



# Shepherd's Staff

May 2019

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## What is a Reconciling in Christ congregation?

Grace and peace to you in the name of our risen Lord, Jesus Christ!

We are in the midst of a very important conversation as a community of faith. The You Belong team has invested a tremendous amount of time, energy, and prayer over the past year. They have worked diligently to provide education, awareness, and opportunities for dialogue about where we are and believe God is leading us with regard to how we understand welcome, inclusion, and God's heart for our sisters and brothers who are LGBTQ+ here at Good Shepherd. This is no easy task and I am deeply grateful for their willingness to invest not only their time, but their hearts. We also understand this is a very complex and emotional topic, with people of faith having a broad range of experiences, feelings, and theological perspectives. So, let me also say that I am grateful for the honest and heartfelt feedback people have been willing to share with me, with other leaders, and the You Belong team. We have heard many voices of enthusiasm and excitement, but also voices of worry and concern. Many questions are in the air right now, all of which are valid and need to be heard. While we strive to consider all of our questions and perspectives, we must remember to keep the fundamental question always at the fore:

**What is God's desire for our sisters and brothers who are LGBTQ+ and Good Shepherd?**

It is critical we keep this question at the heart of the conversation because it keeps God at the center and reminds us that we are all in this journey together. That being said, the most common area of confusion we have heard is with regard to a lack of clarity around what a “Reconciling in Christ” congregation is, what that means for us, and why people feel this is important. I want to offer some responses to questions we have received, but first a question for us to consider of ourselves: What source am I using to learn what RIC means and why it is important? If you have not yet had the opportunity to ask a person who is LGBTQ+ about why this matters so much to them, please take the time to do so. I have read, studied, and discussed this extensively, but until I heard the personal stories and perspectives from members who are LGBTQ+ I simply did not comprehend the full picture. Their stories are an incredible gift and I encourage you to take the opportunity to listen.

Below are explanations of Reconciling Works and Reconciling in Christ that we hope will bring some clarity.

### **What does “Reconciling in Christ” mean? What is “Reconciling Works”?**

**Reconciling Works** ([www.reconcilingworks.org](http://www.reconcilingworks.org)) is an independent organization comprised of Lutherans. It is recognized by the ELCA, (some other examples are Lutheran Men in Mission, Women of the ELCA, or Augsburg Fortress), but not a direct ministry of the ELCA (such as Global Missions, ELCA World Hunger, etc.). Reconciling Works hosts the Reconciling in Christ Program which helps communities work through the process of becoming more open and inclusive for all people, but especially for people who are LGBTQ+. From their mission statement: “to embody, inspire, advocate, and organize for the acceptance and full participation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities within the Lutheran communion and its ecumenical and global partners, striving to dismantle injustice and oppression.”

The **Reconciling in Christ** program ([www.reconcilingworks.org/resources/ric](http://www.reconcilingworks.org/resources/ric)) is the part of their work that helps congregations by offering resources and advice to help communities have healthy, faithful conversations about becoming fully inclusive for LGBTQ+ people.

### **What is required to be designated as a Reconciling in Christ (RIC) congregation?**

- A congregation must have adopted a statement that clearly states welcome and inclusion for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.
- That is it. There are no ongoing requirements, financial costs, or anything else. Once a congregation has had faithful conversation and adopted a welcoming statement, it can be submitted to the RIC program to be approved as an RIC congregation. (Individuals or congregations that are passionate about this work can deepen their partnership with Reconciling Works, which could include financial or other means of support.)

### **Can we adopt a welcome statement on our own without connection to Reconciling Works, or being an RIC church?**

- Yes, but if we do all the work and come to a place of adopting such a statement, there are really no downsides to being RIC, but there are many benefits of being RIC that we would miss out on.

