

LGBTQIA+

# Welcome in Rural Communities

LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR

**ReconcilingWorks**  
LUTHERANS FOR FULL PARTICIPATION



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# FRAMEWORK

## Welcome to the Resource & Foundational Information

**We know lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual/aeromantic (LGBTQIA+) people live in all areas of the country.**

This resource is meant to help those living in rural areas who are LGBTQIA+ or who know and love LGBTQIA+ people in rural areas in being seen, named, and cared for.

To begin this holy work please use the following steps as the foundation for conversations and work.

### **1. PEOPLE OVER DEFINITIONS:**

If you do not know which identity terms, pronouns or titles someone uses, ask, or avoid using gendered terms. Remember, all we really need to know about a person to welcome them is their name.

### **2. CURIOSITY CONTINUUM:**

The curiosity continuum is an important tool to use as we seek to extend a welcome to our LGBTQIA+ neighbors. When getting to know someone, you are sure to have many questions. Before you inquire, you may want to ask yourself: “Why am I asking?” or “Will this question help me build relationships of mutual trust and respect?” Does your question represent “hospitable curiosity” or “lurid curiosity?” Asking someone questions about their bodies or who they are attracted to are example of lurid curiosity.

The goal of this resource is to dismantle barriers between us, and the perception that LGBTQIA+ people are exotic oddities does not serve that goal.

### **3. GRACEFUL ENGAGEMENT:**

The “spirit” with which a faith community journeys to care for LGBTQIA+ people can make all the difference. It requires deep listening, seeking the Divine in the people with whom you engage, and finding the ways in which God is revealed to you through them. The journey must carry a similar spirit. This spirit is called Graceful Engagement. Graceful Engagement is a way of practicing holy conversation in which each person is treated as a beloved child of God. It is about listening, sharing one’s own story, hearing one another’s perspective, and finding commonalities and shared experiences.

It is about building relationships based on shared values, so those involved may come to a renewed understanding together as the Body of Christ.

## Where to Begin

**“I don't think I know any LGBTQIA+ people, so how is this my work to do?”**

Just because it may appear as though there are no people who identify as LGBTQIA+ in your community doesn't mean they aren't there. The LGBTQIA+ community fits into all facets of the broader community.

If you think someone you know might identify as LGBTQIA+ but aren't sure, do not “out” them. Their story is not yours to tell. It is important to remember not all LGBTQIA+ people desire to be out publicly due to the discrimination that still exists for them.

We want to remember that stereotypes are often based on mistruths and can be very harmful. People who are a part of the LGBTQIA+ community are so much more than a cultural stereotype or characterized persona portrayed in media. LGBTQIA+ people are your neighbors, coworkers, and family. Let's strive to see people for the person we know them to be rather than a stereotype or character of who we assume they are.

## Helpful Terms

### OUT / OUTED

When an LGBTQIA+ person shares their identity with someone it can be referred to as "coming out" to someone. If the LGBTQIA+ person is not the one sharing the information about their identity they might feel they have been "outed" by the one sharing.

### OTHERED

When someone whose identity(s) are not a part of the perceived dominant culture are made to feel like an outsider for being who they are.

### CISGENDER

Someone whose sex assigned at birth is aligned with their gender identity.





# STORIES

## Building Relationships & the Importance of Personal Stories

Learning the stories of other people helps us build awareness and relationships through shared values and experiences.

Our stories are deeply personal, and for those who identify as LGBTQIA+ in your congregation or community, they may not always feel safe or comfortable sharing their stories. If you ask someone to share their personal story and they say “no” respect their boundaries. Knowing there is so much more to LGBTQIA+ people than their sexual orientation or gender identity, ask them different questions to build the relationship. Such as;

- “What make our congregation special for you?”
- “Tell me more about what brings you joy?”
- “What is one of your favorite pas-times?”

