

Becoming a Reconciling Ministries Congregation

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS & DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS:

What does it mean to become a “Reconciling Congregation?”

A Reconciling Congregation is a United Methodist (UM) congregation that has formally voted to create a *Welcoming Statement* that specifically welcomes all people, including those who identify as LGBTQ. The congregation also votes to join the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) and to support its advocacy within the United Methodist Church (UMC). In addition, these congregations are listed on the RMN website as “safe, nurturing faith communities” for anyone seeking the ministry of the church.

What is the Reconciling Ministries Network?

Reconciling Ministries Network is an international network of UM organizations advocating for the full inclusion of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities into the life of the church. It is currently the only organization of its kind that represents United Methodist communities, congregations, and individuals seeking to affirm full inclusion. Founded in 1984, RMN consists over 1,000 United Methodist congregations, campus ministries, and communities, and more than 40,000 individual members. Within the network there are also organizations specifically for parents, clergy, people of color, and students. For more information go to: (www.rmnetwork.org)

What does it mean for us to affiliate with Reconciling Ministries Network?

We would embrace the goal of full inclusion of LGBTQ persons in the church, both in policy and in practice, and engage in the ministry of reconciliation in two ways:

1. Outreach, welcome, and ministry with and for persons who identify as LGBTQ in their local settings.
2. Create ongoing opportunities to engage in dialogue, build relationships, and advocate for changes to the discriminatory statements and policies in the *United Methodist Book of Discipline* (BOD).

What are the specifics steps of involved?

1. Adopt a welcoming statement that specifically mentions “people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.”
2. Keep the welcoming statement in visible places, such as newsletters, worship bulletins, websites, Facebook “About Us” sections, etc.
3. Consider an annual donation of \$250 to RMN. (This donation amount is a request and a guideline, not an actual requirement.)

Why is this issue important?

Since 1972, the UMC *Book of Discipline* has included language stating that “homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.” Later, the BOD prohibited United Methodist clergy and churches from performing and hosting same-sex marriages. The UMC also does not allow “*self-avowed, practicing homosexuals*” to be ordained as UM clergy. Affiliating with RMN is another way for Central to join with other churches that are striving to make the UMC fully inclusive. By doing so we are saying to our community that LGBTQ neighbors are welcomed and accepted here.

If we affiliate with Reconciling Ministries Network, does that mean we are leaving the United Methodist Church?

No. RMN has always sought to work within the UM denomination to affect change. Affiliation with RMN is a public and unequivocal way to affirm our belief in full inclusion. It would add Central United Methodist Church’s voice to the many voices that are advocating for our denomination to eliminate the contradictory, discriminatory, and hurtful policies and language regarding human sexuality in the BOD.

Will we lose our pastors if we become a Reconciling Congregation?

Pastors in the United Methodist Church are appointed to their local congregations annually by the Bishop of the Annual Conference. So, there are never any guarantees regarding the length of a pastors’ tenure at any given UM church. However, Bishop Bard has supported longer term appointments and prior to his election, he served First UMC of Duluth, MN that was a Reconciling Congregation. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that our pastors would be moved just because we decided to become a Reconciling Congregation.

Does this mean we are disobeying our denomination's rules?

No. A public statement inviting *all* to join our faith community is consistent with the UMC *Book of Discipline* which states that "all persons are of sacred worth" and that the church should be in ministry with all persons. In addition, we are in compliance with the denomination's rules when we work to change statements in the *Discipline* which we believe are not obeying Christ's commandment to love God and neighbor. The UMC Judicial Council has ruled that groups within the UMC "may express disagreement with the current language of the Discipline and may express aspirational hopes." The democratic process for change is built in to our United Methodist way of life.

Does becoming a Reconciling Congregation mean our pastors will perform same-gender marriages in our building?

Not at this time. We will see what is decided about this matter at the 2020 General Conference.

If we become Reconciling, will we become an all-gay church?

No. We may receive some new lesbian and gay members. In addition, we may receive new heterosexual members who are attracted to the open, inclusive, and hospitable environment that a Reconciling Congregation can provide. Parents often seek out such a church in which to raise their children. Many churches that have gone through the process in a sensitive fashion have found it to be a positive development for their congregations. Our church would likely continue to have much the same mix of people we have now. Most mainline protestant denominations have already taken steps to become more inclusive toward persons who identify as LGBTQ. And most states now have at least one United Methodist Reconciling Congregation; Michigan has 14 plus several Wesley Foundations and other UM groups.

What is our process for becoming a Reconciling Congregation?

1. On Sunday, June 2 following the 11am worship service we will host a Q & A Session for the congregation. This will be time to clarify this process and what it means.
2. A online straw poll will be sent to the congregation to survey opinions on this matter. The poll will be open June 2 – 17. Once the results of this poll are received, the Church Council will make a decision about going forward with a Church Conference vote.
3. If we move forward, a Special Church Conference will be held on July 7th at 10am to vote on the following motion: **This is a members-only vote.**

"The Church Council of Central United Methodist Church moves the following:

1. That Central Church affiliate with the Reconciling Ministries Network for the purpose of naming our commitment to support church policies and practices that offer full inclusion to LGBTQ persons.
2. That Central's current Welcome Statement be amended in the following way **(additions highlighted)**.

*"We welcome all who have no church home, who need strength, who want to follow Christ, who have doubts, or who aren't sure what they believe. Welcome to new guests and to old friends. Welcome to grandparents, to mothers, fathers, and single persons. Welcome to people of all colors, cultures, abilities, **sexual orientations and gender identities**, to old and young, to believers and questioners and welcome to questioning believers. Everyone is welcome at Central Church.*

Who can I contact if I have questions now?

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