**TRANSCRIPT of Deacon David Behling RECONCILING WORKS PRESENTATION – 09/14/25**

[Speaker 2]

Thank you all for coming this morning, my name is Neil Pfeiffer, I'm currently on council, along with Angie Brickson, and Pastor Jordan, Mr. Beck, and Nathan, our Director of Communications. We have started organizing what we're calling the Welcome Journey Conversation. This is part one, last week in Sunday Bulletin, you guys might have seen, or came by email, kind of a long information sheet, we're starting today with part one, in a few weeks we'll have part two, another conversation where we're inviting pastors from local churches, I think we're up to three, pastors will come and talk about the community and how they've moved through Welcome Journeys.

We then have part three, which is a survey, part four, kind of a response to that survey. So this is really kicking off, we've got a few extra handouts of slides, I know everybody learns differently, some of us are visual learners, some of us are audio learners, some of us like to write notes, so we've got slides and notes, as we get started, just kind of give me a little hand sign, I'm going around to get you guys to have some on the tables. Just to kind of bring back why we're here, we're continuing a discussion on wealth, inclusion, racial equity, social justice, here at Tillman, and we've started with two kind of key goals.

The primary goal is to keep the congregation whole, and the secondary goal is to find clarity as to what our commitments are, living as a wealth-free faith community. With that, we've invited Deacon David Bailey here from Reconciling Works to talk about Reconciling Christ. Now, the idea is we're going to not have the end outcome predetermined of where we're going to go in this journey, but really we want to listen to each other, listen for voices of support, voices of concern, we can find each other in that understanding.

There are just as many perspectives as there are lives lived in this room, and we want to celebrate that right now that you're in Tillman. So this will be the opportunity to hear from the two groups that we've heard from, those that have not heard much about Reconciling Christ prior, so that's what Deacon David will take us through, and also to talk through any concerns anybody's had, and we can all find each other in that understanding. We're going to have questions at the end.

If we run out, Deacon David will be staying after the late service, or I can stay in this room after for additional questions. With that, I'll turn it over to Deacon David to tell you what we're all about.

[Speaker 1]

Good morning. Good morning. The Lord be with you.

The Lord be with you. Good Lutherans. So, I'm here to be the public persona, the face of Reconciling Works.

I do the organization credit. I'm also here to share a little bit about the Reconciling Christ journey, and I'm going to start with a little bit of an exercise that helps us tap into how we experience God's love and grace in our bodies, not just in our minds and spirits. So yeah, we'll just go ahead and start.

There is a hard stop for this at quarter two, because some of us have to be in worship. If you're in choir and have to leave before the end, please quietly move to the exit that's closest to you. I feel like I'm going to be on an airplane later, so it's like exits aren't here.

[Speaker 8]

There are no exits up here, so don't come this direction.

[Speaker 1]

Who or what is Reconciling Works? We are a national nonprofit, so I work with RIC partners across the whole United States and basically in Canada as well. Not all of North America.

We have no RIC partners in Mexico or Latin America, but we do have partners that are members of the ELCIC. We have been in existence – well, I wasn't working for them – since 1974. So as an organization, under the name Lutheran's Concern, at first in 2012 it became Reconciling Works.

This organization is actually older than the ELCA, which came into existence in 1989. It was originally a pan-Lutheran organization, working with all the Lutheran denominations at the time, and most of those consolidated into the ELCA, so we are now a recognized ministry of the ELCA. So for someone like me, if I had known there was an organization that was about helping churches welcome LGBTQIA plus Christians into the community, that would have been wonderful.

Because, you know, 1974, I was 12. I was entering puberty, and I was having crushes on boys, and so that was very confusing. I had no idea that Lutherans actually cared about people like me.

We host the Reconciling Christ Journeys, or program, and that also is older than the ELCA. It has been in existence since 1983. So our earliest partners are way back in the 1980s.

In 1983, our first partner, Congregation, joined, became a partner of Reconciling Works, or Lutheran's Concern at the time. There are a few that are other denominations, because other denominations, like the Presbyterians, the Methodists, they didn't have anything like Reconciling Works. I've always been Lutheran, but there is a little bit of pride for me as a Lutheran that we were the first.

We recognized, first, the need to be aware that, what I will say, queer, God's queer children also are a part of God's beloved family. But we have partners that are Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist, and UCC that are still members, even though those denominations now have, they're also using the same toolkit, they have their own journeys set up for those denominations, reflecting their own polity. We work in all three expressions of the ELCA.

Most of our partners are congregations, but we have 32 synods in the ELCA that are RIC, and we have three of the five synods in the ELCIC are also RIC. It means something different for a synod to be RIC than a congregation, but it still is an important thing to note that a synod has chosen to take that path. The Central State Synod is an RIC synod.