**It’s easy to think that homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia aren’t present in your congregation, but oppression is present everywhere. When someone tells you of an instance where they have been tokenized or mistreated within your congregation, believe them and ask how you can provide support.**

## Tokenizing

Too often lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual/aeromantic people are seen only as their sexual orientation or gender identity making them feel as the “exotic other” or as a token of diversity. It can be exciting when new people from underrepresented demographics show up in church, especially in areas where the dominant culture is white, heterosexual, cisgender, and English speaking. However, there are ways to welcome people without treating them like the “exotic other.”

Here are some examples of how people are made to feel othered or tokenized in conversation and in communities:

- They are asked to speak for their entire community.
- When they are the only person from their demographic in the room.
- When they are asked inappropriate questions about their body or who they are attracted to.

# JOURNEY

## Support and Care in Your Community and Congregation

People who identify as LGBTQIA+ are constantly looking for safe spaces. Here are a few small things you can do to signal to them that they are safe in your congregation:

- If you are an RIC community have the logo visible for people to see.
- Consider what kind of imagery you use in your building. Does it reflect the diversity you are trying to welcome?
- If your congregation uses nametags, provide some that have a space for pronouns

While signaling is important, what's more important is how people feel when they walk into a space. People may not remember what posters or signs they saw in your building, but they will remember how they were treated

It is important to remember welcoming people does not mean expecting them to conform to the norms of your congregation. Appropriation is not welcome.

You're welcome here but . . . There are no "buts" when it comes to welcoming people. Your job is not to decide who is welcome, because God has already decided that. Your job is to let people know they are welcome and that they belong. It's important to remember that LGBTQIA+ people have always been part of the church. When extending an explicit welcome to them, begin with the mindset that they already belong, that they already have a place in the church.

## LGBTQIA+ Support Orgs

### PFLAG

"The PFLAG Chapter Network--with over 400 chapters across the country--provides confidential peer support, education, and advocacy to LGBTQ+ people, their parents and families, and allies."  
<https://pflag.org>

### GSA

"GSA clubs, or GSAs for short, are student-run organizations that unite LGBTQ+ and allied youth to build community and organize around issues impacting them in their schools and communities. GSAs have evolved beyond their traditional role to serve as safe spaces for LGBTQ+ youth in middle schools and high schools, and have emerged as vehicles for deep social change related to racial, gender, and educational justice."  
<https://gsanetwork.org>



# National Reconciling in Christ Program

**Reconciling in Christ (RIC) program** is for congregations, synods, colleges, seminaries, and other Lutheran organizations and ministry communities who have made a public commitment to welcome, include and celebrate lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual/aeromantic (LGBTQIA+) people.

1. **Building the Foundation:** Is the key to having a well planned and successful RIC Journey! These first steps and tools are here to help you learn more about your community, treat all folks engaging in this work as beloved children of God, and frame this work in a way that is exciting and engaging for folks.
2. **Living the Journey:** Your ministry setting will be taking the information gathered during "Building the Foundation" and using that data to create educational forums, panels, and studies of scriptural engagement that best meet the unique needs of your faith community so that all of your folks feel seen, heard, and cared for.

## Additional Resources for Individuals and Congregations

### 1 Building an Inclusive Church Training/Toolkit

Design and implement a journey for your faith community to publicly and intentionally welcome people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.

### 2 Reconciling Scripture for Lutherans: On Sexuality & Gender Identity

A short commentary which takes into account biblical integrity and knowledge, key Lutheran interpretative lenses, and the diverse experiences of the LGBTQIA+community.

### 3 Lutheran Introduction To Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, & Gender Expression

As a way to deepen and expand that welcome, we offer this resource as a basic introduction to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.



*All resources listed can be found at [www.Reconcilingworks.org](http://www.Reconcilingworks.org)*

### 4 Clunky Questions: LGBTQIA+ Lutherans and Pastors Answer Common Questions

If your faith community is interested in how to better support LGBTQIA+ Lutherans, but are not sure how to ask what it means to be LGBTQIA+ then the "Clunky Questions" series is for you.

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[WWW.RECONCILINGWORKS.ORG](http://WWW.RECONCILINGWORKS.ORG)