

Your Congregation is Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Now What?



RECONCILINGWORKS 
LUTHERANS FOR FULL PARTICIPATION

Practical Ideas to Move Forward with Inclusive Ministry

Introduction

This booklet is to assist RIC ministries in living out their welcome to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. The action steps suggested here are not *requirements*, but rather *possibilities*. These ideas come from the varied experiences of Lutheran RIC congregations, organizations, colleges and RIC synods across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCiC). None of the specific actions suggested in this document are prohibited by the ELCA or the ELCiC.

As an RIC congregation, you have developed an explicit affirmation of welcome for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. RIC congregations and organizations, however, frequently ask for ideas regarding ways they can expand their ministry of reconciliation and faithfully carry out their welcome. It is important to stress the ongoing nature and continuing need for outreach, reconciliation, and greater understanding.

Most congregations that adopt affirmations of welcome will spend some time developing their own ideas for what happens next. We encourage those conversations. If you have exciting ideas not represented in this booklet, please email them to Tim Feiertag at grassroots@reconcilingworks.org.

One important step your congregation can take that will allow you to help further this ministry of welcome and reconciliation is to make a financial contribution to ReconcilingWorks. Making the commitment a part of your congregation's budgeted benevolence demonstrates to your members that this ministry partnership is a valued asset to living out your own mission. Another option is to take a special offering annually (perhaps on RIC Sunday) and designate the proceeds to ReconcilingWorks. Congregational members may also be encouraged to join as individuals or households.

If you need additional information or have news to report, you are welcome to contact us. *Concord*, the quarterly newsletter of ReconcilingWorks, regularly features the actions and ministries of RIC congregations. You are encouraged to submit an article about your congregation to grassroots@reconcilingworks.org or by mail to the address below. An accompanying digital photo is also greatly appreciated.

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How do you proclaim a welcome to visitors and members?

1. Continue to build and strengthen relationships among individuals through the practice of intentional, one-on-one conversations, particularly across ideological and affinity group lines within the congregation.
2. Provide opportunities during worship for lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) people or other allies to share a short version of their stories and why RIC is important.
3. Include positive stories of LGBT people in sermons and congregational newsletter articles.
4. In sermons and newsletters, lift up the faith journey that parents and families of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people have taken.
5. Gather a discussion group to examine the gendered language in your bulletin, newsletter, sermons, liturgies, and hymns. Talk about the assumptions these language choices imply and who might feel constricted or excluded by the gendered wording. Explore creative ways to avoid such exclusively binary-gendered language as “men and women,” “sisters and brothers,” and “mothers and fathers.”
6. Facilitate discussion among *all* church staff regarding how they will welcome people of all gender identities and expressions and sexual orientations.
7. Provide training for your greeters and ushers on welcoming people of all gender identities and expressions and sexual orientations.
8. Include the text *A Reconciling in Christ Congregation* in your letterhead and other communications materials, such as your newsletter and on your website.
9. Include the text *A Reconciling in Christ Congregation* as part of your bulletin masthead below the congregation’s name, or add a shortened version of the welcome so it is explicit. For example: “We welcome people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. [Name of congregation] is a Reconciling in Christ congregation.” Be sure to explain what Reconciling in Christ means somewhere within the bulletin.
10. Include openly LGBT people in visible worship and other leadership roles.
 11. Have an openly gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender pastor as a guest preacher.
 12. Celebrate RIC Sunday in your worship on the last Sunday of January of each year. ReconcilingWorks prepares suggested worship materials for this celebration. Alert your pastor that such materials will be available each year. If the designated Sunday does not work, use some or all of the materials on another Sunday. Take up a special offering to support the work of ReconcilingWorks through the RIC program.
 13. Celebrate the anniversary of the adoption of your welcoming statement in worship.
 14. Celebrate a re-naming ceremony in worship for transgender members who transition to a name reflective of their gender self-identity.
 15. If your congregation has not done significant education about transgender people and the issues they face, invite a member of the transgender community to facilitate a workshop, invite transgender people to serve on a panel for discussion, show a film or plan a film series dealing with transgender people and conduct discussion about the films, etc.