It does not automatically convey RIC status on congregations in that synod. Congregations still have to enter and complete the journey themselves. It's not predetermined.

It just means that the synod is now a second resource, other than RIC. Our values. God values and embraces each person, each individual person, as a beloved child of God.

There are no distinctions. God loves us. All of our diversities are present.

The Spirit gives a diversity of gifts. We are not all the same. We don't all have the same gifts.

We don't all have the same needs. So we are beloved for who we are, but that doesn't mean we are exactly the same as everybody else. Jesus calls us to work for justice.

It's one of our values. We recognize in the Gospel there is a call to reach out to people whose society, including the government, tramples, ignores, or marginalizes. And so when that is happening in a society, we believe that justice is part of what we are doing as a faith community.

It is an important part of that. What are we talking about today? Well, first thing is graceful engagement.

We'll take a little bit of time to check in with our bodies, get ourselves centered, and God's grace on us. I'll talk about the Reconciling Christ journey a little bit overall, but I'm going to focus on parts of the journey that apply to you, where you are now, and where you're going for the next few months. And this might be the Q&A part.

What does full inclusion, open and affirming ministry, what does that look like here at Tomah? What does that enable you? How can you engage?

What are the challenges and joys in that identity, if that's how this journey ends? Who am I? I am a deacon in the LCA.

I was ordained in 2019. Wasn't exactly dragged kicking and screaming up to the front of the church for that to happen, but ordination was not my game plan. I spent most of my life as a professor and administrator in higher education.

Most of the time at Waldorf University, which is in Port City, Iowa. But I also taught at Texas Lutheran University for a year. I am the program coordinator at Reconciling Works, which means that I get to work with wonderful people like you and RIC congregations that are in the journey, but I also work with partners that are already RIC.

They've already confirmed their welcome statement. As they decide, hmm, what are we going to do? What are we going to do as RIC?

It isn't just a certificate that sticks on the wall. It's something that should be infusing, flavoring, helping to guide the kind of ministries that you engage in in your community. All kinds of ministries, not just for people in what I would call the queer community.

I know that can be a trigger word for some, but that is a word that I want to embrace for many people who are much younger than me. Also, the LGBTQIA plus acronym is very hard to pronounce. It's like, LGB.

I have a diverse personal, educational, and professional background. I grew up in Rhode Island while my dad was in the Navy. I was baptized six days old in the parlor, because it was my grandmother's house, the front parlor, the formal room that I hardly ever got to sit in as a child.

That's where I was baptized by my uncle, who was a pastor in the Missouri Synod. I then lived in Baltimore. Then I lived in Yokosuka, Japan.

Then I lived in Washington, D.C. Then I lived in Tucson. Then I lived in Iowa. Then I lived in Texas.

I did also spend one year living in Germany as a college student. I grew up in a lot of different places with a lot of different people who spoke many different languages. We spent enough time in Japan that I came back being able to speak Japanese.

I would interpret for my mom. We lived off base, so I would interpret for my mom at the store. I can't speak Japanese anymore.

I lost it after about six months in the United States. Nobody else in the family knew how to speak it. When you don't use a language, for those of you who have studied a language already, maybe you've figured this out, when you don't use a language, you lose it.

I do speak German still, but we have a few who have not. My educational background. I have a master's degree from Wartburg Seminary in Biblical Studies.

Again, my favorite gospel that I focused on. A lot of my studies was Mark. But my dissertation, my thesis, I did take a full semester class on the Gospel of John, which is an interesting book.

I will give that. But I wrote my thesis on a parable from Luke, which is the one for the electionary text for next Sunday. Since I'm preaching, I'm not going to go back to my dissertation, I don't think.

I then have a master's in science and technical communication, because I thought I would leave higher ed and become a tech writer, and that didn't work out, so I went back to education. In terms of education, I do have an MFA in writing. Because again, I thought, I'm tired of grading first-year college English essays.

I want to write a novel and become wealthy and powerful. That didn't work out either. So I went back to grading those college essays.

My professional background, mostly in higher ed, but I've also worked part-time as a writer at a newspaper. I spent five years at home, full-time, taking care of children in the division of labor in our household. So I have that experience, which at the time was very unusual for a man to be a stay-at-home homemaker.

Ground rules for today. Together, we will create a space where we can respect and listen to each other. We can learn from each other.

We will put people over definitions and labels. My identity is part of that acronym, but I'm also David, and I'm a father, and I'm a spouse. So there's a lot about me that that is the least interesting part.

It's about people, and it's about relationships. Labels are important. They can empower, they can free, but they are not the most important.

