

As Aldersgate begins exploring what it would mean for us, as a church, to become a Reconciling Congregation, here are some questions that have been asked and the response of the committee that has formed to design a process for this discernment. Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) also has a FAQ and some may wish to read it in addition.

Q: What does EMBaRC stand for?

A: Enquiring Minds: Becoming a Reconciling Congregation. That's the original name of the committee that formed to design a process for Aldersgate to decide whether to become a Reconciling Congregation. After some discussion, we realized the bias in that name and have since changed it to Considering Reconciling Congregation (CRC), which we feel is a neutral name for the committee.

Q: What is a Reconciling Congregation?

A: It is a global movement of Methodists who have decided to intentionally welcome their LGBTQAI+ neighbors into their congregation. There are also Reconciling Ministries that do not encompass the entire congregation but could be a Sunday School class, a youth ministry, a women or men's group in the church. Aldersgate is currently exploring the entire congregation becoming a Reconciling Congregation rather than any subset or program becoming a Reconciling Ministry.

Q: What will this process look like?

A: Right now, AUMC is in the exploratory phase. The CRC committee has been tasked with designing the process our congregation will use to decide whether to become a Reconciling Congregation. This FAQ is the first step. Beginning in early 2018, we are planning a combination of Bible studies, educational opportunities, and small group conversations. After those important discussions have taken place, if appropriate, the CRC committee anticipates an all-church vote on reconciling. If the church votes "no" to reconciling, the committee may recommend that Aldersgate adopt an inclusion statement. Please understand that the committee's task is to design the process, not to make the decision.

Q: How long will this process take?

A: To be honest, we don't know. How long it takes depends on the readiness of each church. Some churches are ready to become a Reconciling Congregation within 6 months of when they start the process. Other churches may take 3 or more years. Our best estimate is that it will take 1-2 years to reach a decision. Our current schedule is that we will have Bible Studies with Pastors Brad and Laura in January, panel discussions in April and May, and guest speakers in June. We anticipate small group discussions as well and are continuing to work on the timing. The process can be stopped at any point.

Q: How will we make sure all voices are heard and that all people feel comfortable speaking up?

A: The committee is working to develop ways for everyone to be included in the conversation. There is currently a purple box at church where your questions and concerns may be deposited anonymously. We also have an electronic “purple box” that you can submit your questions, input, or feedback located here: <https://goo.gl/forms/MhIWD3IngtxyBXOw1>. You are invited to speak with Pastor Brad or Pastor Laura and many of the committee members are available. The question about the process has more details. We are putting this FAQ out now, we encourage you to ask questions at any point along the way.

Q: If Aldersgate becomes a Reconciling Congregation, what changes should I expect? Is anything expected of me?

A: One thing to expect is that Aldersgate would begin publishing in written materials and on the website that it is a Reconciling Congregation. It will also be added to at least one directory of Reconciling Ministries and Congregations. We would explicitly say that we are welcoming to all, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. There are some paperwork steps that the committee, or Core Leadership, would need to do to officially become a Reconciling Congregation and the committee is committed to transparency throughout the process. We, as individuals and as a congregation, would be inviting our LGBTQAI+ neighbors to join in ministry and worship with us. The expectation would be that we welcome all our neighbors with open hearts, open minds, and open doors.

Q: What changes to the facility should I expect?

A: Most likely, none. It’s possible that we will change the bathroom signs at some point in time, but there is no reason that we need to do that initially. There is already a single use bathroom in the nursery for anyone who prefers.

Q: Is there a cost associated with becoming a Reconciling Congregation?

A: Aldersgate would be expected to contribute \$500 annually to the Reconciling Ministries Network.

Q: Will we lose members over this process? What happens if we lose a lot?

A: The hope of the committee is that as we proceed through the process, there will be understanding, patience, education, and grace to help us retain as many members as possible.

Q: Are there churches in Washington that considered becoming Reconciling but decided against reconciling?

A: To the best of our knowledge, there are two churches in Washington that considered becoming Reconciling and are not. They each have a Reconciling Ministry as part of their congregation. As of November 17, 2017, there are 43 Reconciling Congregations in Washington.

