**TRANSCRIPT of Welcome Journey Community Conversation – 10/05/2025**

[Speaker 2]

Welcome. Tonight is community conversations, neighbor conversations. We've welcomed some other clergy who have experience in their own setting with Reconciling Works.

And we just invited them to kind of talk about their experience, their congregations. I'll give a brief introductions. So first of all, we have Reverend Sarah Pierce, who currently serves at All Saints Lutheran in Blue Springs, Missouri.

And Reverend Jelaine Markle, who currently is the interim minister at Salem Lutheran in Lenexa and Overland Park. And the Reverend Dr. Michael Peck, who you guys know him down the street, senior pastor at Holy Cross Lutheran Church. So what we're gonna do is I'm gonna let each one of them speak and talk about their experiences.

When the three of them are finished speaking, we'll have some time for Q&A. And myself and Pastor Jordan, who's in the back there, will also take place in the Q&A. And I'll talk more about that when we get to that point.

But right now, we just wanna invite our friends to share their experiences and their perspectives. And we couldn't agree on who went first, so we're gonna go on where they sat. And Pastor Sarah sat over here closest to me.

So we're gonna let her go first. Let's welcome Pastor Sarah Pierce. Thank you, Pastor Pierce.

[Speaker 3]

I had to be prompted to stand up, and that's unusual for me, but I had forgotten that that was part of the deal. Thank you all for inviting us to come in and spend some time with you this evening. This is an important question that you all are wrestling with, an important discernment process that you are in the midst of.

And I think that hearing some outside voices can sometimes be helpful in answering those questions for yourself. So as Pastor Zach said, my name is Sarah Pierce. I am a pastor at All Saints Lutheran in Blue Springs, and I have been there coming on five years now.

I have been ordained for about four years, just over four years. So my journey there has been a little bit different, and our process, our reconciling in Christ process was a little different, maybe than some of the other stories that you'll hear tonight, in part because of who I am and what our journey has been together, my journey with All Saints. So I'm a lesbian, and I am married, my wife and I have been married for almost 12 years now.

And so I mentioned that I have been at All Saints for almost five years, and have been ordained for almost four years. So when I started at All Saints, I had finished all of my seminary work and had finished my internship, but I had not yet graduated. And All Saints was nearing the end of their interim time.

They weren't quite, their call committee was not yet ready to call someone. And then their interim pastor had a pretty significant health issue and could not finish. And of course, we were right in the middle of COVID, as I'm sure you remember, at the end of 2020.

And so I was at the point where I was ready to serve, but not yet ready to be, I hadn't graduated, so I wasn't ready to be called, and therefore I wasn't ready to be ordained. And so the bishop reached out to me and said, we think we have a spot for you if you want to serve as a lay leader, a synodically authorized minister. And so that differs from the call process, and this is important to our process with reconciling, I promise.

That differs from the call process in that, and we interview, you meet with the council and have that conversation. And then rather than being called, you congregations were like, hey, here. And so when I met with the council, it was over Zoom, which was weird, right, for a first conversation, but we're deep in the middle of COVID and nobody's going anywhere and nobody's meeting up with anybody.

And we're having this conversation and things are going very well. And then I said, I need to know that my wife and I are going to be accepted for who we are at All Saints, and that this is not going to be an issue. And you can kind of see them all kind of look at each other as you can kind of see people do on Zoom.

And the president of the congregation at the time said, I'm sure that's not going to be an issue. Well, that's not really the answer you want, right, when you're walking into a situation like this where you're going to potentially be pastoring somebody. So I said, that's not good enough.

And they kind of looked at each other again. And All Saints, I don't know if you know anything about us, but we are a really small congregation. We worship about 25 on a Sunday morning.

So they agreed to call every family and every member and just say, is this going to be okay? Is this going to be a problem for everybody? And unanimously, everybody that they talked to, and they talked to everybody who was a member except for a few members who were in nursing homes who had dementia, who would not have given probably good responses anyway, so that was fine.

Unanimously, everybody said yes. And some of them said yes with great gusto. So that was the situation that I was walking into when I became their Synodically Authorized Minister was knowing that not only would I be welcomed, but that kind of the totality of who I am as a person would be welcomed, and my wife would be welcomed to come in as well.

And then, of course, fast forward a few years, and we hadn't really had the conversation yet or started to have the conversation about reconciling in Christ because partly because there's a little bit, when you think about how do I start to have this conversation with my congregation, it feels, I would imagine it feels a little different for a straight pastor to say that than for a pastor who's a member of the LGBTQ community to say, start this conversation, because there's a little, it's a little bit more loved because what happens if the answer is no, right? And so I was a little hesitant. I mean, I knew they loved me.

I knew they loved Rebecca. I knew they welcomed and accepted us. And I was pretty sure I knew what the answer would be if we started having this conversation, but I didn't really wanna kind of get the ball rolling.

Believe that there needs to be significant lay involvement in a movement like this. It should not be primarily pastor-driven. And so one summer, two or three years ago maybe, we were in a kind of a summer-long project where we were exploring how to be more involved with the community.

And so we were working with Pastor Donna Simon when she was the DPM. And there were several other congregations who were involved in this work as well. And I meant to look up the name of the program and just totally space it.

I should have taken some notes. But what we did, so we had to come up with a project. And what we did is that summer, we were hosting the Blue Spring City Theater was using our building to rehearse for a youth theater that was gonna go to Nashville and compete, a youth play that was gonna go to Nashville and compete.