We will practice hospitable curiosity as we engage with each other to learn each other's stories. The alternative is lurid curiosity. We don't want to ask questions.

Don't ask a question of somebody else. You're not willing to answer for yourself. That should be a general rule.

Any question you would be uncomfortable asking someone, I mean answering for yourself, that's like, okay, that's a warning sign. That's not a hospitable question. And again, it's about relationships.

The whole journey is built on building relationships, on listening over speaking, learning from each other. We will practice self-care for ourselves, body, mind, and spirit, knowing that sometimes the burdens of this work will feel a little bit too much, and we might need to step back. We might need to gather the group and say, can you pray for me?

Can we do graceful engagement? I need to get in touch with God the Lord first. We're not doing this alone.

There should always be someone we can tag team off of. We will nourish open minds and open hearts in everything. And becoming RIC, assuming that is the path, that is the conclusion of this journey, or the heart of your journey, not the conclusion, that's only part of it.

There's more. There's more. There's always more.

That's the story of the church and the gospel. There's always more to do in this world. So, graceful engagement.

What I'm going to do now, I'm going to play a little bit of music, about two minutes worth of music, and I'm going to ask you to just practice what you can call circular breathing or some deep breathing exercises. I'd like you to get into a place in your chair where you're comfortable. No part of your body is feeling stressed, often times, find your feet, sit up.

Sometimes, it's easiest for some people, very few people, they actually want to get up and be in a mountain pose for yoga. That is the most comfortable spot. And you can leave your eyes open or close them, it doesn't matter.

So what I'm going to ask you to do when I start to play the music, is, I skipped the other slide, is what does it feel like to be touched by God's grace and love? What does it feel like to have that grace and love wash into you? And you can visualize in a lot of different ways.

You can visualize yourself breathing and imagining yourself moving into the ground below us. Into Mother Earth. Finding God's love and creation there.

Reaching out to the people in the room. Not physically, but reaching out to them. Or up into the sky.

It's like, let yourself breathe. Release yourself from any kind of thoughts other than focusing on let's just let ourselves breathe in God's grace and love. Breathe in God's grace and love.

And then I will read a short familiar by the person. So breathe using your abdomen. Breathe like you're in fire.

And breathe out. You don't have to count. Just breathe.

John chapter 3 verse 17. For God so loved the universe that He gave His only Son so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life. Indeed God did not send the Son into the universe to condemn the universe but in order that the universe can be saved through Him.

As you feel called just share is there a word to describe what this meant to you? How do you feel tapping into God's love and grace? Do you like it?

[Speaker 8]

Breathe.

[Speaker 7]

Breathe. Grateful.

[Speaker 2]

Grateful.

[Speaker 1]

Safe. Graced. It can be different for everyone and all of the ways we experience God's love and grace are important.

Now this tool, I'm not doing it exactly the way it is listed but it is available in the toolkit and I left some printed copies, the exercise version with the team here so that it's the first tool in the building and includes the toolkit. It's one we want the RIC team, the group that leads this journey, to use as a way to get to know and relax as they work with each other but it's also one that is useful to tap into periodically through the journey. Every time you enter a new phase, maybe it's time to pause, spend some time in graceful engagement, tapping into how you feel when God's grace and love are part of you.

Drawing that into yourself and then sharing it out with other people. Very briefly, that specific tool, it's about community. It's about how we are not alone in this work.

We are part of the group. I know, especially in the United States, we have this obsession with individuality almost to the point where it can become toxic. The RIC journey, we're not trying to directly combat that but we are wanting to remind people we are in this as a community.

The gospel is about building a beloved community. That's what Jesus was about. Always touching people and bringing them back into where other people were so that they were not alone.

That's what graceful engagement is about. It's about listening throughout every tool. Listen, listen, listen, listen.

Listen more, talk less. Listen more, talk less. And I know, ironically, here I am doing all the talking this morning.

I'm not really able to listen to your stories as much as might be ideal. But there's also the need for information. Understanding, meeting people where they are.

We are not all in the same place when it comes to any kind of a new thing at our church. Especially when it comes to open and affirming ministries. And that can be across the board.

There are some people who are really uncomfortable with neurodiverse people when they have either meltdowns or shutdowns. You know, during worship service, for example. I can be like, but those are god's beloved children.

But don't shame them for having that reaction. It's like, try to meet them where they are. They need some comfort, too.

As they experience this disassociation from that other person. So we meet people where they are. We don't insist that they be in agreement with us, for example.

And it's about building and strengthening relationships. The whole journey is predicated on the building and strengthening of relationships. One goal for the journey, and I have anecdotally heard about this from time to time, the whole congregation is much more in touch and in tune with each other.

Everyone knows each other's stories in a much more solid way. And the congregation is stronger. And that's not about how big the congregation or how small it is.

