

1. What does it mean for Salem First United Methodist Church to become a Reconciling Congregation?

Becoming a Reconciling Congregation means Salem First United Methodist Church will fully welcome all individuals into the life, ministry, and leadership of our church regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, or other labels placed on people. We will *specifically and publicly* adopt a statement of welcome to individuals regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

2. Are there other United Methodist Churches that have become Reconciling Congregations?

The Reconciling Ministries Network recognizes over 900 registered Reconciling Communities. In Oregon, there are at least 33 United Methodist Churches that have identified themselves as Reconciling Congregations. Among these are: FUMC Ashland, Beaverton FUMC, Corvallis FUMC, Eugene FUMC, FUMC Gresham, FUMC Oregon City, and Portland FUMC. Morningside FUMC, one of the Salem-Keizer Open Door Churches, became a Reconciling Congregation over 20 years ago. Our Oregon-Idaho Conference declared itself to be a Reconciling Conference in 2004.

3. I think we already have a welcoming congregation, so why do we need to be “Reconciling”?

Our members certainly exhibit a warm and welcoming spirit to others. However, there are certain provisions in the current United Methodist *Book of Discipline* (2016) that prohibit the full inclusion of members of the LGBTQ¹ community into the life, ministry, and leadership of our church. By becoming a Reconciling Congregation, we are clearly and publicly stating that we will fully welcome people of all sexual orientations and gender identities into the life, ministry, and leadership of FUMC regardless of provisions in the *Book of Discipline* that state otherwise. We will also advocate for changes in our United Methodist *Book of Discipline*.

4. What is the Book of Discipline and what does it say about homosexuality?

The *Book of Discipline* of the United Methodist Church sets forth the laws, organization, and processes by which United Methodists govern themselves. It was originally published in

¹ LGBTQ = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning. Sometimes also LGBTQIA, which adds Intersex and Asexual or Ally.

1784 (in the Methodist Episcopal Church) and is updated every four years following the meeting of the General Conference, which has the authority to amend the document.

There are specific provisions in the *Book of Discipline* that state to the LGBTQ community that they are not fully welcome into the life, ministry, and leadership in the United Methodist Church. Among them:

“The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.” [*Book of Discipline*, Section 161.G]

“The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.” [*Book of Discipline*, Section 304.3]

“Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.” [*Book of Discipline*, Section 341.6]

5. So, if we become a Reconciling Congregation we will be going against certain rules in the *Book of Discipline*?

We have a choice. We can strictly adhere to the *Book of Discipline* and continue to exclude members of the LGBTQ from being fully part of the life, ministry, and leadership of our church, or we can deliberately and publicly choose to not follow specific provisions in the *Book of Discipline* and welcome all people into our church family. Regardless of whether we choose to become a Reconciling Congregation, we will continue to affirm the values of all people. As stated in the *Book of Discipline*:

“All persons are individuals of sacred worth created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self” [*Book of Discipline*, Section 161.G].

“Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties regardless of sexual orientation” [*Book of Discipline*, Section 162.J].

6. *If we want to become a Reconciling Congregation, do we have to allow ceremonies in our church that celebrate homosexual unions?*

Becoming a Reconciling Congregation does not strictly require a church to open its facilities to same-sex weddings. Some churches have chosen not to do so, but in the meantime are supporting changes to the *Book of Discipline* that will allow ministers to officiate same-sex marriages and allow the use of facilities for same-sex weddings. For Salem First United Methodist Church, we believe that full inclusion of all people into the life of our church includes opening our facilities to ceremonies that celebrate marriages of all people and allowing our ministers to officiate at these ceremonies. Doing so will formally demonstrate that LGBTQ persons are fully able—and welcome—to participate in all aspects of the life and ministry of Salem First United Methodist Church.

7. **What is the process for First United Methodist Church to become a Reconciling Congregations?**

Becoming a Reconciling Congregation will involve five steps:

1. The Administrative Council will prepare a draft Reconciling Congregational Statement.
2. The draft statement will be widely distributed to members of the FUMC family.
3. A period of time will be provided to offer information, answer questions, facilitate discussions, and receive input on becoming a Reconciling Congregation.

The purpose of this period is to ensure everyone in the FUMC family is afforded an opportunity to provide input as they carefully and prayerfully consider whether FUMC will become a Reconciling Congregation.

4. The Administrative Council will prepare a final Reconciling Congregational Statement.
5. A church-wide vote will be taken on whether FUMC will become a Reconciling Congregation. If at least two-thirds of the voting members are in favor, we will become a Reconciling Congregation.

8. **Who is eligible to vote and how will the vote be taken?**

The Administrative Council has determined that anyone who self-identifies as a member of the Salem First United Methodist Church family is eligible to vote. The vote will be taken through a written ballot at a duly called congregational meeting. Prior to the congregational meeting, opportunities will be provided to submit a written absentee ballot for those who cannot be present at the congregational meeting.

9. Will I still be welcome at Salem First United Methodist Church if I disagree with the outcome of the vote?

Most certainly, yes! Even now, members of the Salem First United Methodist Church family have wide ranging and diverging views on biblical doctrine, church policies, local and national politics, and world events, to name a few. This vote on becoming a Reconciling Congregation will not change the fact that we are all members of the same family. We will continue to learn from each other and value each other and enjoy being together regardless of our many differences.

10. Where can I find more information about becoming a Reconciling Congregation?

An excellent online resource is Reconciling Ministries Network, a national organization working for the full inclusion and participation of all people in the life of the United Methodist Church. For more information, see www.rmnetwork.org.

11. What is the timeline for us to consider becoming a Reconciling Congregation?

The draft Reconciling Statement was adopted by the Administrative Council on September 20, 2018. Throughout the month of October opportunities for feedback on the statement and individual conversations becoming a Reconciling Congregation on will be offered. Discussions are encouraged in all Sunday school classes, UMW circles, committee meetings, and other small groups. One or more question and answer sessions will be scheduled and a panel presentation is being considered as well. By Thursday, November 1, all feedback and any suggestion forms must be received by the church office. On Thursday, November 8, the Administrative Council will adopt the final Reconciling Statement that will be the subject of a congregation-wide vote. The final Reconciling Statement and absentee ballots will be made available on Friday, November 9. On Sunday, November 18, at 2:30 p.m. an All Church meeting will be held. All absentee ballots must be received prior to the start of the meeting. The ballot count and final results will be announced before the meeting concludes.

12. Is there someone I could talk to learn more about this?

Feel free to contact any of the following individuals if you would like to learn more about becoming a Reconciling Congregation or simply talk to a member of Salem First United Methodist Church about the proposal. Sarah Pitney, Laura Metzger, Lisa Rybloom, Wendy Herrett, Charlie Wallace, Cesie Schuermann, Marilyn Edwards (503-930-6091), Renee Cuffe (503-949-0726), Heather Hawkins (503-802-8000), Diana Dickey (503-930-7139), or Steve Dickey (503-930-7142).