And so we decided that what we were gonna do is that summer, one Sunday evening when the kids were there, we were gonna have an ice cream social and just feed the kids and their parents ice cream and just kind of engage them in a conversation. And the big learning that came out for those of us who were involved in that group was the kids in that theater group who don't go to church, don't go to church because they are worried that they're not gonna be welcome because whether it's because they identify as LGBTQIA, whether it's because they are somewhere on the autism spectrum, whether it's because of their race or ethnicity, whether it's because of any one of a number of things, because they are involved in the theater so people think they're weird or whatever the case may be, any one of these things. And, but their experience was not that those labels came from their peers.

Their experience was that those labels came from other parts of society and they were worried. And so when we were talking afterwards, when we were kind of debriefing, we said, we need to start moving on reconciling in Christ as soon as we can because we need to show these kids that they would be welcome in our building whether they are LGBTQ, whether they are somewhere on the autism spectrum, whether they are involved in theater, whatever the case may be. And so we started, we kind of started having discussions.

We said, this is what we wanna do. We do something in our church called Coffee with Council where every fourth or the fourth Sunday of every month, basically we invite people to stay after worship and we say, this is what the council is talking about. This is what we're working on.

And so we used that time to talk about becoming reconciling in Christ and to give people the opportunity to answer or to ask questions and to have the discussion. And there was one person who said, I don't understand why we have to do this. Shouldn't this just be who we are as the body of Christ?

And I thought, yes, it should be, but we do because there are people who are worried they're excluded. And then from there, the questions just very quickly moved to logistical questions. And so we really very quickly had our answer.

And when we voted, it was 100% to become reconciling in Christ. And we've taken it very seriously. And so when we wrote the mission statement, we were very inclusive.

Reconciling in Christ or Reconciling Works is fairly prescriptive in terms of you need to include LGBTQIA folks and you need to include anti, this sort of thing. But then we kind of called out anti-poverty because we're very close, we work very closely with the Jackson County Community Services League, which helps folks in Jackson County who are in poverty and rent assistance and those kind of things. We called out people who are in from substance use disorder as being welcome in our church.

We called out people with mental health diagnoses as being welcome in our church. Just kind of all of these things that are not necessarily things that Reconciling Works says, this is part of our umbrella, but it was important to us to say, you specifically are welcome here. And I think to me, that's why Reconciling in Christ is so important is because it's really easy to say everybody's welcome, but unless we say specifically to a group of people, yeah, I'm including you in this welcome, it's really easy for that group of people to think, well, when they say everybody, they don't mean me.

So I think one of the questions is, what is our relationship ongoing? We don't necessarily, we reach out to folks who are in our community for a close relationship and Reconciling Works is of course up in the Twin Cities. And so that's kind of out of our zone of who we have a close relationship with.

We do support them financially. I was thinking about this the other day, just thinking about our budget. So our benevolence, one of the things about becoming Reconciling in Christ is that they ask that you support Reconciling in Works in a way that is meaningful to your congregation.

Our benevolence budget, 48%, I figured this out, very specifically, 48% goes to the Synod of our benevolence budget. 48% goes to Community Services League in our, in Blue Springs area to help people who need that assistance and that we also support them in kind and then 2% goes to Reconciling in Works and then 2% we choose to send to one of the Mission Start, non-English speaking Mission Start congregations in the Central State Synod to support them as well. And so I feel like that's how we take our relationship with Reconciling in Works very seriously is we are supporting those communities in our midst, the communities that we call out in our welcome statement as being welcome in our church, we're putting our money where our mouth is and putting our support where our mouth is because they don't walk through our door very often but we're practicing our faith in that way by figuring out how to support them even if they don't know what supporting them means. So that's what I've got. So all right.

[Speaker 1]

Could you give this back? Hi everybody, I'm Pastor Jelaine Markle and you can call me Pastor J because Jelaine's hard to remember and it's really easy to mispronounce but do not confuse me with that Pastor J. So and I serve St. Louis Lutheran Church and Pastor Jackson in Lenox said in Overland Park it's because our offices are in Lenox but we worship in Overland Park. If you wonder how that works, we can chat afterwards. So when I was going through seminary and I don't feel more this way, like I had the perfect call, perfect church I was gonna serve. It was gonna be an urban inner city ministry that catered to the homeless, LGBTQIA and HIV positive community.

I came in and God said, how do you feel about rural Iowa? But I served the people of Elvira Zion Lutheran Church, yes that's really the name, in rural Iowa for seven and a half years. They were not a Reconciling in Christ congregation and that was not a mountain I was willing to climb as a first call pastor.

And then we moved here to Kansas City and I became an interim at First Lutheran Church in Mission Hills. And lucky me, I walked in to a Reconciling in Christ congregation that was already done for me. And it was the same with Salem.

So I'm very lucky that I just had to step into this community unlike Reverend Pierce and Reverend Peck that have done a lot and their experiences are much different than mine. So I took some notes because it's a Sunday and my brain has already done a lot of braining for today. So to me, being Reconciling in Christ is more than being welcoming to the LGBTQIA community.

That should be the bare minimum, honestly. That should be like the bar is real low of what we do. For me, it's crucial that I am welcome and my kiddo and her friends are welcome.

So I have a 12-year-old, middle school's a dead end trip, y'all, it's just, she likes me, she loves Jordan, so that works out really well. And she is a nerdy theater kid. And so all of her friends are also stone cold weirdos and they wanna be able to come to church and I wanna be able to tell them, you are welcome here and you are safe here.

