



Church of Christ Uniting Reconciling Ministries FAQs

What is the definition of a Reconciling Congregation? A reconciling congregation whose membership has, by a vote, adopted a public statement which promotes inclusion of all families including persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities into all aspects of life in the United Methodist Church. A Reconciling Congregation is also affiliated with the Reconciling Ministries Network, a resource for United Methodist Churches seeking justice and inclusion for all of God's children within our denomination.

How does becoming a Reconciling Congregation change what our church stands for? Aren't we already open to all? In 2019, the governing body of the UMC changed the *Book of Discipline* to include severe penalties for clergy who are self-avowed practicing homosexuals or who perform same sex marriages or who allow same sex marriages to be performed in the church. Becoming a Reconciling Congregation is proof to the annual conference that a vote taken at COCU proves our support of the removal of these penalties as well as the statement that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Furthermore, by making that definitive statement to the denomination, we affirm our church's commitment to practice what it preaches, to make sure the community knows that the COCU lives by the denomination's motto: Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors.

If we become a Reconciling Congregation what changes or benefits would result?

- Becoming a Reconciling Congregation would help us to live into the Gospel's message of inclusion. COCU will be listed on the Reconciling Ministries Network list of churches for those searching for a church family that loves and welcomes all of God's children and celebrates their participation in all aspects of service AND rights.
- It will invite parents seeking a church to raise their family in where their children will always be loved, cherished, and welcomed in their home church.
- Current members may find peace in knowing that members voting for reconciling have examined the Bible using the Wesleyan Quadrilateral of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience while respecting, that individual members do not all feel the same about every issue and that, again, there is room for everyone wanting to learn and grow in faith at COCU.

What does the *United Methodist Book of Discipline* say about homosexuality and welcoming gay and lesbian people:

- That the UMC is radically inclusive.

- That diversity should be reflected at every level of leadership in the life of the Church. That homosexuals are individuals of sacred worth who should not be rejected or condemned.
- That human sexuality is a gift from God.
- The UMC supports basic human and civil liberties regardless of sexual orientation.

The UMC *Book of Discipline* includes mixed messages because it also says it:

- Prohibits ordaining and appointing self-avowed, practicing homosexuals.
- Declares homosexual practice as incompatible with Christian teaching.
- Prohibits, with assigned penalties for, performing marriages for same gender couples or hosting their wedding services in our churches.
- Prohibits the expenditure of national denominational funds to promote acceptance of homosexuals.

What is the difference between a Reconciling Community and a Reconciling Congregation? A Reconciling Community, which COCU informally has, is a subset of the church that has stated their support for full inclusion. A Reconciling Congregation would mean that the church membership has voted to accept the following welcoming statement:

We at Church of Christ Uniting believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is unconditionally welcoming and affirming of all persons. We celebrate God's gift of diversity and value the wholeness made possible in community equally shared and shepherded by all. We welcome and affirm people of every gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation, who are also of every age, race, ethnicity, physical and mental ability, level of education, and family structure, and of every economic, immigration, marital and social status, and so much more. We acknowledge that we live in a world of profound social, economic, and political inequities. As followers of Jesus, we commit ourselves to the pursuit of justice and pledge to stand in solidarity with all who are marginalized and oppressed. We welcome all to full participation in the ministry, leadership, mission, and life of our church. Our hearts, our minds and our doors are open to all who want to share the love of Jesus Christ in our community and in our world.

For LGBTQ+ persons, the predominant message coming out of Christian churches makes them feel unsafe and unwelcome. This vote would reflect that we wish to reconcile with those who have felt excluded, deemed out of reach of God's love. We would make this known through the Reconciling Ministries Network.

Why vote? What are the pros and cons of taking a vote on this? The United Methodist Church has come to a crossroads. A split may be imminent and our actions and voices now could direct what direction the denomination takes. The Reconciling Ministries Team of COCU hopes to show the General Conference that we stand on the

side of removing the penalties and condemning language added to the *Book of Discipline* in 2019, keeping in mind that there are no stipulated penalties for ANY OTHER ACT taken by clergy not in line with the *Book of Discipline*. We would be showing support for our siblings in Christ regardless of how God made them, whether clergy or parishioner.

Will we be breaking UMC church law if we become a reconciling Congregation? Are we in violation of *The Book of Discipline*? No, there is no *Disciplinary* restriction on becoming a Reconciling Congregation. One of the methods of changing unjust laws is to actively resist them. Jesus did it all the time.

Does becoming a Reconciling Congregation mean that same-sex marriages will be performed at COCU? Becoming a Reconciling Congregation does not mean COCU will be flooded with same sex marriages. Sadly, so many LGBTQ+ persons have been so hurt by the rejection they faced in their home churches and the comments made by those representing Christianity in the media, we have a lot of rebuilding to do in the trust department. But, we'd like to start making steps in that direction. Sometimes, we don't know the harm we do, even to our own. Sometimes, we get it right.

What about the *Bible*?!

How we read: Most people know that there are a few isolated passages of scripture that speak to people "lying with same gender partners." These are dynamics of power and submission, elders with youngsters, and orgies, temple prostitutes in the context of the Roman Empire. Nowhere does the Bible address loving, same gender, committed relationships.

If we use slavery and women in ministry as an example, we can see that over time followers of Jesus have realized that owning people as property is not acceptable and that women are full partners in the faith, filled with the Spirit. There are many Bible verses supporting the institution of slavery, as well as verses used to silence the women. Faithful people learned to do better, and to be better, to follow the example of The Word made flesh, Christ.

We work on the Sabbath, we do not give all of our money away, we eat shellfish and touch pigskins (footballs), and we don't put our children to death when they talk back – as we are instructed to do in the Bible. So, our long supported idea that we interpret the Bible as an unquestionable book of clear instructions to follow seems to only apply to the LGBTQ+ community, and that warrants examination.

What Would Jesus Do? Jesus told us he was the new law, he replaced the old and he said let the children come unto me and he didn't specify which ones. Jesus says nothing about same-gendered partners but insists that we "love our neighbors as ourselves," "make disciples of all" Mt. 28, and "set at liberty all those who are oppressed." Lk 4.16.

Jesus did not only preach this, he lived it. And he had to break religious law to do so. He defied all purity codes to welcome the stranger, hang out with sinners, heal the impure, and work on the Sabbath.

The COCU Reconciling Ministries Team would like to invite all who question, all who would like to know more about what the Bible says to join us in a safe, respectful place to discuss what is happening in the United Methodist Church and what the Bible says. You can do it one on one with a team member or with Pastor Jane. There are also resources that the church has that you can borrow. Watch for postings on the COCU Facebook page as well. Various resources can help you learn more, guide your discernment whatever it may be, or help prepare you for similar conversations.

Where can I find out more about the Reconciling Ministries Network? The website is:
www.RMNetwork.org