

# Reconciling in Christ



A  
program  
for Lutheran  
communities of faith to answer  
the inclusive call of the gospel by  
welcoming believers of all sexual  
orientations and gender identities.

*And Jesus said to them, “Go into all the  
world and preach the gospel to the whole  
creation.”*

Mark 16:15

## **What is the Reconciling in Christ Program?**

In 1983, Lutherans Concerned/North America started the RIC Program to recognize Lutheran congregations that welcome lesbian and gay believers. During the 2002 LC/NA Assembly, members took action to include people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in the program. The Reconciling in Christ roster includes Lutheran congregations in the U.S. and Canada, synods of the ELCA and ELCIC, Lutheran colleges and other Lutheran organizations, such as the Lutheran Student Movement - USA, the Urban Servants Corps, an ecumenical ELCA-Episcopal camp ministry, the Lutheran Volunteer Corps and several synodical Lutheran Youth Organizations.

## **All people are welcome here. Why should we single out gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (GLBT) people?**

The Reconciling in Christ Program doesn't seek special treatment for GLBT people. The reality is, however, that we live in a time where the voices of fear and ignorance dominate the public discussion on human sexuality issues in our society. Most often these judgmental voices of irrational fear are all that is heard. In fact, Lutherans Concerned continues to learn of Lutheran churches that shun GLBT people. Sometimes even their parents and family are vilified and attacked by church members.

As a result, it is assumed by most GLBT people that they are not welcome in any church unless told otherwise. Even a general statement of welcome is heard as really meaning "everybody but me", so it takes a special effort to communicate the same welcome. The RIC Program seeks to make clearer the policy of churches where all people are welcome as full members, regardless of their sexual orientation, their gender identity or that of their children, siblings or friends.

## **What is the Affirmation of Welcome?**

The single element that is central to the program is the Affirmation of Welcome. It is simple yet powerful in its witness. Any group that adopts it or a similar statement which includes the naming of GLBT people as welcome to full participation is eligible to be designated as Reconciling in Christ after review by Lutherans Concerned. Making the affirmation promotes a publicly inclusive ministry and helps heal the pain of doubt.

## How does our congregation become designated as RIC?

Most groups start the process of consideration by engaging in a study program or series of educational meetings. Hearing the experiences of GLBT people and their families often creates greater understanding and insights.

A congregation joins the program in one of several ways: by having its council (or equivalent body) approve the Affirmation of Welcome or by having a vote of the whole congregation. Once the Affirmation is adopted, the congregation sends a copy of the Affirmation with a signed letter to the LC/NA Executive Director. When the Affirmation is reviewed and accepted, the congregation will be added to the roster of RIC participants. This roster is carried on our website and is distributed appropriately as a witness to the community and the church at large.

## What will happen if we participate?

What you do once the Affirmation is adopted is up to your own congregation, synod or organization. Many churches post their Affirmation or include it in their bulletin. Others make an inclusive reference in their advertising or include the RIC Program in their annual budget. When we receive your Affirmation of Welcome we will send you a new resource called "Your Church is RIC: Now What?" a guide full of voluntary inclusive ministry action steps.

Experience shows that any changes in your church or group will happen slowly, opening individuals to healing and deep spiritual reconciliation. Perhaps parents with a gay son may finally be able to feel they are not guilty of failure in raising their child. Maybe a closeted lesbian member will bring her partner to church for the first time. A bisexual or transgendered person, hearing of your congregation, may return to church after an absence of many years. It's amazing how the Holy Spirit works when you are willing to be an instrument of God's grace.

*"All this is from God who reconciled us through Jesus Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."*

2 Corinthians 5:18

## Sample Affirmation of Welcome

As a community of the people of God, we are called to minister to all people of our world, knowing that the world is often an unloving place. Our world is a place of alienation and brokenness. Christ calls us to reconciliation and wholeness. We are challenged by the Gospel to be agents of healing within our society.

We affirm with the apostle Paul that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female” (Galatians 3:28). Christ has made us one. We acknowledge this reconciliation extends to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

Because gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons are often scorned by society and alienated from the Church, we wish to make known our caring and concern. It is for this purpose that we affirm that:

- people of all sexual orientations and gender identities share the worth that comes from being unique individuals created by God;
- people of all sexual orientations and gender identities are welcome within the membership of this congregation\* upon making a common, public affirmation of faith; and
- as members of this congregation\*, people of all sexual orientations and gender identities are expected and encouraged to share in the sacramental and general life of this congregation\*.

\* *organization or synod*

For more information about the RIC process, visit our website [www.lcna.org/ric.shtm](http://www.lcna.org/ric.shtm) or contact us. Additional resources available include the **Reconciling Ministry Planner CD** packed with over 400 pages of helpful materials; **It's About Being Church DVD** which is a collection of video resources on the RIC process, training, coming out, and transgender voices; and **RIC Leadership Training** which is an intense 3+ day hands-on workshop intended to give participants the skill set and knowledge base to foster the expansion of the RIC Program.

*“Behold I stand at the door and knock ...”*

*Revelation 3:20*

# Open Hearts....

The number of Lutheran communities of faith who are intentionally welcoming believers of all sexual orientations and gender identities is growing. This response comes after prayerful consideration, re-examining

# Open Minds....

scripture in light of a Lutheran interpretation of God’s living word and listening to all the needs of people in their own places of worship.

# Open Doors....

The Reconciling in Christ Program is the primary way such a public welcome is extended. It is also a grass roots approach to build understanding, one community at a time.

Making an affirmation of welcome promotes an intentionally inclusive ministry and helps heal the pain of alientation and exclusion.

*Welcome one another therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*

*Romans 15:7*



## Lutherans Concerned/North America...

...Has the simultaneous goals of affirming the God given nature of sexual orientation and gender identity, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ through inclusive worship and promoting positive changes in all expressions of the Lutheran church.

...Is an independent, membership-supported organization which has ministered to thousands of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and heterosexual people since being founded in 1974.

...Reaches out to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities through local chapters across the U.S. and Canada. Its members also serve as resources to local Lutheran congregations, their pastors, and elected leaders. We began a formal relationship with the ELCA Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission Program Unit in 2002.

**For more information about  
LC/NA and the RIC Program  
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