Not too long ago, she's like, mom, there's a group that meets at school before school on Fridays. And she gave me the name and I said, you know what, let me look it up because it was a Christian group. And I said, I wanna make sure it's a safe place for you.

And she said, okay. And y'all, when the website doesn't say specifically who is welcome, then it tells me that there might be a chance that people are not welcome, right? So I tell her this, the website was not explicit on what they believe and what they don't believe.

So just go in with your ears wide open. She's like, okay. So we'll see how that lasts.

Yeah, you will probably get a text about that. So again, I love that Irving Pierce mentioned this, but for me, being recognized in crisis means that I am welcome in my full self. So I have brain health issues.

I don't call them mental health issues because my brain is an organ just like anything else. And it chooses not to function the way I want it to. And so my brain functions like a jerk sometimes.

But therapy and Zoloft are my best friends. And depression and anxiety are very much a part of my life. And I need a place where I know that that's okay for me to say that out loud.

I also need to know that it's okay for me to be in a place to say, no, thank you, I'm an alcoholic, and for that to not be an issue. And I'm very, very grateful that when I came on at Salem, we use a common chalice for the presiding minister. And somebody reached out to me and said, I just want to let you know, I let the altar of guilt know that from here on out, it's juice and the chalice.

I didn't even ask. Like, that was done automatically because I was very open and shared that part of my story. So it was really nice to be able to not have to fight that battle.

It means to me, when you're recognized in crisis, it means my friend's autistic son is welcome to come to worship with his headphones. And it's okay if he lays down in the queue. And it's okay if he's playing with his fidget while we're in worship, right?

That is important to me. It's important to me that a congregation is representing me in Christ because what that tells me as a pastor, as a potential participant, is that you not only have read the gospel, but you've lived it, right? Have y'all ever heard this expression like going to church on Sunday makes you no more of a Christian than standing in a garage, makes you a car?

I'll give you a second to ponder that, right? So you are living the gospel out loud when you proclaim this radical welcome. It also tells me that you know how to have hard conversations and you are willing to sit in the hard.

We come from a fix-it-fast society, right? If you need a fix, Amazon can get it to your house tonight by midnight, right? Fix-it-fast.

This is not a fix-it-fast situation. I know that this is a conversation that's been going on for a long time, but I don't think you're going to regret being slow and purposeful and methodical about it because it's important that you get it right. But sometimes it's uncomfortable to sit in the hard stuff.

But because you're willing to do it, that tells me that you're open to other conversations that might be hard, like what if we change the liturgy, right? You guys never do that, right? Never change, change, right?

Exactly, yeah. And to me, there is a big difference between congregations that are represented in Christ and congregations that are not. And that is not an insult to the congregations that have not gone through that process, but to me, it's an outward sign of what is believed, what is accepted, who is welcome.

And again, the welcome is specific, right? Like Pastor Pierce said, we can say all are welcome, which again, bare minimum of what Christians should do. But when you actually say this is who is welcome and we are serious about that, that goes a long way.

I thought about this this morning on my commute because I live in the Northland and it's not easy to get to Oakland Park from the Northland, but on a Sunday, you can drive backwards on 35 and nobody notices. But anyway, and I thought about is there a drawback? Is there something negative about being represented in Christ?

And this is a weird drawback. I am a female pastor in a congregation that proudly flies the pride flag. And that makes me a target.

But I'm glad to be that target every single Sunday. But because of that, and unfortunately, because of the society we live in, I'm very aware of who comes in the door, where they're sitting, are they new, are they allowed that? But I have two things that people really don't like sometimes.

I'm a lady pastor and I'm queer friendly. Don't get me started on the way I feel about candy corn. I'll be going down.

So those two things, that's the only drawback. And really, it's not a drawback because the story of Jesus is what I'm willing to risk and be wrong about. And what I mean by that is like, I wanna live my life like Jesus is the real thing, like Christ is the answer, and find out at the end I've been wrong about it all.

Then live my life like Christ doesn't exist, like I'm not nothing and find out at the end. So Jesus is the story that I'm willing to risk and be wrong about, and every Sunday, I will proclaim that gospel loud and clear of love and inclusivity. And yes, we do mess it up.

We mess it up a lot. And here are some of the ways that we mess it up. We have not done a lot of thinking about the sound in our sanctuary.

So those who are neurodivergent might find the sound to be a little too loud, right? If we were serious about this, all communion would be gluten-free. We don't.

I know, thank you. We don't, we have regular crispy Christ and gluten-free crispy Christ. So just choose your poison.

It really, yeah. Poison, yeah, and stale, usually. So if we were really inclusive, that's what that would look like, right?

Inclusivity looks like ramps, looks like having headphones, looks like handicapped accessible stalls that are actually large and not just stalls when you put bars on. Inclusivity looks like it's okay if you come in and you're not afraid that you're gonna be judged because your jeans are holy, right? Of course they're holy, they're your Sunday jeans.

So you're welcome for that bad joke. So we, yeah, we screw it up, but that's where grace comes in. Our Reconciling Works relationship is ongoing and beautiful.

We look to them for guidance, and we are actually in the midst of making sure that our welcome statement is up to date because we do need to include some additional things about race and gender, and that's kind of for us a no-brainer and something that we are proud to do. And we also try and support financially Reconciling Works. I would love nothing more than if I were to leave Salem, because as I mentioned, I'm in an interim, that they are prepared to call a member of the LG because that's another thing.