16. Assist every formal and informal group within the congregation to consider how they will live out the commitments made within the welcoming statement and to identify any barriers that might prevent others from experiencing a welcome within that group.
17. Discuss local, statewide, or federal laws and their impact on the LGBT community in an educational forum.
18. Hold a series of adult education classes using the ReconcilingWorks discussion resources. Several are available from www.reconcilingworks.org/resources/order-resources-infox and include *Shared Congregational Conversation Around Homosexuality, Homosexuality and the Bible* by Walter Wink, *Claiming the Promise* and *Listening to the Spirit*.
19. Order the 1999 ELCA resource, *Congregational Hospitality to Gay and Lesbian People* from the Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission Program Unit of the ELCA. Form a small group to read and discuss how the lessons learned in this study compare with your congregation's experiences.
20. Include RIC information in your new-member classes. Include stories about the process that led up to the vote on your welcoming statement and discussion on the ways that this welcoming continues to be lived out in the mission and ministry of the congregation.
21. Sponsor a well-known LGBT theologian (or LGBT-supporting theologian) or pastor for an education event in your congregation and advertise throughout your region.
22. Include and recognize same-gender couples in the same ways as male/female couples.
 - Honor anniversaries of all couples in the same way, i.e., bulletin or newsletter listings or by mention in the prayers of the church. Ask each couple for permission prior to listing.
 - Put both people's names on any mailing envelope from the church as you would for a heterosexual couple.
 - Include pictures of couples and their children in your congregational directory. List the names of both people together in the directory, listing the couple twice if necessary. Again, ask for permission prior to listing.
 - Invite all couples (including same-gender couples) to church functions such as partners clubs, dances, retreats, etc.
 - Perform baptisms of children of parents of all sexual orientations and gender identities.
 - Celebrate ceremonies of blessing for couples of all gender configurations.
 - Mention long-term, same-gendered couples in sermons.
23. Before your congregation is in a call process, facilitate discussion (perhaps among the congregational council) about the ways that your congregation has been prepared to accept the gifts of an openly LGBT pastor or other rostered leader.

How does your building proclaim a welcome?

1. Display your RIC certificate in a prominent location like the narthex, perhaps above the guest book. Professionally framed, it becomes a permanent part of the church décor. If your certificate is missing or in need of replacing, contact grassroots@reconcilingworks.org
2. Display your welcoming statement in its entirety along with the RIC certificate elsewhere within your building.
3. Post the RIC logo – Rainbow Heart – or a rainbow flag or other rainbow symbol outside your church. It should be large enough that those driving by can clearly see it.
4. Look for opportunities to visibly display your congregation's welcome – especially on your outdoor sign(s), street-facing windows, and entryways. The RIC logo – Rainbow Heart – window cling is great for this purpose.
5. Place ReconcilingWorks brochures in your church's information racks.
6. Encourage the local ReconcilingWorks chapter and other LGBT organizations to hold worship, events, and regular meetings in your church building.
7. Ensure that a gender-neutral, single-stall bathroom is available in all areas of your building.
8. Tour your property, paying attention to what messages your pictures and other art send. Will visitors see individuals and families like themselves in the photos and artwork on display?



How do you proclaim a welcome to your neighbors?

