

## Linden-Linthicum United Methodist Church

### What is a Reconciling Church?

The United Methodist Book of Discipline reminds us that “*we are called to be faithful to the example of Jesus’ ministry to all persons*” (§139) and implores “*families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.*” (§161.F) Reconciling congregations consider these evangelical instructions to be a serious and valuable teaching that should be accurately represented by the church.

### What does it mean if LLUMC decides to become a Reconciling Church?

Reconciling United Methodist Churches, as part of its mission:

- (1) adopt a Welcoming Statement that, in addition to welcoming people of all ages, races, ethnic backgrounds, marital status, socio-economic conditions, abilities, nationalities, etc., also specifically includes language that welcomes people of different sexual orientations and gender identities. LLUMC already has a “Statement of Inclusion” which speaks to these things.
- (2) decide how to communicate the Welcoming Statement/Statement of Inclusion to others outside the church,
- (3) usually affiliate with the national group, Reconciling Ministries Network, which works “for the full participation of all people in the United Methodist Church”.

### Why should a UM church adopt a Welcoming Statement? Doesn’t our church already welcome everyone?

A Welcoming Statement communicates an inclusive message of welcome to all people and indicates that this particular church values diversity in its many forms. The current policies of the United Methodist Church define only one group of people as “incompatible with Christian teaching”: homosexual people. Since this group of people is explicitly excluded, and thereby is expressly made to feel unwelcome, any Welcoming Statement should be just as specific in its inclusion of this group of people. One of our LLUMC members recently shared with our Reconciling Committee about how it feels to be a “second class citizen” in the official stance of the UMC.

Current denominational policies preclude the full participation of homosexual persons in the life of the church. Currently, our discipline: 1) states that the practice of homosexuality is “incompatible with Christian teaching”; and 2) gives pastors the discretion to exclude homosexuals from church membership. The decisions of the special General Conference of 2019, to be enacted beginning Jan. 1, 2020, call for mandatory minimum punishments for those who violate the discipline, mostly affecting clergy, beginning with suspension and increasing to revoking of Ordination.

In comparison to these policies, the Reconciling movement seeks to welcome all persons (including LGBTQ) into the life and ministry of the church, so that church is a safe place for all of God’s people. Many people received the GC 2019 action as furthering and strengthening an unwelcome posture to LGBTQ persons and their families and allies. Reconciling churches identify themselves as churches that are welcoming to all persons, including LGBTQ persons, and will include them completely in the life and ministry of the church. People who have been hurt by the judgmental and excluding words and actions of the church are much more willing to seek out congregations that have intentionally named themselves as open to all.

Reconciling Churches are no different than other churches as far as ministry goes. They worship, study, serve and witness to the transforming love of God in Christ. They have Sunday School and VBS, Bible study and prayer groups, youth ministry and senior adult ministry, and mission and outreach ministries to care for the needs of people in the community and the world. The thing that distinguishes Reconciling Churches is that they undertake ministry with a core value of inclusion for all, and overtly name LGBTQ persons as part of the “all”, since the UM Discipline, at this time, uses language that does not make this clear.