

FAQs for Reconciling Ministries

Person 1: Hey Sue/Laura, I've been noticing a lot of stuff around the church about Reconciling Ministries and I have a couple questions.

Person: I don't mean to butt in but can I join this conversation?

Person 3: Sure. What do you want to know?

Person 1: Well, exactly what is it and what is our church doing with it?

Person 3: Well, Reconciling Ministries Network is a group of individuals, small groups, and congregations of United Methodists who work for justice and reconciliation in their churches. They are especially concerned about our relationship to members of the LGBTQ community and those who love people in that community.

Person 1: Well, why is this coming up now?

Person 3: Actually, this has been an issue that has divided our church since 1972 when negative language was first put into our Book of Discipline.

Person 1: What exactly are the issues?

Person 3: We do not treat LGBTQ persons as full members. They can receive baptism, join our church, serve our church in any capacity, and give their money for our ministries, but they are not allowed to get married in our church, ministers are not allowed to perform marriages, and they are not allowed to be ordained.

Person 2: Why not?

Person 3: That's a question that may take a longer conversation. It has to do with prejudice as well as not understanding what it means to be a person who identifies as Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning. If you haven't worked to educate yourself or don't have conversations with a variety of people, you may have a lot of misconceptions. Often what we hear on TV or read on Facebook is not accurate and when people don't get to know each other or understand each other, prejudice and misunderstanding can grow.

Person 1: So why is *our* church spending time on this?

Person 3: We want to educate ourselves and be a welcoming place to those who are in this community as well as their family and friends.

Person 2: Well, we're certainly a friendly church and we welcome everyone.

Person 3: There's actually more to it than that. We need to make sure that, say, a gay couple who comes to our church will know that they are safe. They won't be disrespected from the pulpit or in casual conversation with us. It's not only what we say - but how we act. We need to be aware of ways to be supportive. Think about woman who comes to church and unbeknownst to us, she has a transgendered child. How would she feel if she hears anti-gay words spoken? How would she feel if the minister preached an anti-gay sermon?

Person 1: She'd never come back! She might also tell her family and friends that we are not a safe place to worship.

Person 3: Right! So, by becoming a Reconciling Church, people would know that if they come here, we will respect them and treat them with dignity.

Person 2: I have another question. Is this something that Rev. Karen is pushing on us?

Person 3: No! Exploring becoming a Reconciling Church was initiated by lay members. Some of us thought it was time to become officially reconciling and we approached the Administrative Board and Rev. Karen, asking if we could start a Task Force. They all said yes.

Person 1: Won't we get into trouble going against the *Book of Discipline*? Won't the pastor get into trouble?

Person 3: No on both counts. We are not breaking any rules by becoming Reconciling. But we, and the over 1000 churches in the Reconciling Movement, think that the *Discipline* needs to be changed to fully include everyone - regardless of human sexuality.

Person 2: Someone told me we were becoming a Gay Church.

Person 3: No on that one too. While there are gay denominations and certainly anti-gay denominations, we just want people to know that in our church they are welcome and safe.

Person 1: That doesn't sound too difficult.

Person 3: True, but all of us have things to learn. That's why we showed the movie, *The Bible Tells Me So*, and studied the book, *The Children are Free*. And that's why we have materials available to read and members of the Taskforce available to talk with us.

Person 2: I wasn't able to come to the movie.

Person 3: That's ok, we have a copy that you can check out on the Reconciling table and you can take it home and watch it. You can even have your own movie night.

Person 1: So, becoming a Reconciling Congregation simply means that we are following the command to love God and love others. And we are also following John Wesley's example to care for others, especially those who are discriminated against.

Person 3: Yep. That's the bottom line. We want people to really study the scriptures. And we want to follow John Wesley's Three Simple Rules to Do No Harm, Do Good, and Stay in Love with God.

Person 2: One last question. What about those in our congregation who don't want to do this? Will they still be welcomed and loved? Will they still have a place in our family?

Person 3: Of course. When we say that our church welcomes all, we mean ALL.

Person 1: Is Reconciling Ministries only focused on the LGBTQ Community?

Person 3: No, it's about full inclusion and welcome for all God's children and it's about educating ourselves about other people who are discriminated against by race, language, nationality, ability, and gender. This is a first step because the LGBTQ community is the only group against which our denomination officially discriminates. There will always be a lot of work to do to remain open to all the people in our community.