You can say, of course everyone's welcome here and we'll marry your son and his boyfriend and your trans daughter is welcome here. And then when you have someone say yes, but I want to be your pastor, is that okay? That's, for some folks, a bridge too far to cross.

And so for me, I want to make sure that that is done. And so if I get into the call process with another church, I want to ask them, I thank you for your interview interest. Have you interviewed somebody who is involved with Reconciling Works, part of the LGBTQIA community?

Because here's the thing, y'all, I'm a straight white woman. I have a lot of things going for me. But I want to be able to open those doors for others and use what power I have with my voice, my body, my gender, my sexuality, to make sure that others are listened to.

I screw it up all the time. You're gonna make mistakes, right? I get people's pronouns wrong.

I maybe call somebody by a dead name when it's not done on purpose. But instead of making a big deal out of it, say, thank you for correcting me. I'll do better next time.

And they not do, right? So don't worry about getting things wrong in all of this. Live into that, trusting God's grace, and know that when it's all said and done, Jesus still shows up.

And the kingdom of God is really big and wide, and the table is always big enough for everybody. We just need to make sure that the table's also accessible, and apparently, full of gluten-free things and dairy-free things and other things like that. And making sure that if I need my therapy, I've got it.

And if you need headphones, you've got it. If you need a ramp up to the table, it's there. So don't be afraid to mess it up.

Choose presence over perfection.

[Speaker 4]

Good evening. I'm Michael Peck. I'm the senior pastor of Holy Cross here at Old Oak Park.

And I'm the one pastor who didn't get the dress code medal. I have been a pastor at Holy Cross for 27 years. And that has given me a long, expansive history with the congregation.

I've been there to walk with them for quite some time. When I first arrived at Holy Cross, one of the first things we did was we developed a mission statement. And the first line of that mission statement, you know, over the course of the time that I've been with the people of Holy Cross, we've continued to explore what the expansiveness of the gospel of Jesus Christ is and what it means and how it impacts us.

The congregation has been through many changes over the years and it was back, I think, in probably, it was pre-COVID time, we began to talk about RIC and what would it look like for us to enter into a conversation with one another about what it would mean to become a Rite Telling of Christ congregation. And as you know, eventually the world turned upside down. And so that took a backburner.

And then a couple of years ago, we had a few folks that came back and said, look, we need to re-engage this conversation with one another. And so we did. And it was a wonderful process.

I know that you've been through the process. And so this last April, we voted overwhelmingly to become an RIC congregation. One of the questions that kept getting asked over and over again was why do we need to be RIC?

Why do we need to say this person is welcome or this person is welcome? Because we say all people are welcome. And what I discovered over the course of those 27 years, and I think it's already been listed here, is that for a large segment of our community, all doesn't necessarily mean all, or no questions.

So again, I've been a Catholic for 27 years. When our eldest son was in college, he came up to us. And one of the questions that I had for him at that point in time was why don't you say something to us sooner about this?

Because you know how we personally, now again, this is a child that grew up in the congregation. He was, I think, four years old when we arrived. He looked at me, he said, Dad, I was afraid of what it would be.

So here's a kid who grew up, a passionate kid, grew up in this church that says we welcome all people. But he's not quite sure that he will not be welcomed because of his sexual identity. Shortly after he came out, I was with a men's group, we'd gone on a ski trip, we did this every year.

And as guys tend to do on these trips, you know, we're having fun, and they're making homophobic jokes. Every one of those homophobic jokes had a face on it. Guess whose face was in that joke?

My son. These are true people. So we talk about welcoming people.

We talk about being RIC. Why is it important? It's not only important for those who are coming and wondering is the extantness of Jesus Christ and his grace for me, but it's also for the congregation to be aware of how they're interacting with others and the kinds of barriers that they're putting in front of them.

We have many, many barriers that we put in front of the means of grace. Doors, restrooms, parking lots. So one of the things that RIC has done for us is, it's already been mentioned, is it's raised our awareness in a number of those things.

So we're trying to improve accessibility throughout our building when it comes to doors. We're taking a look at sound in our sanctuary and how we're gonna be able to facilitate hearing for people. All of those little barriers, things that we just don't pay attention to because everybody's welcoming.

Things we don't pay attention to, but we have to be very specific about. So that specificity becomes very, very important in letting people know. So that, for me, really was one of the incredible benefits.

Now, the question you're wondering is, did people leave the church? You know, what do you do with the conflict? Yeah, we had a few people that left.

They just could not get their heads wrapped around what we were doing. And that's fine. I hope that they can find a place where they are welcome.

They would be welcoming in our midst, but this is just the bridge too far. But I will tell you this. We have had people come and join our congregation because they knew we were in the process.

They joined our congregation because we are RIC. These are straight folks. But they're straight folks who are coming to a greater understanding of, again, the expansiveness of the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

I will leave you with this because I know we want to have some conversations with one another. But again, that long history that I've had with the congregation, when we were in the midst of this process and we were sending out information and conducting surveys for the congregation, a young person come to me that had grown up in the congregation and had been confirmed, had gone to school, and greeted me one Easter Sunday morning in the back of the church. And so I just want to tell you that I now identify as trans.

And the fact that my congregation is doing this saved my life. Saved my life. If we are in a life-saving business, and if we are taking, again, the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ, the expansiveness of that grace, and what that means, and this is really gospel work that we're engaged in.

So I commend you. I commend you for the work that you've done. I call out this with us who have been through the trenches, so to speak.

And it's a process. As I said, 27 years, God will and I'll continue, and the congregation will continue to change.

[Speaker 2]

Folks, let's give a round of applause for our speakers. I like it. Thank you very much.

