



How Can Our Congregation Help Expand the Number of RIC Congregations in Our Area?

Whether it happened last month or a dozen years ago, your congregation was added to the roster of Reconciling In Christ (RIC) congregations and other faith communities through your adoption of a welcoming statement informing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals and families that they are truly welcome among you. ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation trusts that this ministry of hospitality and reconciliation has been and will continue to be a blessing to the life of your entire community. You have seen the spiritual benefit to clearly proclaiming God's boundless love to those who may not trust that Good News is for them. Now you want to share this story with other faith communities, to encourage other congregations and organizations to join you in making a public welcome to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. But where to begin? Here are some ideas.

1. Attend a Building an Inclusive Church (BIC) training. ReconcilingWorks, in cooperation with LGBT welcoming programs of about a dozen denominations, provides opportunities throughout the United States for people to learn and practice skills of faith-based community organizing to plan and implement a welcoming process. Even if you attended this training within your own congregation's welcoming process, attending a BIC training will help you serve as a mentor or coach for other congregations. Trainings are posted on our website at www.reconcilingworks.org/news/training-events/building-an-inclusive-church.
2. Contact the other RIC congregations in your area. Listen for ways they express their commitment to being a welcoming community. Invite them to join with your congregation in expanding the number of RIC congregations in your synod, metropolitan area, or other geographic region. If there are no other RIC congregations near you, check www.welcomingresources.org/directory.htm for welcoming congregations of other denominations that might join with you in expanding the number of welcoming congregations.
3. Ask the clergy and other leaders in your own congregation for suggestions of other clergy or congregations they know that may be supportive. You could schedule visits with these additional clergy to learn about the mission and ministry occurring in these congregations. Listen for the ways that a ministry of hospitality and reconciliation fits within that congregation's ministry. Ask what place LGBT people have in the life of that congregation and in the community surrounding that congregation. Tell your story of how your congregation has been enriched by the RIC process. Ask who are the laity in that congregation who might be interested in beginning an RIC process.

4. Share your story of your congregation's RIC journey as well as your own story about why RIC matters with people you know from other congregations:
 - What partnerships already exist between your congregation and others (such as cooperative work at a food bank or a shelter for homeless people, through Habitat for Humanity or other service organization, or during political campaigns such as a marriage-equality campaign)? Have one-to-one conversations with the people you already know through these relationships.
 - Raise the idea of RIC with your counterparts in the Women of the ELCA organization in your synod. It may be that starting with the anti-bullying work that ReconcilingWorks provides would be a good place to start.
 - What congregations are geographically close to you? Explore the possibilities with these congregations—Lutheran or our ecumenical partners—as places ready to move toward a public welcome.
5. Visit with your synod's bishop or other synod staff members. Listen for their vision for the future of ministry within the synod. Share with them how this ministry of welcoming could help further that vision by reinvigorating ministry across the synod. Ask for their help in expanding the number of welcoming and open congregations in the synod.
6. Post a declaration on your personal Facebook page such as this:

I am glad to be in a congregation that publicly welcomes people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Ask me how your congregation can become one too!
7. Arrange to hold a synod assembly workshop about the Reconciling in Christ Program. ReconcilingWorks staff or volunteers may be available to help lead it. Your congregation can share the stories of how God has been active through this ministry of welcome.
8. Contact local media outlets and pitch a feature story to a reporter or editor about your congregation and its welcoming ministry (or the process you went through to become RIC). Members of other congregations may see your story in the media and feel safe to take the same steps too after your congregation has taken the first steps in the community and talked about it publicly. Consider these media outlets: Christian media, your city's daily newspaper, weekly neighborhood or town newspapers, radio stations (Christian and secular), web-only news outlets, and television stations.
9. "Pray always and do not lose heart" (Luke 18:1-8). As a welcoming committee within your congregation or in cooperation with other RIC congregations in your area, pray regularly together that God will guide your process, place opportunities before you, and open your hearts, your eyes, and your ears to be aware of possibilities for sharing the Good News you've become through being a congregation that is always Reconciling in Christ.