## **If we do become a Reconciling in Christ congregation, what would it mean for Good Shepherd?**

- We would be listed on the Reconciling in Christ website (along with 870 other communities). When Lutherans that are passionate about their church being inclusive move to or visit a new area and are looking for a church to attend this is the primary place they look. LGBTQ+ people can use this roster as a tool to find us and know that our community is a safe place to worship and grow in their faith.
- We could (but would not necessarily have to) publicize the RIC logo and state that we are a Reconciling in Christ congregation on our website, bulletins, or outdoor sign. This is one area in particular we will need to have more conversation and clarity about.

## **The ELCA is already open and affirming of LGBTQ+ persons, right? Why would we need an additional label or statement?**

- No. The ELCA's social statement and policy gives permission to congregations to decide this for themselves. Some ELCA congregations have intentionally become open and affirming, but others have intentionally not. There are congregations and pastors who have stated clearly (some in constitutional by-laws or policies) that no same-gender weddings will be officiated on their property or by their pastors.
- For people seeking a community that is fully welcoming, open and affirming the label of "ELCA" says that this *might* be the case. Because so many Christian churches have stated such a clear non-affirming position, we find that if a church says nothing on this topic, most of the time that means no. This is why a statement or some formal, congregationally approved designation is so important. Without it, people simply do not know. For people unfamiliar with the ELCA or various Christian denominations in general, a clear statement becomes even more essential.

## **Why are we doing all of this work and risking upsetting people for such a small minority?**

- Because we are the body of Christ and if one member suffers, all suffer together with them. If one rejoices, all rejoice with them (1 Cor. 12:26). Some members of our body have been deeply wounded by the Church.
- This conversation is not just relevant to our members who are LGBTQ+, but to all of us. The vast majority people from whom I have heard passion for this process are *not* LGBTQ+ themselves, but have others they love and care about who are, or simply believe this is what God is calling us to do.

## **What about the people who, for whatever reason, cannot support same-gender marriage? Will they still have a place here if we make a clear, affirming statement?**

- Yes, absolutely. We say all are welcome at Good Shepherd, and I believe with my whole heart that this community truly means that. This is a core tenet of this place and will not change.

## **What is God's desire for Good Shepherd and our sisters and brothers who are LGBTQ+?**

How do we discern this? First, we have to be in constant prayer. I have been praying this question over our process daily for the last year. I hope you will join me in this. (I'm sure many of you already have!) Second, we have to listen to each other. Really listen. Jesus said where two or three are gathered in my name I am there, so we realize that clarity around discerning God's will is almost always discovered, not in isolation, but in community.

If we keep God's desire at the center, and we earnestly, honestly, and opening seek the answer to this question, I believe we will move forward together in faithfulness and abundant joy, and that God has a beautiful future in store for Good Shepherd.

With much gratitude and love,  
Pastor Josh.

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## **Glenn Kraft** **Council President**

Jamie does a great job inviting those who can, to sing when they can make it. Lately I really appreciate that, given the need to pull back with other duties at church.

I recently had the pleasure of singing with the new 11am Contemporary Choir a song entitled, "Come To The Table". The song was well done (of course), but the words may have been missed as they went by quite fast. Early in the song, there is a phrase, "There's no one unwelcome here." Lately I have engaged in several conversations about You Belong where caring members are surprised that this is not already evident at Good Shepherd. The words of this song go into detail about all those that are welcome: "the prisoner-the soldier, the younger-the older, all who hunger-all who thirst, all the last- all the first". In a world where Christian churches often have inflicted guilt, shame and 'less-than' status to those who's lives are broken or different, this song celebrates with clarity that all can "Come to table, join the sinners who have been redeemed." Yes, "all the chained and all the free; all who follow, all who lead; any one who's been let down; all the lost, you have been found, who've been labelled right or wrong, to everyone who hears this song".



Our proposed welcoming statement makes it clear that we can sing this song together and proclaim that All Are Welcome... Really! And quite specifically.