Q: How can we ensure that we follow God's will and not our own emotions?

A: Through a process of discernment, prayer, conversation, study, and education. The committee's role is to define the process, not to make the decision. One of our top priorities is that all voices are heard. Those in support of becoming a Reconciling Congregation, those who are opposed, and those who have questions. There are other churches in our conference that have been through this process and we are reaching out to them for information, perspective, and guidance. None of them can say what is best for Aldersgate, but they may have insights to share that can help illuminate our path.

Q: Is this process contrary to the Bible?

A: As Christians, we are called to love. Pastors Brad and Laura are planning a series of Bible Studies in January to help us explore this further. There are links in the Reconciling Ministries Network FAQ (link below) that we encourage you to read. There are also links at the bottom of this for you to consider.

Q: Is this a matter for the Bishops to sort out?

A: In time, yes hopefully. At this point in time, it is a groundswell movement of Methodists who are committed to full inclusion for all in the United Methodist Church. Churches who choose to become Reconciling Congregation are not going against the Bishops; they may be leading the way. We are considering this question, not to oppose the Bishops, but to determine if this is the right action for Aldersgate since the Bishops have not yet taken action.

Q: Why are we singling out the LGBTQAI+ community?

A: Because the Book of Discipline does. The Book of Discipline specifically excludes homosexuals from participating in the full life of the church. This change was made in 1972 and there have been minor modifications to it since then. Homosexuals are the only group that are specifically excluded from full inclusion in the Book of Discipline. Others are specifically included, such as those of all: races, colors, national origins, status, and economic conditions.

Q: Is it a choice for someone to be LGBTQAI+?

A: Scientific evidence is continually emerging that being LGBTQAI+ is not a choice. There are abundant stories of people who tried to "pray away the gay" but still knew who they were. Conversion therapy for minors is legally banned in at least 9 states and multiple additional counties, including King County. There are also many people who identify as both Christian and LGBTQAI+. We are all created by God and in the image of God. Please read some of the links at the end of this for more on this.

Q: Why does this matter?

A: As Christians, we are called to love one another. We are called to be in community. We are called to worship one God. As Methodists, we have a history of social justice and of protesting (we're Protestants after all) when the church is acting contrary to Christ's teachings. Many believe that excluding our LGBTQAI+ siblings, as the Book of Discipline explicitly does, is contrary to Christ's message of love, inclusion, and grace. Additionally, there are terrifying statistics about what happens to people who are shunned from their church and their families because of their God-given identities. The link below for The Trevor Project contains some of these statistics. With all of this in mind, Aldersgate is exploring the possibility of becoming a Reconciling Congregation.

Q: What do all those letters mean? LGBTQAI+

A: LGBTQAI+ is the acronym for:

Lesbian: female attracted to female

Gay: blanket term for homosexual but used to be used for males attracted to males

Bi-sexual: attracted to both male and female

Transgender: someone who was identified as one gender at birth based on their external presentation, but self identifies as another gender

Queer or sometimes Questioning if there are two Qs: Queer is another blanket term for someone who identifies as at least one category that is atypical. It used to be used as a slur, it is being reclaimed by the LGBTQAI+ community. Questioning refers to people who are in the process of determining their identity and orientation.

Asexual: someone who does not find themselves sexually attracted to others, used to mean Ally

Intersex: someone who has naturally – versus medically – developed either male and female sex characteristics or ambiguous sex characteristics. Intersex people used to be routinely operated on while very young to make their outward appearance strictly male or strictly female

+ : encompasses the variety of other identities that are outside of the heterosexual cisgender societal norm (cisgender means that a person's gender identification at birth is consistent with their self-identification of gender)

Q: Are there books I can read, or movies I can watch?

A: There are many books! We are providing these websites now because they are relatively easy to access, and most are relatively quick reads. We anticipate having a list of print, and possibly video, resources available early in the new year. If you have resources that you would like to share with the committee or the congregation, we encourage you to share them in person or through the purple boxes.