

CUMC Reconciling Ministries FAQ, adapted from East Longmeadow UMC in East Longmeadow, MA (<https://www.elumc.org/reconciling-FAQ.htm>)

What is a reconciling congregation?

A reconciling congregation is one that embraces and works for the full participation of all people in the United Methodist Church, including full equality in membership, ordination, and marriage for God's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) children. Reconciling congregations make a public declaration welcoming all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, to participate fully in its congregational life, and they work for change within the denomination for full inclusiveness and equal rights and privileges for all.

Why did we explore becoming a reconciling congregation?

Our congregation has long had a stance of welcoming everyone into our community church. We have the blessing of being able to have deep and meaningful relationships with each other. Even so, we want to ensure that this congregation is one where everyone knows they can belong. Current and former members and staff have been directly affected by the injustice of our denomination's current stance on those who are LGBT. This is one way for CUMC to stand up for those who cry out for love and justice and to invite others to be a part of transforming the world.

Aren't we already a welcoming congregation?

While it is true that CUMC is known to be very warm and welcoming and we have had and currently have openly LGBT members, we have not formally and publicly affirmed our position on full inclusion for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons. Studies have shown that the overwhelming perception within the LGBT community today is that they are not welcome in churches, in many cases because they have faced blatant discrimination within the church. Youth and young adults overwhelmingly see Christianity as anti-gay and want no part of a religion that (in their perception) focuses more on hate than love, on rigid rules rather than liberation. Being a reconciling congregation indicates to non-heterosexual people that they are more than just welcome; we also celebrate how important they are in the church and affirm their gifts for the building of God's kingdom.

By specifically calling out that we are openly welcoming LGBT, aren't we putting one group above others?

Our intention is that this movement be first and foremost about inclusion of ALL people. No person or group is more important than another. However, it is necessary for us to be specific and intentional about naming LGBT because Christian denominations including the United Methodist Church have been exclusionary of LGBT. Even now, the only group explicitly excluded from basic rights including marriage and ordination by the Book of Discipline are homosexuals; in fact, with the Special General Conference in 2019, the UMC's policies have taken a step back from full inclusion. Therefore, it is expected that people in the LGBT community will assume that they are either not welcome or at best second class citizens in United Methodist Churches. It is vital that we are explicit in our welcoming of LGBT.

Will "Reconciling" become the sole focus of our ministries?

No. Our church has been blessed with a history of ministry, mission and outreach including our relationship with Works of Grace for mission in Guatemala, serving our neighbors who struggle with food insecurity with our Food Pantry, and our thriving music program and children's ministry. We hope that Reconciling Ministries will become another way in which our congregation can live into our mission statement of knowing and working with our neighbors near and far as we grow in God's love together. Like all of our ministries, the emphasis on reconciling work will depend on the commitment and energy of those in our congregation who choose to step up and step out to raise the level of hope for those who cry out for love and justice.

What is our Welcome Statement? (Proposed – to be voted on May 26th)

You are welcome to this sacred space; our doors are always open. Join us as we at the Chebeague United Methodist Church embrace God's gift of diversity and welcome people of every age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation, socio-economic condition, family structure, and physical or mental ability into the full participation of this congregation. No matter who you are or where you are on your journey, you are loved and a child of God. Our passion for a wide welcome of all God's children moves us to continue to educate ourselves and others about issues in the wider church and world that seek to divide us, so that we might truly be a congregation with open minds, open hearts, and open doors.

Can't we choose to adopt a social justice ministry that is less controversial?

Looking for the "safest" or least controversial ministry defeats the whole purpose. Our mission statement challenges, even invites, the risks involved in responding to God's call to raise the level of hope for those who cry out for love & justice. Like letting your light shine rather than hiding it under a bushel (Matthew 5:15), the decision to become a reconciling congregation is an event to celebrate rather than a decision to be kept quiet.

What is the Reconciling Ministries Network?

The Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) is a growing movement of United Methodist individuals, congregations, campus ministries, and other groups working for the full participation of all people in the United Methodist Church to transform our Church and world into the full expression of Christ's inclusive love. Established in 1984, RMN works for full equality in membership, ordination, and marriage for God's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender children. RMN encompasses over 1,000 Reconciling Congregations and Ministries. There are over 40,000 Reconciling United Methodists. The RMN is an independent, not-for-profit organization with no official ties to The United Methodist Church but does reflect the Methodist tradition of social justice and action. RMN's board of directors includes United Methodist lay people, clergy, cabinet executives, academics and bishops. It includes a very active Parents group and a student group called MOSAIC.

For further information, see the Reconciling Ministry Network's website at www.rmnetwork.org.

How does a church become part of the reconciling network?

After a period of exploration, including study, prayer and reflection about concerns of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons and their relationship to the church, a local church makes a public statement welcoming all persons to participate fully in its congregational life. The statement is adopted through an all church vote. Anyone who is a member or feels connected to our community can cast a ballot on (1) our welcoming statement, and (2) our decision to join the Reconciling Ministries Network.

Does the reconciling program put us in violation of the Book of Discipline?

Absolutely not! Making a statement of inclusion, in fact, supports the Book of Discipline which calls for the inclusion of all persons who are viewed as individuals of sacred worth. Official United Methodist policy bars the ordination and appointment of "self-avowed practicing homosexuals". The Board of Ordained Ministry and bishop of each annual conference must decide how to handle this mandate. The Book of Discipline also "prohibits ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions". Each local church must decide for itself how it will handle this matter.

Does becoming a Reconciling Congregation mean we are leaving the United Methodist Church?

Voting to become a Reconciling Congregation does not mean we are leaving the United Methodist Church. A vote to become a Reconciling Congregation means that we join a network of other United Methodist Churches and ministries who have made intentional their welcome of LGBTQ individuals and their families. It demonstrates that we are an inclusive congregation and puts us in a relational network with other congregations who are also inclusive. It lets people who are looking for a church family know that we are a United Methodist congregation where all are welcome.

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

No. There are now over 1,000 Affirming (United Church of Canada), More Light (Presbyterian), Oasis (Episcopalian), Open and Affirming (Disciples of Christ or United Church of Christ), Reconciling (United Methodist), Reconciling in Christ (Lutheran), Supportive (Brethren/Mennonite), Welcoming (Unitarian Universalist), and Welcoming and Affirming (Baptist) churches and ministries in the US and Canada. The experience of these congregations has been that they have received some new lesbian and gay members. In addition, they have also been graced with many more new members who are attracted to the open, inclusive, and hospitable environment a reconciling congregation can provide.