

From the August 19, 2020 Bethelite

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# Reconciling in Christ (RIC)

## A Welcome and Invitation

Bethel has been welcoming members of the greater Madison community since its inception over 160 years ago. From its original Norwegian roots Bethel has expanded to welcome all community members, including in more recent years the Spanish, Bhutanese and Homeless communities.

Have you heard of our Reconciling in Christ program?

If you missed some of the early communications we welcome and invite you to learn more about the Reconciling in Christ program as we enter a more visible phase of the program through our new Reconciling in Christ webpage, our 1-on-1 listening sessions and educational offerings.

**What is the Reconciling in Christ program?** Bethel's 2020 - 2025 Strategic Plan includes a vision of Bethel being an actively welcoming church, serving a diverse and inclusive greater Madison population. As part of this vision Bethel is on a journey to become Reconciling in Christ affirmed in January, 2021. In so doing Bethel will join over 900 other Lutheran congregations who are RIC affirmed, plus over 350 more who are on the journey to becoming RIC affirmed. A Reconciling in Christ congregation is one that is recognized as openly welcoming to the LGBTQIA+ community.

**Why is this important?** Many in the LGBTQIA+ community feel they are not welcome in faith communities, even those that state "all are welcome here." "For Bethel to become a truly welcoming church under the philosophy of 'Reconciling in Christ,' it must move beyond being passively open to diversity and must actively seek to welcome full participation by people from diverse backgrounds and orientations." (Bethel 2020 – 2025 Strategic Plan)

"Called by God in our journey of faith to carry out Jesus' ministry of inclusivity, the Bethel congregation begins a series of educational and programmatic opportunities so that we become a Reconciling in Christ congregation. An RIC congregation articulates – intentionally, specifically and publicly – full embrace of persons of all sexual orientation, gender identities and gender expressions." (Bethel Joint Council - June 6, 2019)

Yes, Bethel has always been welcoming to all people, however, we remind ourselves that a welcoming culture is one rooted in an actively welcoming mindset. There is nothing passive

about a welcoming culture whether in our home, work or faith lives. “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.” (1 John 4:4-8)

### **Where can I find the Reconciling in Christ webpage?**

You can find the Reconciling in Christ webpage by typing “Bethel-Madison.org/RIC” in your browser’s search bar. You can also find the Reconciling in Christ link in the “About Us” or “I’m New” pages on Bethel’s website. What you’ll find there includes:

- A Charter outlining the goals and guiding principles of the RIC program.
- A Timeline outlining key milestones in the rollout of the RIC program.
- A video message from the pastor, and messages from the RIC Steering Committee members.
- Reconciling in Christ Reflections.
- RIC related resources in the form of articles and videos, including a selection of music video.
- An invitation to be heard via a 1-on-1 confidential listening session with one of the RIC Steering Committee members.

**An invitation to hear from you.** Graceful engagement is a way of hearing one another’s perspectives, and finding commonalities and shared experiences. It is also about building relationships based on shared values. As part of the Reconciling in Christ program we invite you to sign up for a 1-on-1 listening session with one of the RIC Steering Committee members, including Pastor Mike. These 30-45 minute confidential sessions give us the opportunity to get to get to know and learn from you. To sign-up visit the “We Want to Hear from You” link on the Reconciling in Christ webpage.

**RIC-related educational opportunities** are posted on Bethel’s Events webpage and communicated in the Bethelite and Daily Devotion. They are also noted in the RIC Timeline found on the Reconciling in Christ webpage.

**The journey continues...**All are welcome and invited to join us on our Reconciling in Christ journey, however, the “welcome journey” continues beyond becoming RIC affirmed in January. As with any journey there may be twists and turns, and challenges. We recognize that the corona virus temporarily limits our ability to provide in-person welcomes but we will persevere. Bethel will learn and grow as an actively welcoming congregation to all communities in the greater Madison area; it’s in our DNA.

– *Dave Clack Reconciling in Christ Steering Committee*