It's just like, you are much more into each other's, in a good way, in a positive way. But we know more about, we care about people we know about. So anyway, building and strengthening relationships with those in our community.

And then hopefully, because of that, we can build and strengthen relationships with people outside our community as well. It's not about argument or debate. That's not what the graceful engagement tool is about.

It is not what the journey is about. Don't get into a position where this, you know, two different sides. We don't want this to be divisive.

It is a sacred work, this work. Forcing opinions. No one likes to be told how to think or feel about something.

It's like, that is there. That is part of meeting people where they are. There is space at God's table for all people.

It is not our, it's not our place. Jesus welcomes all to that table. And that means some people we're not used to seeing at the table.

And it's not about everyone being exactly the same. We are all very different and special. And beloved.

Second part. This is the RIC partner map as of June 16th. We periodically update this on our website.

And that just demonstrates the distribution by state. So there are 11 RIC partners in the state of Kansas. Most of those are here in this metro area.

I think Lawrence is the other one. And that could be the campus ministry. That's at the University of Kansas.

And then in Missouri, we've got 15. Again, most of those are here in this metro area. But not completely.

There are some in St. Louis. There's a very large one in St. Louis I met someone from at a meeting that was not about RIC. So anyway, that gives you overall there are someone pulled up the map on their phone last night.

There's like 1150 or so that are currently RIC. And there's about 270 or so that are in the journey. And so among that 270 is this one.

You are officially listed as being in the journey of discernment for our records. The people in the journey of discernment don't show up on our map though. That's just a number.

The ones that show up on our map, which is on that same page, they are the ones that have completed the journey and voted on their welcome statements. And that is one benefit to being part of the RIC partner network is that people who are moving to the area or are feeling like they don't want to go to the church they're going to anymore because of something like one of their children has come out. It's like they were like, where's a church I can go to?

My cousin is using the tool for Methodists. They have a similar one. She wants to find a church in Houston that they can go to.

They don't have any LGBT kids. But they want to be part of a church that welcomes all. And so they did find one.

It's my wife's cousin. This is one reason for why this work matters. Only one.

Demographics. A lot of Lutheran churches we hear, we want young people. Where are the young people?

You're here. You are here. But when you look at the number of people who have now felt it's safe enough to share who they really are the percentage is much higher than you might think.

And this is not a record. The Gallup poll system does not track people who are allies. And so when you think about the people who are in fact part of the community and then their family members and other allies there's a lot of people in many generations who are part of this.

Who are looking for places where they can be their whole selves or share every story about their family. Because that is often something that happens is a congregation enters the RIC journey thinking oh it's about those young people of college or whatever and then they discover oh it's Lucille. She has a trans grandson.

We didn't know that. We didn't share that because I wasn't sure anyone would still talk to me after that. But the RIC journey opens that up so people feel like they can talk about their own kids, grandkids nieces, nephews, friends.

Public accommodations this is up mainly so you can see where Kansas is. It's sort of mixed. It interprets existing in this state they interpret existing laws to protect people who are in the LGBTQI community from being evicted from their homes from losing their jobs.

I know that sometimes the rhetoric is all about bakers and florists who don't want to do stuff for same sex weddings but when we talk about these kinds of laws and these protections they're about much more important things. Right now in some places if someone was hostile to LGBTQI plus people found out that one of the tenants in an apartment was in a same sex relationship they could be evicted. I don't know that it's happened but that's what you live with if you're in certain states.

And Missouri is, there's no explicit protection for people of any kind other than perhaps racial that might still be protected. I don't know. And then of course there's the phenomenon of anti-trans bills.

This is just tracking from 2025 the number of anti-trans legislation the amount of anti-trans legislation that was introduced in state legislatures. Not all became law but there is certainly a wave. It really started to hit heavy in 2020 so there's a burden there on families and friends and trans people that they have to live with.

Can you even travel to a certain state and be safe? Can your child receive medical care that they need? And this sometimes will include intersex people who are, because their bodies were born with a different sort of configuration in either DNA chromosomes, hormones they need that sort of gender dependent care.

So anyway, just to let you know that this is also something that makes this work important. The Reconciling Christ journey itself. It's about relationships.

So that's the big root circle. It's always about relationships. Always about being in relation with each other.

One of the things I value about the journey in many congregations including this one is how much work the RIC team and the pastors who are not technically part of the team directly, how much work they do to make sure everyone's included. Everyone's informed. Everyone is listened to.

Nobody is excluded. Even the quiet voices. And sometimes those quiet voices, they can get drowned out by the loud ones.

And so sometimes it means, can you just shut up for a while? Of course it would be said more politely than I just said it. I was a dean and so I did have to tell faculty to shut up for a while.

