

Reconciling in Christ - Question and Answer Sheet

The Reconciling in Christ program equips us with the tools needed to deepen our understanding of inclusion, and welcome people of all sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, as well as individuals across racial and ethnic identities. The Reconciling in Christ process gives us an opportunity to live out the values that Jesus portrayed when he walked and taught this earth.

1. Why do we need to be a part of the RIC to be inclusive?

Earning the RIC designation entitles NHELC to be put on the Reconciling Works database. People use this database to find an inclusive and welcoming church. Displaying the RIC logo helps remove the guesswork for those seeking a safe and inclusively welcoming congregation. When an LGBTQIA+ or person of color enters a RIC church, they are welcome to be themselves and to fully participate in the life of the church. As Pastor Ric Elliot, a former NHELC pastor, reminded us in his recent sermon to our congregation, welcoming all to our church is a matter of hospitality.

2. Since we are running a deficit, why do we need to join something that will cost more money?

One of the requirements of becoming a Reconciling in Christ congregation is to make a meaningful annual contribution to support the National RIC program. Reconciling Works (RW), the National organization, was contacted for clarification. According to RW, this does not need to be a line item in the budget. The RIC core team is planning to place a container in the Welcome Center one month during the year for a free will offering.

3. Why do we need to wear name tags for RIC, and what's the purpose of gender identification?

During a RIC team meeting, it was discussed that wearing name tags would help visitors and new members feel welcome. Name tags help us get to know one another in our community. We have added many new members since the pandemic and name tags help introduce one another. The hope is that most, if not all, members wear name tags during worship and fellowship.

The purpose of using pronouns on our name tags is to create a safer environment for those whose pronouns may not align with how others perceive them. Using pronouns, especially when your pronouns may seem “obvious”, sends a powerful message to others who are afraid to show their true identities: This is a place where you are seen, respected and safe to be yourself. This small act of inclusion can give someone the courage to show up fully as themselves in a world that may not always welcome them. When we create a space where everyone feels respected, we live out that love that Jesus modeled for us and calls us to model for others.

4. How many RIC churches are in our area and which are they?

There are 20 Lutheran Churches within 30 miles of our church that have obtained the RIC designation. Some examples are: Advent Lutheran Church of Goschenhoppen in Harleysville, The Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit in Emmaus- this is the church Pastor Ric retired from, Trinity Lutheran in Kutztown, and St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church Mayfair.

5. Will a flag in the sanctuary be replaced with a progress flag (the LGBTQIA flag)?

There is no plan to hang a progress flag in the sanctuary.

6. Welcome statement:

The core team will soon begin writing a "Welcome Statement" that explicitly includes LGBTQIA+ people and people of all races and ethnicities. After the welcome statement is written, it will be submitted to Church Council for their review. It will then be put before the congregation for a vote of approval.

Below is an example of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church's welcome statement:

"We at Saint John's Lutheran church welcome all who seek to follow Jesus wherever they are in their faith journey, regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, nationality, ethnicity, marital status, physical or mental ability, family configuration, political affiliation or economic circumstance.

We strive to follow Jesus' command to love one another as he has loved us (John 13:34). Led by the Holy Spirit, we are committed to God's liberating word to the world, working for environmental stewardship, racial justice and gender equity. All children of God are welcome to worship, learn, serve, and lead in this church. Jesus never turned anyone away from his table and we're not about to start here."

7. Be open to calling an LGBTQIA+ and/or Person of Color rostered leader.

It has always been possible for our congregation to call an LGBTQIA+ or person of color pastor. Now this will be explicitly stated so that any future candidates can be certain that they will be hired without prejudice. NOTE: There will not be a new position needed if we obtain the RIC designation.

8. Allow LGBTQIA+ weddings be performed in our sanctuary.

A team of members of the congregation was established to research and discuss this in 2009-2010. Their recommendation, to allow LGBTQIA+ weddings in our sanctuary, was presented to Church Council and Council approved their recommendation.

Most of the information the RIC core team has provided to the congregation can be found on the church website under the "get involved" tab. If you would like to know more about Reconciling Works, their website is Reconcilingworks.org.