Thank you very much. So at this point, before I forget, one public service announcement. When we do close tonight, we do have refreshments.

There's water and Angie brings some made pumpkin bread? Homemade pumpkin bread. So I just want to make sure I don't forget to say that.

We do have some refreshments afterwards. Okay, so this meal, I believe this microphone is now mine also. What I'd like to do is invite questions from the audience.

We're all sitting up here. If you have a question that you want one of us in particular to answer, just say that when you ask it. If you don't, if you just have an open-ended question, please share it, and we'll let the spirit move and kind of pass the mic around and see who wants to answer.

That's kind of how we'll go. My suggestion, I’ve got 6:37pm right now. I think probably around 7:15pm, 7:20pm, we should probably close.

We do have some time for some questions. I do want to make sure too that everybody gets at least an opportunity to ask one question. So let's let everybody ask one question and then there's some follow-ups.

We can do that. Yeah, but not all at once, one at a time. And Neil's going to be the host of the talk show.

[Speaker 14]

On the master list across the country, is there an indication which congregations are more commonly listed as acknowledging RIC versus any, rather than large congregations or small congregations? Can you see a pattern there?

[Speaker 2]

So Neil wants to see a question in terms of congregations becoming RIC, which kind of stats on that or trends on that, not necessarily on the size of the congregation, but other factors. I can tell you stats, but can you guys like, what? I'm going to let Mike do this one.

[Speaker 4]

Just anecdotally, I'm sure you probably knew a deep dive, we've only had smaller congregations become RIC only because it's an easier ship to move. A larger congregation's harder to move. It's harder to get 90% approval for your welcome statement.

And so it just takes a lot more work in a larger congregation. But we're seeing more and larger congregations actually take up the task. There's just a real movement going on.

[Speaker 1]

Not only in congregations, but we have seminaries in the ELCA that are now RIC and we have entire synods that have become RIC, this one included. So yeah, it's on a local level, congregation-wise, it does tend to be a little smaller. All Saints, Salem first, we're a little smaller.

Holy Cross is 100 in both of our congregations combined. But the work and the process is still the same.

[Speaker 2]

And the only thing I would add, just anecdotally, you know, I think of Kansas, Missouri, the central states, and I think of Chicago, where I went to seminary in Michigan, where I've been to the nation of Texas, where I grew up. So, you know, all these places do have RIC-comprised congregations. And they have congregations that are not.

So I don't know if there's naturally a geographic trend to it. I mean, right now, RIC congregations are all across the United States. So there's some everywhere.

Yeah, possibly, maybe probably more urban than rural, but still, some rural too. Thank you.

[Speaker 17]

For Matt and I, two things. How did you determine your level of works? And secondly, have you done anything, signage, banners, outside the church?

[Speaker 4]

So to first, we haven't set that at a monetary level. What we have said was we would do a free will offering. Because there is a financial commitment to RIC, as you know.

So we've not set a number. So that could be in dollars. I mean, we've even had individuals say, I'll pay whatever is required.

So we have not done that. So we do not include that in our operating budget as part of our balance. But we do have a commitment to raise that every year.

In terms of signage, at this point in time, the only thing that we've done is we've put the little RIC sticker on our door next to the one, the sticker that says we have an AED right above the sticker that says no guns. So that's a sign there for those who want to know what they're going to do. I will say this, though.

We are in the midst of a visual identity refresh. So we're working on new branding. And part of that is going to be how we're communicating to the community.

The branding folks that we're working with, the communication folks that we're working with, will only work with congregations that are RIC or in an RIC process. They have an understanding of what that means. What else that looks like, not real sure at this point in time.

One thing I failed to mention was our process was primarily a lay-led process. I was fairly hands-off. We had another pastor on the staff that really worked with that team.

I just got to sit back and watch and cheer.

[Speaker 8]

So I just wanted to, from Pastor Zach and Pastor Jordan, I attended the Verizon's presentation today. And I was surprised when, I can't forget his name, you're Dustin?

[Speaker 2]

Dustin.

[Speaker 8]

Dustin said that of all the people that he had interviewed at the church and had conversations with, they all were not sure what our vision was for atonement. And so when I think of vision and work that I've done with RIC, I think congregation is staying put. And to me, for us to have this very inclusive, welcoming statement is a way for us to move forward as a congregation.

And I just wondered if either of you had an opinion on that.

[Speaker 20]

Wow.

[Speaker 2]

Put the senior pastor on the spot. Jolene? Yeah.

Can I share mine first? Please. Okay.

That's a great question. Yes, with our work with Verizon's, with the stewardship team and with the strategic planning team, this has come up. You know, what is your vision?

They're real good about too, you know, what's your vision in the next three years? Let's start with that. Who are you?

And again, this is a process. So this is why we're doing this. They don't expect us to know this tomorrow morning.

You know, from my perspective, I totally agree with what Pastor Pat said. You know, when it comes to reconciling works, this really needs to be a lay led endeavor. Not that pastors aren't included.

We're part of this community too, but I've never been one to say, you know, I'm just gonna take this and put it on the congregation. But I will say with that said, some of my thinking about this has changed, really the past four years. And, you know, four years ago, I stood in front of God at a similar forum like this and said, you know, based upon what the council is saying, what the welcoming team is saying, I kind of feel like we're being called to kind of be that church in the middle and maybe in our best efforts not to pursue this right now.

And I own that. I said that. Some of you may like that and some of you maybe didn't.