So there's outreach and education as a part of building a relationship through learning through encounters. Review and have a community vote. You do have a welcome statement draft that is in circulation.

There will be a survey of that trying to meet maximum number of people, individuals. Hopefully that survey is conducted anonymously so people can share their thoughts and ideas about things. I think a lot of your questions are open-ended.

If that survey of the entire church membership does not achieve the 75% threshold, then we recommend that you pause, take a deep breath, use the graceful engagement tool, and look at the results to see what kinds of learning do we still need to engage in? What are the questions? Where does the outreach need to happen?

Where are the obstacles to this? Is it something we can make a difference with? And then you have a formal vote that we really encourage and can require.

You follow your policy. You follow your bylaws and constitution. Three quarters vote again.

75% or more to become an RIC partner. And the only thing that's required is affirming the welcome statement. You can go on and do other things at that meeting.

You can vote on certain parts of RIC stuff, but the main thing for us is you affirm the welcome statement. That makes you RIC. If you don't submit the profile form, we're not going to know.

It's like we don't have magic people working for us. Oh, congregation over there in Kansas, they just became RIC. You have to tell us.

And then the ministry is lifelong, so then what's next? These are the four commitments that we expect all of the partners in our network to publicly commit to. A welcome to people of all sexual orientation, gender identities, and gender expressions.

Now that's just not how the language you want to use. You can use LGBTQIA+. We will not accept queer, with some exceptions in some communities because queer is also a trigger word.

It's not always a positive word, even though it's more positive for younger people than it is for some older people. But that needs to be in the welcome statement, and the ideal is for there also to be a commitment to racial equity. Equality and equity are not the same thing.

You can also go with anti-racism, or as some of our ELCIC partners, white supremacy and colonialism as they deal with reparations and reconciliation work with First Nations people in Canada. But that is... Anyway, open to calling someone.

Now if you affirmed all the stuff up there in one, and you're welcome to say it, then number two is like, it's a checkbox. It's like, you did it. Some congregations have to look at their constitutions because they have not been updating them, as you're supposed to every two years, and so there's some exclusionary language in there.

You need to get rid of that. Three, marriages. Right now, marriage is legal everywhere in the United States.

And so we expect an RIC community to be willing to host a wedding in this building. And again, if you've affirmed number one, and you're welcome to say it, that shouldn't be a problem either. And then the fourth one, meaningful contribution.

When I started in July of 2024 in this job, I thought for sure I was going to get lots of questions about racial equity. And maybe marriages. But I actually have a lot of questions about meaningful contribution.

Tell us what the number is. It's like, you determine the number. What is meaningful?

What's sustainable? That's really important. Maybe that's my higher ed background.

Don't launch a program if it's not going to be sustainable. Don't make a commitment if it's not sustainable. Because then it's not really meaningful.

So the average for congregations is about 600. But some congregations give $5,000 a year. That's a lot of money.

I'm guessing most ELCA congregations don't have those kind of resources. And so other campus ministries, that average would probably be in the low hundreds. I know the campus ministry I was at for three and a half years, it was $25 a year.

Because that's what the students could come up with. And I rounded it up each time to $25. For my own money.

So anyway, there may be questions today about that. What are meaningful contributions? But you determine what that is.

We don't even ask in the profile form. We just assume. You've done all the rest, we're going to assume you're going to follow through and support David's salary, for example.

That's really important. Help with my health care, a little bit for my retirement. We do have staff.

And all of our funding, by the way, comes from partners. ELCA, even though we're a recognized partner, they provide no funding. They give us no money.

We paid our own way to Churchwide Assembly. Even though all of the staff was there. And they did use us as a resource from time to time.

While we were there, on our own back. And so, I'm not bitter about that, by the way. It gives us some independence.

It means we can also say, Oh, ELCA, you foolish mortals.

[Speaker 8]

Whatever you do.

[Speaker 1]

So, this is just an image of the table of contents. And again, if you really want to dig into the details, the Building an Inclusive Church toolkit is a free download on our website. It is easier to use as a PDF.

It's 72 pages. But you can print it if you just have unlimited amounts of paper and colored ink on your printer. I do recommend heavier paper because of all that colored ink that will saturate the page.

So, it lists out the first part, building the foundation. You're already done with that. You've been on this journey for 17 years.

And so, that 17 years has mostly been focused on building that foundation. You have also gone into the other part as well. To keep returning to that building the foundation as you recommit every few years to this journey.

But that's the entire. There are 11 steps total in the journey. Where is atonement?

From what I understand from listening to your team and the meetings we have leading up to today, is you are community recognition. You have received so much messaging about this journey at this point that if this is the first time you've heard about RIC, I'm sorry, that's more on you than it is on anyone here at the church. It's been in bulletins, it's been in newsletters, it's been on the website.