1. Continue to build and strengthen relationships among individuals through the practice of intentional, one-on-one conversations, particularly with members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities in your area.
2. Commission a group within the congregation to specifically identify ways to reach out to the LGBT community. (There may be other groups that intentionally reach out to other populations – families with children of varying ages, divorced families, retired people, etc.)
3. Prepare a web page that easily identifies your welcome to the LGBT community. The RIC logo is easily recognized by the LGBT community because of the rainbow.
4. Include a link to www.ReconcilingWorks.org on your congregation's website.
5. In your advertisements in telephone directories and in the local LGBT, secular and/or church press, highlight your congregation's welcome. The RIC logo is great for this purpose.
6. Tell your congregation's story of hospitality and reconciliation in a letter to the editor or an article in the local LGBT, secular and/or church press.
7. Sponsor cultural events in LGBT communities, such as including an ad in the program for a gay men's or women's choir.
8. List your congregation as a referral for worship services or pastoral care with the local LGBT hotline or community center.
9. Make a connection with your local PFLAG (Parents, Family, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) organization. Introduce yourself and your church. Let the PFLAG chapter know you welcome LGBT people, their friends, and families at worship.
10. Either as an individual congregation or in collaboration with other welcoming congregations in your area, sponsor a worship service focused on celebrating welcome to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. RIC Sunday (the last Sunday in January), National Coming Out Day (October 11), and the date of your local LGBT Pride celebration are all excellent opportunities. Advertise thoroughly in your community in newspapers and the LGBT press.
11. Observe the Transgender Day of Remembrance (November 20) by celebrating and memorializing the lives of transgender people who have been murdered in the past year as a consequence of fear and hate.

12. Have a visible presence at annual LGBT Pride events:
 - Organize a group of Lutherans to march in the parade. Include a banner for every RIC congregation in the area.
 - Organize a group to give water and a greeting to marchers along the parade route.
 - Staff an information table about your congregation at the Pride festival.
13. Have a visible presence at LGBT rallies and events, with clergy in clerical garb and lay members in congregational shirts.
14. Have a pastor or lay representative speak to LGBT community or business groups.
15. Advertise in the local LGBT community directory, if there is one.
16. Start a local chapter of ReconcilingWorks, or join an existing chapter. For more information about starting a chapter, contact the ReconcilingWorks Grassroots Organizing and Training Coordinator, Tim Feiertag, at grassroots@reconcilingworks.org. You need only five willing hearts and minds to form a chapter.
17. If your congregation sponsors a Boy Scout Troop, explain the affirmation of welcome to the troop leaders. Some RIC congregations or the Boy Scout troops have chosen to disassociate themselves from each other since the Boy Scouts actively exclude participation by gay scouts or leaders. Other congregations have found that being publicly welcoming to LGBT people is a valuable witness to the Scouts.



Website of Faith Lutheran Church, Phoenix, Arizona
(www.faithalive.com)

How do you shepherd other faith communities expanding their welcome?

1. Continue to build and strengthen relationships among individuals through the practice of intentional, one-on-one conversations, particularly with members of other faith communities in your area and throughout your synod.
2. Sponsor a resolution at your synod assembly for the synod to adopt an affirmation of welcome. There are now several RIC synods in the ELCA and the ELCiC. E-mail Tim Fisher (TFisher@ReconcilingWorks.org) to request a sample resolution.
3. Alone or with other RIC congregations or a ReconcilingWorks chapter, sponsor a workshop and/or hospitality suite at your synod assembly to share your ministry of welcome with others.
4. Help to promote the RIC Program in your area:
 - Organize or join an RIC Leadership Team to work most effectively towards a welcome for all.
 - Attend a Building an Inclusive Church (BIC) training to gain valuable new tools and skills. The schedule of trainings can be found on the ReconcilingWorks website at www.ReconcilingWorks.org/news/training-events/building-an-inclusive-church.
 - Host a BIC training and invite local Lutheran and ecumenical partner congregations.
 - Hold a forum and invite representatives of any other RIC congregations in your area as well as potential RIC congregations to explore the process together.
 - Serve as a mentor congregation to other area congregations who want to become RIC.
5. Include the RIC program of ReconcilingWorks in your annual budget to promote the growth of the RIC program. Contributions may be made to ReconcilingWorks, 1669 Arcade Street Suite 2, Saint Paul, MN 55106-1054. Please note the RIC Program in the memo line of the check.
6. Tell your congregation's story of hospitality and reconciliation in a letter to the editor or a "My View" article in *The Lutheran* magazine.