Please continue the conversations as we journey through this process.  
Glenn

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## **Updates from You Belong** **Jen Wade**

Well, we have gotten quite a big response to the proposed Welcome Statement! Thank you to all who have been attending our Dialog and Discernment sessions and informational sessions.



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I know this has been a time of reflection and growing for many of us (myself included) and it has been an honor to be a part of this process with you. So far, we've heard lots of support for our LGBTQ siblings and the Welcome Statement itself, as well as questions and hesitations about labels or what this might look like for our particular congregation. Most importantly, you all are talking with each other, inside the caring relationships that we have already formed around this congregation and allowing the exploration of differences among us to be something that ultimately brings us closer together. So, thank you for the trust and vulnerability you have shown throughout this process as we work together towards a church and a world with no outcasts.

As promised, the You Belong team has developed a webpage of resources that we have been collecting throughout this year of discovery together. You can go to our church's website [GoodShepherdLutheran.com](http://GoodShepherdLutheran.com) - then scroll to the bottom and select the "Member Access" button. You only need the password to gain access:

**MartyLuther** - no username needed. Or you can [Click Here](#) to be taken there right now. We have book recommendations, video links, recorded presentations, website links, and more. The "Proposed Welcome Statement" and "What Does This Mean?" document are there as well to review. Hopefully, this will be a one-stop shop for helpful resources to learn about the personal, historical, medical or theological foundations for the year-long discussion we've been engaged in.

The next big step in our journey together is to reach out to you all and "take the temperature" of the congregation with regard to the Welcome Statement. On the weekend of May 18-19th, we will be conducting a short survey online and in person at all the services. This will be for informational purposes only, and will give the You Belong team an idea of what direction we should be heading next. Is our congregation prepared to officially consider the proposed Welcoming Statement? Or are there topics that would be beneficial to discuss in further detail? We hope you are able to complete the survey and help inform our team in the coming weeks.

Lastly - we hope you can join us for our Tacos and Movie night! We are showing [Believer](#) in the sanctuary on this coming Sunday night, May 5th at 6pm, childcare provided. (Believer follows Mormon Dan Reynolds, frontman for the Grammy Award-winning band Imagine Dragons, as he takes on a new mission to explore how the Mormon Church treats its LGBTQ members.) Hope you can join us!

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**A "Wink" from the Welcome Ministry Team**  
**by: Elliott Haugen**



Play ball! It's time for enjoying ball games, walks, flowers, and great days. I think hot dogs taste better at a ball game - and donuts

certainly taste better at church! It has been said that you don't want to see how hot dogs or sausages are created, but we usually want to know how things we see or experience come into existence. That's why there are so many books, TV shows, and online resources that explain almost everything. This Wink message shares some of what goes on behind our new member process.

In March we welcomed twenty-seven wonderful people as new members of Good Shepherd. We are blessed by them and how you have welcomed and included them. During the year we hold three orientations to inform those interested in joining. Suzie Everingham leads the sessions as prospective members learn about Good Shepherd and each other. The first 2-hour session focuses on who they are, how they found Good Shepherd, and what inspired them to return. This session is also attended by pastors and staff who lead core ministries and it is wonderful to hear them share their experiences too. Pastor Rich leads the discussion about Lutheranism and the ELCA and he and others address related questions. I am fortunate to attend and hear how Good Shepherd Lutheran is actively acting out its mission.

The second part, a 1-hour session, focuses on sharing experiences that have helped shape each person and his or her relationship with God. It is moving and heartening to hear the stories about how faith and family were part of their early lives. We pray that Good Shepherd continues to strengthen beliefs, hopes and relationships for all its members and guests.

***May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. Romans 15:13***

The next new member orientation is scheduled for **July 14** and **July 21**, with joining on **August 2**.

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Visit our Website

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church | 636-391-6685 | [goodshepherdlutheran.com](http://goodshepherdlutheran.com)

[Good Shepherd Calendar](#)

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