Every possible means of making us transparent to the community has been exercised here. Which is wonderful. Not every church has done as good a job in making sure this is something that everybody knows about.

And so, a lot of credit to Neal here for spearheading that, but also the others of the team. There have been educational opportunities. You've already had some, led by Pastor Zach, or PZ, as I understand people also call.

Some by Pastor Jordan, some by some other people. You will have more coming up. September 24th will be another iteration of Scriptural Engagement.

What... It's a gathering place. What are...

I don't think you're going to do all six, but what are some of the clobber texts that are used to say you don't belong? The ones that I heard, for example, when I was growing up. Oftentimes with the high school teacher or the confirmation teacher looking right at me, I don't think it was intentional.

But, you know, when you're 14, 15, 16, it's like... I just want to... I want to go away.

I don't want to be here. And so, educational opportunities. Writing the welcome statement.

The draft is circulating. It might get revised a little bit more. I don't know.

Step eight. Really important. I already referenced this.

An exploratory survey which gets this question to the entire community. This is the welcome statement we propose we have for this congregation. Do you think you can affirm this?

Is it a yes? Unqualified? Is it a yes, but...

And then you fill in the blank. Is it maybe? And then explain why.

And I'm not sure. Or even a no. But again, why?

Explain why. And so when you get to that survey, if you're not that unqualified yes, be open to sharing what are the things that you need to hear about or have addressed. And then holding the vote.

So if that threshold is achieved, 75%, 80%, 95%, whatever that percentage is, there's at least one partner that had an RIC vote in the last month and it was 100%, unanimous. And my first thought because I'm a white congregation... Were they originally a part of a different denomination?

100%. And then you hold the vote. And if you've done your work and your due diligence and you know what the outcome is going to be, even if you don't really know, you can also do the celebration.

So you can have a party as well. One congregation in Onalaska, Wisconsin, had a giant sheet cake rainbow. You don't have to.

You don't have to show the rainbow other than in the little symbol on the door so that people coming into the church realize you are RIC. And so they will feel safer in your space. And then there's publicizing it in a variety of different ways.

Bulletin, newsletter on your website, being active in the community, joining up with other RIC partners to be more public. Showing up at Pride, for example, can be an option. Not required again.

Connecting with your ecumenical partners. Thanks to the choir for music we're going to be hearing at 11, for those that are going. And then Step 11, which is also known as Oh, we are RIC.

Now what? What are we going to do next? What's next?

And hopefully the answer is not, oh, the certificate arrived, let's put it up in the narthex. That's not the most important thing. What are you going to do to live into an How are you going to live into this event?

What are the things you can do? And it's intersectional in terms of your welcome statement, for example, but include disabilities. The congregation wants to be a place where people who have different kinds of bodies feel welcome, embraced, and fully loved and seen as a child of God and a member of the congregation.

These are some of the resources we have. I have the booklets that are available. You can buy them on our website off of our e-store.

I have some books over here that we recommend that congregations turn to as they have different kinds of questions. Some are published by our own publishing house. Some are published by others.

Unclobbered is a book about the clobber test. But then Matthew Bynes' book, God and the Gay Christian, has been one that has resonated with people who have a more conservative approach and understanding of how important the Bible is. For Lutherans, the Bible is the authoritative source and norm of everything we do.

That is what we say. That is a required language for me as a rostered leader for congregations and their constitutions. But there are Reformed Christians and others who have a different, more conservative understanding of the importance of the Bible.

They don't use the word language of authority. They use other words. That book is very good for people who really need to find that way of seeing that the Bible embraces queer identities.

There are also a number of resources printed here if you want to take one that are free on our website about frequently asked questions. We're already welcoming. Why?

Why? Why? Why?

It's a lot of work. One of the things this is mainly for you to think about. You don't have to air any questions today.

We do have 15 minutes left before I have to disappear. What did you learn? Think about it.

Did you learn anything today? Did you learn anything new about yourself? About the material?

About the journey? About others here in the room? As you look around, it's like, oh, they came.

That's good. I'm glad they're here. Are there still some questions that you have?

In a bit, I'll open it up. If you have questions, you can share them now. There will be a transcript since this is being recorded, but your name will not be attached to that.

The questions for those that look at this, watch this later, the questions will be anonymous for that even though they're not anonymous here. How will what you learned today, how is what you're learning through this journey going to have an impact on this congregation? On what happens here at Atonement?

