conversation is easy! Here are some questions to reflect on and discuss, in journaling and conversation with your pastor, fellow members, or family members and friends.

- Tell a story of a time when you felt truly welcome, as you are. What was said or done that helped you to know you were welcome? What did it feel like to know that you were accepted, as you are?
- Tell a story of a time when you knew you were not welcome. What was said or done that helped you to know that you were not welcome? What did that feel like?
- Imagine what a newcomer experiences when coming to your congregation. How does a newcomer know where to enter the building? What do they see, hear, and read when they first enter? Who welcomes them? How do visitors know where to go, and what will happen when they come in? Who do you imagine might easily feel welcome when they enter? Who do you imagine might wonder if it’s OK for them to be there?

BROADENING THE CONVERSATION

Now that you’ve thought about receiving and demonstrating hospitality, how might you continue to share and explore those thoughts throughout your congregation?

- Facilitate a forum dedicated to welcome topics, such as “How has the lived experience of our welcome/welcome statement been demonstrated?”
- Suggest your Church Council dedicate a meeting to discuss what it means to be welcoming.
- Encourage congregational sharing about their first visits to your church: What made you feel welcome? What caused you to take some time to adjust?
- Ask members who grew up in the congregation to share how they have seen visitors welcomed, including things they’ve done themselves or observed.
- Invite one-on-one conversations between members so your congregation is more prepared for RIC materials. This could include small group conversations in a larger setting, asking members to sit with someone they haven’t yet talked with on this topic.
- Increase awareness of the current social climate and related vulnerabilities, for example fear being expressed by LGBTQIA+ students on college campuses and challenges faced

by high school teachers dealing with what they're allowed to say and do in establishing a welcoming environment for all students versus a climate of fear.

- Consider indications that your congregation might be ready for a conversation about RIC, including the following.
 - Our congregation includes LGBTQIA members and/or families working through LGBTQIA+ questions with their children (including adult children).
 - People are asking to have a conversation about welcoming LGBTQIA+.
 - We think we're ready but have not had the conversation.
 - Questions are arising so it makes sense to explore.
 - There are identifiable groups in our congregation that hold different positions about our hospitality. Some groups assume our congregation is already fully welcoming and others are aware we aren't there yet, but are okay with that.
 - Our congregation feels they need to be a voice in favor of inclusion and that now is the time to stand and say "you belong" to vulnerable communities.

HOW TO BECOME AN RIC CONGREGATION

If your congregation has been wondering about extending an intentional welcome to LGBTQIA people and people of color and is interested in exploring this further, ReconcilingWorks has great resources to guide and support you in that conversation. You do not have to be ready to become an RIC congregation, or even commit to being RIC in the future, to use the tools they offer to have meaningful conversations about what it means to you to live the Gospel of Christ by embracing all of God's children! Below is the link to ReconcilingWorks, and some information about what it means to be RIC.

<https://www.reconcilingworks.org/ric/becomeric/>

The purpose of the Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Program is to ensure the welcome, inclusion, celebration, and advocacy for people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions; work for racial equity and commit to anti-racist work and support the national program.

To be recognized as a Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Partner, your faith community will:

1. Clearly state a welcome to people of “**all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions**” or “**LGBTQIA+**” and name its commitment to “**racial equity**” or “**anti-racism**” in its welcome statement.

Anything in bold and quotations above must be included in your RIC Partner Welcome Statement to meet ReconcilingWorks commitments.

If your faith community has its own statement of racial equity or commitment to anti-racism, be it in public community documents or social statements, polities such as by-laws or constitutions, or in its Mission, Vision, or Value statements, this can also satisfy this RIC Partner commitment and a copy of this additional statement will need to be shared with ReconcilingWorks.

2. **Be open to calling** an LGBTQIA+ and Black, Brown, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC) Rostered Leader.

A Rostered Leader is any clergy/pastor or deacon in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA); this commitment extends to all areas of leadership within the life of your community.

3. Allow sanctuary/community space/ to be used for **LGBTQIA+ weddings and blessings**.

If your faith community is looking for resources for wedding or blessing services to be more inclusive, see the [ELCA’s Marriage Resource](#) or ReconcilingWorks [Worship, Liturgy, & Scripture](#) material.

4. **Make a meaningful contribution annually** to support the national RIC program.

A **meaningful** contribution is determined by your faith community, its budget, and the understanding that your generosity funds the RIC Program. Meaningful contributions vary for each RIC partner.

*For clarity and support around these expanded commitments,
please contact [ReconcilingWorks staff](#).*

OTHER RESOURCES TO HELP NAVIGATE THE JOURNEY

The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality

Matthew Vines video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezQjNJUSraY>

Church Take Heed! Matthew Vines's Unbiblical Case for Same-Sex Relationships

A review of his book from a conservative viewpoint: <https://tinyurl.com/bddjuf34>

Raising Kids Beyond the Binary

A sharing of personal experience by Jamie Bruesehoff, an ELCA Lutheran mom of a young adult trans woman. Book description and purchase option:

<https://www.broadleafbooks.com/store/product/9781506488646/Raising-Kids-beyond-the-Binary>

Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians

Personal experience and Biblical and theological reflection by Austen Hartke, an ELCA Lutheran trans man. Austen's website: <https://austenhartke.com/book>

ReconcilingWorks

Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity & Gender Expression - Reconciling Works

Lutheran Guide to the LGBTQIA: <https://www.reconcilingworks.org/resources/sogie/>

Outside the Lines: How Embracing Queerness Will Transform Your Faith by Mihee Kim-Kort

Personal story and biblical analysis from the author who is a wife, mom, and a Presbyterian minister. And she's queer. Book description and purchase option:

<https://www.augsburgfortress.org/store/product/23749/Outside-the-Lines-How-Embracing-Queerness-Will-Transform-Your-Faith>