What has changed, my perspective, says that, and I don't know if it's anybody's fault, but I think the culture and the world has really delved into a lot of these topics around welcoming, vicinity, and sexuality. And we're almost to a place now where the world is just expecting the church to have an answer, you know? And to tell you the truth, the last two years, especially of those with new members that have joined, members are asking this question, that they're aware of what Reconciling at Works is.

I've had members join who are here for two months and say, I didn't realize we weren't RIC. I've had members who joined Atonement and found out we weren't RIC and then sort of went away. This is on people's minds.

So, pastorally, you know, it's not my job to tell you how you should think about all these things, but I'm at the point where I feel like for us as Atonement, as a congregation, I think is in our best interest. I think for our long-term health, which will lead into our vision, I feel like as a congregation, we really need to make a decision about this to move forward, whatever that decision is, because we really need to find out, you know, who are they? So that's why I'm glad that we're doing this process now, because I think we need some clarity on that.

Thank you.

[Speaker 1]

One of the things I wanted to say, Pastor Jordan, did you have to? So there's a conversation at Salem because we worship in the same building as Overland Park Lutheran. People are like, why don't you guys, you know, merge?

Because they're not reconciling in Christ. Period. For us, that's the end.

Like, we can worship together on Ashton's Day. We can worship together on Christmas Eve, but as far as becoming one congregation, aw, nope. That's a hard and fast stop for my people.

And that's one of the, like, our non-negotiables, is what we've said. I, as a called and ordained minister of this church, if I got paperwork for my next call and it was not a reconciling in Christ congregation, I'd have to say yes, even to an interview.

[Speaker 7]

Hi, I guess this is kind of a fallen tax answer, and it's also to ask Deacon David, he had friends last year who were RIC partners.

[Speaker 20]

Yeah.

[Speaker 7]

So, basically, the process we're going through this year seems kind of almost like we ended up from the results of the certain beliefs and scriptural interpretation and diversity of political viewpoints. Now it's, I think, rational for why we decided not to pursue RIC partnership. But the difference is, this seems like it's almost more of a campaign, a check and a pulse.

We had heavy hitters here that are clearly a pro-RIC partnership. So I guess, how do we reconcile, lack of better words, the difference of opinions and the cognitive dissonance of folks that, you know, want the more conservative, I'll say, beliefs, respected and still feel welcomed, as opposed to the argument of supporting an organization that advocates for, you know, a lot of what you don't agree with, how things change, and it seems like more of a push this time.

[Speaker 2]

Well, that's pretty intolerant-specific, so maybe, I'll give you two kind of short answers, David, and then I'll pass it to Pastor Peck. And from my perspective as senior pastor, really, the simple answer to your first question, you know, we did something very similar just a couple years ago, we were kind of aiming a little different this time. For good or bad, as a pastor, I just, I try to take my guidance, yes, from the Holy Spirit, yes, from my conversion to the scripture, but also from the lay leadership.

And the last time we kind of did something similar like this, the WIT team, the council, came to me and said, you know, this is where we think we are, and I respected that, and I said, okay, you know, I'm not, and the past year, with a new council, this is the first lay leadership, and again, with these two, it's really come from them that you don't want to do this again. So that's, from my perspective, that's kind of the difference here. I really am trying to listen to the lay leadership.

It's not unanimous, it's nothing, it's never been unanimous here, except maybe we should leave this as the council meeting at 8.45. But that is, right now, the motion of the lay leadership, so I'm trying to respect that. And another thing, and I wrestle with this, Dave, I do. I mean, you guys have listened to me preach.

I think there may be one sermon where I kind of got mad when the next city council were voting down the homeless rehabilitation center. That's about the only time I've gotten political. In terms of actual, you know, policy vote, what you should think about this.

The abortion debate in Kansas a few years ago, the constitutional amendment, I gave a sermon with that too, where I basically urged you to vote for the constituents. I talked a little bit about it. I've never voted until I've voted on a name.

One thing that I picked up from Dean today, because in the past, you know, I've agreed with you, I've kind of said, you know, maybe our scene is more out-of-hand politically. I don't know if I said that anymore, because I really got from him, they focus on well-being, but they have nothing about specific bills. They have nothing about how you should vote.

And I really respect that about them. So I hesitate to say I'm politically out-of-hand. I don't know.

And in fact, I'm thinking about that on a broader topic, but I've got more emails, what I would call maybe, we should think about this for this bill, or this for this bill. I've gotten tenfold more from bishops of the ELCA than, you know, our presiding bishop. Hey, you know, we're still in the ELCA, so we already have that.

I've not gotten that same stuff from reconciled groups. I really haven't. So I've grown to appreciate that about them the more I've learned.

But I've never seen it. But again, that's up to the local congregation. I'm gonna pass it to Pastor Greg.

[Speaker 4]

This is where angels are gonna try. I think I'm stepping into something else going on here. But what I was going to say is, I'm a big believer in process, in working with process.

And Reconciling Works has developed a really good process. And there's no timeline to it. So obviously, if you're entering into the process, hopefully you're gonna get to that point where you are reconciling with Christ's congregation.

But it can take a while. The process is designed to answer all those questions, to bring people along. And even when people are uncomfortable, to feel as though their voice is heard.

We had people that voted against us becoming a Reconciling with Christ congregation. They had one issue with one thing or another. They spoke about that at the meeting.

They've talked to me about that. But they're still joyful mission partners in our congregation and part of our life. So there will be disagreements.