In some ways, it's even more important for a deacon because deacons are called by the church, we're in service, to take the church, this group, out of the building, out of the community, out into the world, and to bring the world in here. Sometimes, bringing the world into church can be a little bit uncomfortable. Definitely bringing Lutherans out into the world, into the public, blinking, like in the light, saying, uh, no, I don't want this.

I want to be safe in the sanctuaries. How will you have an impact on Oberlin Park and the greater Kansas metro? You're going to be joining a network of a lot of RIC congregations and ecumenical partners, so there's a strong network there.

How do you play a role in that community? You are the largest church, I believe, still in the central state senate, and that says something to the rest of the congregations in the senate as well, even though they're not all, obviously they're in other states, not just Kansas. Alright, so, at this point, uh, I'll leave that slide up.

What kinds of questions do you feel like you want to share now? I'll just repeat them for the microphone so that they can be part of the transcript.

[Speaker 5]

When we started this journey in 2010, we were never able to create the relationships you are advocating here. Always this voice of the leadership, counsel, clergy, it's not the time. It's not the time.

What have you learned in the process of why are the voices like that come through when it's to many of us, it seems so simple, it's the call of the gospel. What are you most picking up that, what's the resistance?

[Speaker 1]

Uh, sometimes it is fear of the unknown. Sometimes it's fear of being bullied. Um, I, there are some RIC partners that have had to deal with some vandalism.

Um, one congregation had its sign destroyed, and so then they put it back up. One congregation had a big pride flag on the wall of the tallest part of the building, it was kind of low down, and someone came along and ripped it off. And then they put it up again.

So they moved it up a little bit higher. Then they kept moving it higher and higher and higher on the wall until they finally got to a spot they couldn't reach it anymore. And it stayed.

And so sometimes it's just, we're going to be targeted. And I think most of the time that doesn't turn out to be the case. But there are some, you know, there are some people, you know, meet people where they are, they're afraid.

We have a rainbow, even on the door, a little tiny one, but they're not that big on the door that someone's going to, like, you know, go after us. And so, it isn't always homophobia, it isn't always transphobia, sometimes it's other things that people are just a little bit unsure about. And so, sometimes the resistance is, well, and this is a little flippant, but I think it's also accurate, but we've never had red carpet in the church before.

So I don't want red carpet now. It needs to be beige. It's just because it's different.

It's like, what's the joke about the light bulbs? How many loosens does it take to change a light bulb? Ten.

One to do it. The other nine to say, I like it better the other way. Or, we've never done it that way before.

Pastor's here.

[Speaker 3]

About a year and a half ago, I guess, we had a congregational meeting and a pastor's memo that summarized the results of the previous year's work, where we went on a similar journey where the council and the LGBT appointed kind of an independent welcoming team and they went through several steps that are similar. They had numerous information sharing and opinion sharing meetings on and off campus and they defined a survey, a pretty extensive survey that went out and we had a Bible study series related and the survey was held at the end of the previous year. The results of that that were presented then was that it identified quite a bit of diversity of opinion, a lot of political opinions and people weren't comfortable with advocating for the ideology of the LGBT kind of movement and they had different opinions so we determined RIC or changing the welcoming statement RIC partnership would be unnecessarily divisive and that was a conclusion, I guess, February last year. It seems like this presentation is kind of a beginning of a repeating campaign of doing that with speakers that are obviously advocates of RIC and those are the speakers. It's more persuasive than objective it seems like including this.

What might have changed since that or how do you address the risk of maybe not those that have different opinions politically not feeling welcome anymore in the same way that we wouldn't partner with other political groups, maybe more conservative groups that would make other people feel unwelcome knowing that their church is tied to this particular side of a divisive issue.

[Speaker 1]

My question will be a little bit longer because there's a lot of moving pieces in the question. So one of the things is, you used the word political, I am someone, politics old school, is about how you organize and manage a community. That's what it means to be political.

So everything in a congregation that's made decisions collectively, that's political. Anytime we make a decision in our community, that's political. It's not automatically partisan.

And so what has happened is we have turned the word political to mean only partisan. So when you're talking about things that matter to the whole community, anything we talk about gun safety, guns, killing children in schools, anything is seen as something we can't talk about. So part of that is helping people understand everything we do is political.

But that doesn't mean everything is partisan. Silence is also political. I have a history, I'm second generation, so I have many family members who experienced World War II in Germany.

And so the silence of the churches, Protestant and Catholic, that was political. And it had consequences for 11 million people. And so just to talk about that one part, there is no way to escape political in this decision.

Now in terms of what you're voting on, what your survey is about, all we're asking for is do you accept this as a welcome statement you can embrace? You don't have to embrace the entire spectrum of ideologies from the LGBTQIA plus community. The majority of that community isn't connected to faith communities, in part because they were traumatized and they're not coming back.

