

# OUR CONGREGATION IS ALREADY WELCOMING

*Why do we need to say so?*

The Reconciling in Christ (RIC) program recognizes Lutheran congregations, synods, organizations, colleges, and seminaries that publicly declare their welcome to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Inaugurated in 1983 with just a few congregations scattered across the United States and Canada, the program has grown to include hundreds of faith communities. No matter the setting, the welcoming statement is affirmed and accepted by the whole community. The RIC roster has become known as a resource for people seeking a community prepared to welcome them.



Why would a faith community want to be on the RIC list? Perhaps you feel that your congregation is already welcoming to all people; what difference could having an explicit welcome statement make? Below are some of the reasons we've heard from RIC settings why it is beneficial to the people in their community to be known as RIC.

## **To communicate who you are**

The RIC roster is published on our website; many LGBTQ people and their friends and families use this tool in their search for a faith community that fits. RIC is a great way for people to know that hospitality for all people is a value of your community.

## **As an evangelism tool**

The RIC program is one way to invite people to take the risk of joining you. Having an explicit welcome statement on your website, or displaying our rainbow sticker on your outdoor sign will give visitors an assurance that your welcome is genuine and not a hollow gesture.

## **Hide it under a bushel? No!**

When people see you have gone through the discussions to specifically welcome LGBTQ people, they know you are a community that is skilled at welcoming with specific intention, living as the Body of Christ together. That is the kind of good news the world is hungering to hear!

## **Because people move around**

The RIC listing encompasses all of the United States and Canada and is searchable online. As people experience the vibrancy of an RIC congregation in one place, they are likely to seek that same type of community elsewhere if they relocate or while traveling. The RIC roster will help them find you.

## **To reach and retain young people**

Researchers are finding that young people value inclusion of LGBTQ people. A 2015 Pew Research poll found that over 70 percent of people born after 1980 support same-gender marriage. Many RIC settings report that the demographic most often drawn in by the RIC status is young couples with children. These folks are seeking communities prepared to help them raise their children in ways consistent with their values. They want their children to grow up surrounded by diversity, to see that they will be loved no matter who they grow up to become.

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LUTHERANS FOR FULL PARTICIPATION



## Because people continue to be hurt

Unfortunately, LGBTQ people continue to experience exclusion and harm from people supposedly acting in the name of Christianity. Even churches that declare “All are welcome” often demonstrate to LGBTQ individuals and families that the welcome does not include them. For this reason, the invitation to LGBTQ people must be explicit that the welcome is intended to include them.

## When all can actually mean all

The specificity of the welcome to LGBTQ people opens up the conversation about who is welcome in your community in ways that a generic “all are welcome” statement does not. The commitment to have honest and open conversation around who is welcome at your community will continue past the statement for LGBTQ people as your community expands and becomes more socially diverse.

## To be connected with other faith communities and leaders

The RIC community is a network of Lutheran settings, organizations, and leaders that have made a commitment to a ministry of reconciliation and hospitality. Information and resources for worship, education, and ministry are relayed as settings discover and share best practices with one another through ReconcilingWorks.

## Because your ministry remains your own

The only requirement to join the RIC roster is to have passed a welcoming statement that includes “people of all sexual orientations and gender identities” or that lists lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, people explicitly. Once the commitment to welcome is made, it is entirely up to the community to decide how that



welcome will be carried out in that location. ReconcilingWorks is ready to partner with communities in discerning how to engage in ministry and in advocacy.

## For the health of your community

Engaging in a welcoming process deepens the faith life of the community. As members participate in dialogue with one another, they practice putting their faith into speech and then action, creating a more vibrant spiritual community. Engaging the community members in respectful and grace-filled conversation will allow your community to deal with other potentially conflict-laden issues in healthier, more productive ways.

## As a proclamation to the wider church

Other faith settings in your synod, city, region, or state are wondering if they can be a place of welcome to LGBTQ people and continue in their current mission and ministry. Your public stance of welcome will help them be courageous in broadening the welcome they provide.

## To remember

Having a welcoming statement printed in your bulletin, read during worship or posted on your social media pages, serves to remind members who they are and how they have pledged to engage with one another. When visitors search for you online or join, the statement shows them the type of community they have entered.

As Abraham and Sarah discovered, surprises await for those who show hospitality to the visitors among us! ReconcilingWorks wants to be a support to you as you begin the journey of public welcome to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. **Visit our website to discover how you can begin your faith community's welcoming journey.**

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Learn more: [ReconcilingWorks.org/RIC](https://ReconcilingWorks.org/RIC)