And there are probably gonna be things that Reconciling Works can push forward, just like the ELCA, which is where a number of things that caused me to scratch my head at times. But we're in this together. And it's missing the existing church.

[Speaker 9]

I guess this is gonna be more of an atonement question, but it was discussed that there is certainly a sound to the congregation members, I think, sometime this month. And what are the options of preaching to people that are not able to attend a in-person vote? When it gets to that, and are we, I think Matt sort of had mentioned this, but I was curious, if we are expecting an answer at all.

[Speaker 2]

Do you want me to take that? I don't want to yield the floor to Neil Fyfe on this.

[Speaker 5]

Neil's been working on this process quite a bit. So the first question on survey, we actually, it's in the, we're getting it ready to both have a meeting on Tuesdays, as opposed to on April. We're gonna email it out for anyone who, and we'll make sure we try and reach everyone with the survey.

What's different about the survey on the last one, it's a little bit of the building inclusive two-church toolkit that we're trying to follow is, the last round, there's a lot of raw questions. Where are we going wrong? And that's how we deal with a lot of wrong decisions.

It did not go into much detail about particularly particular changes. And so this is that next step of, if we did modify wrong decisions, and these are the changes, which we really need to cancel and bring out. And on the last survey, the question was never asked specifically about discrimination.

And again, that's not a vote, that's a survey so we can start to explore where we are on that specific question. And those two questions, what that'll hopefully give us is a bit clearer answer of those two things. Because we may be fine moving forward with the Walden State, but we may not yet be ready for our retirement rates.

So there is no, it feels like campaign Saturday. We are trying to move through this and have these conversations, making these things available. We're gonna have online as well for folks who weren't able to attend the kind of listening sessions.

So we're trying to get a little bit of, and then see where the conversation is. And if they're ready to move forward, if the conversation is not. So that's the kind of key point of what the next moment will be after this, is we're gonna do it, and then kind of with the voting.

Unfortunately, our constitution requires in-person voting. This is something that we're actually starting to tackle. So we're gonna start looking at that in the future.

But that, oh, here, come back.

[Speaker 9]

One of my concerns was for those people that are senior citizens, that are members of our congregation, but they are not mobile anymore. They can't get to the church. They can't, some of them aren't computer savvy, but they still have a right to have a voting say and what they want.

So I was just curious how that would, how their congregation wasn't very mobile.

[Speaker 6]

The irony of this is that in order to change that method, we also need to get those people here to change our constitution in order to make that kind of happen. So we're in the process for it, but even getting them, we're gonna have to call a congregational forum to make a vote for that. Yeah, and we're Lutheran, so put that on a timeline.

[Speaker 8]

And I was just gonna say, too, to the people that I know that are, you know, a handful of folks who really want to be here but can't be here, but they should know that by following, by filling out the survey that they get online or they can pick up in the church, their decision as to whether or not they would accept him and be, you know, advocate for RIC or not is going to influence the way the council decides on moving forward. So even though they're not here for the vote, if they fill out their survey, what they fill out of the survey is gonna influence the decision the council makes as to whether or not we have enough people in the congregation that are in favor of moving, because I want you all to remember, this has to be a 75% vote, affirmative vote for RIC to pass.

So that's part of the reason that, when that's a, you know, that's a good, that's a good amount of people. So one of the reasons that we're doing the survey is to find out where the congregation is. And if the congregation is not in favor of the church becoming RIC church, then that information will be presented to the congregation and the vote.

[Speaker 6]

Can I ask a question? Okay, I'm gonna ask my question first, cause I'm a pastor, I can. I have a question for all three of you all, and however you wanna answer.

As you put out signage, something that I've heard kind of in the whispers at a tournament is people, and you mentioned in the question tonight, individuals feeling like they are not welcome if they see the RIC sticker on the door, or they see the signage out front. Have you had any experience with that in conversation with your congregation members, with potential visitors of like, hey, are you within your community? They saw the signage and they walked the other way, or they felt like they were not welcome with their families.

[Speaker 4]

Not yet.

[Speaker 3]

Nope. The only feedback that I have gotten is one time we had a visitor who said that he specifically came to All Saints because we included the language of substance use disease recovery in our welcome statement, because he had, I don't remember, a family member or a close personal friend who suffered from that disease, and so he knew, even though his family member or friend wasn't with him, they would have been welcomed at our church, so he knew he was welcome there. And that's the only thing that I have heard.

[Speaker 1]

In Christchurch, like, that's what we look for while we're on vacation, because we're a churchy, nerdy family, so we go to church on vacation, and the first thing we do is find a reconciling in Christ congregation. Even if it's a longer drive. On vacation.

[Speaker 10]

My question, I was curious, and it's something that came up, is there an opportunity for a secret ballot? And the reason I ask, like, in our congregational meetings, we usually just pass around the list, and everybody, you know, I spoke earlier, including every member of the survey, so is there a means, a thing, an opportunity?

[Speaker 2]

I can speak to that, Neal. I'll add on if you need to. You know, I would say, again, we're trying to put the best rules and constitutionally at it, right?

I don't think any of this, let's start with the survey first, survey. Name is not required, right? And so the surveys that will be physically here and in our things, people can fill those out and not put their name.

You're right about email, and there's a little, I think there's ways we can tell the results and not necessarily get into specific emails. I don't think many of us want to do that. But you're right, there's a little bit of a trail there, but the in-person, the ballot, you do not have to sign them.

So I think we're trying the best we can, if people are concerned about that, to be sensitive to that. Yeah, my short answer is, we're trusting that each member does it once. And so if you guys do it on email and there's two, we know, hey, this is Greg and Trudy.