And so there may be even some hostility. This symbol, there are times when I'm wearing this symbol, and there were a bunch of suicides one semester at the university, so I opted to start wearing my collar, because deacons can wear collars, just so I was available. So people could see there was someone who wasn't employed at the university but was also a deacon in other ways.

And there were some, I got smiles and some were like, thank you for being here. We see that you care, but then I also got some real hostile looks from people who I was guessing were part of the LGBT community. Like, how dare you be here?

How dare you have that rainbow? I don't trust you. And so, that's maybe a longer and more indirect way to say you don't have to embrace any kind of ideology other than the ideology of welcome that's embedded in the gospel.

That's all we're asking you to do. In terms of advocacy, you decide. If you want to, like, have a member, you wouldn't send someone officially to address something at the state legislature or city council meeting, but maybe you provide support to someone who's feeling called to do that, who's a member of the congregation.

[Speaker 3]

You understand partnering with an advocacy group implies that we're advocates, and that's why we tend not to partner with other groups, because not everybody agrees with every group, so you're unnecessarily causing division, it seems, by doing that.

[Speaker 1]

And so I go back to what we do is political, what we do is not partisan.

[Speaker 3]

Forget about political partisan, I'm just talking about causes.

[Speaker 1]

In terms of advocacy, advocacy is carried out by partners. We have some advocacy we do within the ELCA. We don't do any kind of direct advocacy ourselves as an organization outside the ELCA itself.

We do post things on social media that draw attention to things like the trans bills. We will call attention to that. We hope that partners will take that information and feel that they can respond to that in whatever way they feel fits their context.

But we don't have a litmus test of political positions that you have to have beyond that welcome statement. And so your work funds resources we create, it funds our salaries. We don't have a lobbyist that represents how it works.

We don't do that kind of direct advocacy. So if that is something that is something that people feel uncomfortable about, I'm not quite sure how that can ever be completely satisfied. Because again, I will go back to not saying anything also has consequences.

Not taking a stand when bad things are happening to people does happen. We can talk about it without using that keyword. But you sign into becoming part of a partner network that is open and affirming that it provides a safer space for people who want to be part of the faith community.

That is the ground level, that is the foundation of what we are about. If you choose to become advocates for things as a congregation or to support people in advocacy work, that is a decision you make locally, here. We don't insist upon it.

So...

[Speaker 7]

How does the RIC affect the teaching of children and youth?

[Speaker 1]

Again, that's you figure out your own. We don't have a curriculum that you can purchase. We don't have one that we provide.

We do have, when we do our RIC Sunday and pride worship services, we will have a children's message that you can use or not use. We will have some coloring pages that you can use or not use. So it's all at the local level, the congregation level.

We have resources. You can tap into them and use them as you want to.

[Speaker 6]

When you do look on websites and see some of the things they've done, though, in different churches, that kind of flows along and you kind of get the edge there, right?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, I can't speak to what individual, unless I know something about that congregation. I know that the UCC has created an hour-hole-wise curriculum. It's very expensive.

You need to be trained. And so there are resources. They're not coming.

And it's time to stop.

[Speaker 6]

I have one more. What is Queer Confirmation?

[Speaker 1]

Queer Confirmation is through Work Group Seminary. And that is, again, voluntary. And it's designed for queer kids who are not comfortable being part of a confirmation group in a church.

I mean, a whole class could do it together, but it can also be individuals. In consultation with pastors and family or parents, I just don't feel safe. Even though it's an RIC church, maybe, I don't feel safe in this youth group or confirmation.

And so I want to go to this. It's only available online. But that's through Work Group Seminary.

And it was funded by some kind of grant that ELCA got.

[Speaker 4]

So we have no I will say, Boo and Drew and Pastor Zach and myself are still the ones in charge of our curriculum. That won't change whether we come RIC or not. Thank you, everybody, for coming today.

I didn't mean to steal this man for worship to come with me. Neil, do you want to finish up for us?

[Speaker 2]

Yes, excellent. Thank you. Again, thank you guys for coming this morning.

I'll stay here for any questions for anybody who went to early service. Deacon David is going to be assisting worship early and then 11 o'clock service. So he will be available after 11 for anybody who's going to 11.

So if anybody wants to stay for questions, we're going to stay and be available. I'm going to say look forward to more communication and we are here to receive your feedback. So on website, on the email address, direct conversation, let us know where you're at and we're going to try and keep bringing the entire congregation.

[Speaker 4]

As far as I know, I don't think it's going to be back in the charter hall next week and we're going to have a person from Horizons, Justin Cooper, come and talk to us about Hibbing and look forward to having you there and if you have not signed the sheet, there's a couple sheets going around, I'd like for you to please sign those before you escape the room. Thanks for coming.