So it's kind of the honor system, one member, one survey. We're just on the honor system.

[Speaker 4]

One of the things that we discovered with our surveys that anonymity did, was it allowed a couple of people to use that anonymity to say some pretty hurtful things. And so while people may think that anonymity will protect them from really expressing how they truly feel, what I discovered was anonymity gave people a license to say un-Christian things.

[Speaker 2]

No, but of course, this survey is just kind of your opinion on the welcome statement and regular time of work. So there's not gonna be like an update page and put opinions in and things like that. I would say, okay, so that survey, I would say about the vote, I mean, we are constitutionally valid.

Constant Congress decisions have to be made in person at a meeting, right? Try our best to get everybody here, right? I don't wanna make a decision on this tonight.

The council needs to talk about this. I don't wanna speak for the whole council, but I will say, we've done votes before on paper when we call pastors, there's a paper ballot. So personally, I'm not opposed to something like that, but the council needs to talk about that and make a decision.

I don't wanna speak for you, but we've gotten something like that before.

[Speaker 5]

Two questions for you. So being both on getting us through this process, and I actually worked for Johnston-Winnipeg and City Supervisory Judge and the last time I was supervising there. So every time you vote, Johnston County got, you prove who you are at the door, but then there's no connection to having the actual poll when you send it in.

So there's that proof that you're here, and then after that, there's no connection. We actually had a person here, I was talking to at a time of the day, so probably three or four years ago, and she wanted a receipt of how she voted. It's like, well, you knew who I was going to hand in, and I voted, so I don't want a receipt saying, it's like, no we don't, we intentionally do not do that.

So that's kind of the key portion that as we move forward, that portion is kind of maintained. So with what Nathan and I are gonna work out with the online survey, yeah, we're not gonna make sure that you wanna go over email. It's back to that point on your system.

So we'll have someone here, we haven't moved the job, we'll just, again, it's on our system, where we just want to offer it up with as much flexibility as we can. So if I'm pricing, then that's actually what I'm saying. Don't send in, you know, like a serialized ticket, 10, send 10, get the free, and then soon.

They didn't do that anymore, I don't think they do it anymore, watch time, it'd be 87. So yeah, in the secret ballot, that's what we're gonna be presenting here.

[Speaker 9]

This is just a comment based on the, when we get to the voting point. Some of the, some of the passers-by, they came from smaller churches, and it's easier to present their position. And so my opinion is that for when we get to the vote, it doesn't need to be a paper ballot.

That I'm not gonna go raise my hand and get a search and see who raised their hand.

[Speaker 2]

I hear you, the council will take that into consideration. I think, well, Bob's had his hand up. Oh, did Greg, let's do Bob first, Kurt, then Greg.

Now I'm calling the shots. Go ahead, Bob.

[Speaker 15]

I got a question for you. Why don't you call it accepting the gay community as opposed to RIC? Question two.

How much energy are you putting into the target population in this community, in the congregation? This is my business here. Yeah.

How much energy are you putting into this community, about 10% of the population? Yeah, look up the data.

[Speaker 2]

I got you. I'll answer your first question, and then I'll turn it back to the second question. I don't work for Reconciling Works.

I think they would say this community of welcome is for more than just gay people. So that's why it's called, it's about true reconciliation. So that's why it's not, that's not the way it's called that.

[Speaker 15]

Where's the guys like El Pibro, P-P-Ro? The what? The Black Patriots.

The Black people in our community.

[Speaker 2]

I don't know what you're asking about. Well, Bob, it's part of our welcome statement. I don't know why they're not here tonight.

I don't control where people go and where they worship or what meetings they go to, but I can focus on, I wanna make sure I welcome them in case they didn't wanna come.

[Speaker 4]

When you mentioned your business mind, I approach it somewhat similar to that. I look at this as us really reaching out to new markets, to growing markets. And that growing market is a younger generation for whom this is really, really, really important.

And they wanna be a part of a church that will be accepting of their friends. And so, to me, it's really an evangelistic move. So it's not just a 10%, I mean, it's huge.

[Speaker 6]

I'm gonna be completely honest. I probably spend 100% of my time thinking about this. And hear me out when I say this.

I don't ever stop thinking about what is the best way for someone to hear the gospel. And if that means that their stomach is rumbling so loud that they can't hear the words I'm saying, I'm gonna think about food. If that means that they don't feel safe in this space, that's what I'm going to think about.

I mean, we have headphones in the back because I wanted to think about individuals who have come to worship and said the organ is too loud for him. I spend 100% of my time thinking about the communities that struggle to be in this building, whether they're a part of the street community or whatever they're doing. Reconciling works, this is part of that conversation.

And so, I would spend a lot of time thinking about this.

[Speaker 2]

I can see Mary McKinney. I think we have Kirk and then Greg has come too. But Kirk's right there.

[Speaker 16]

As you know, pastors, I'm considering joining the church. The question to question, are you confident RIC means as it means to you? And on the questionnaire you have going out, do you have a question that says, do you understand what being an RIC church means?

[Speaker 2]

That's a good question, Kirk. Well, my answer for you is in this welcoming journey that in some ways we've been on 15 years, this time we really, this is part of the reason we're doing this evening. Really, we've asked that question.

Do our members know what this even is? I mean, pastors kind of know, some of our members don't. That's why we put more of an emphasis this time on, let's really have some education about this.

This is why we had Dean and Dave come. They're not necessarily here to advocate or push one way or the other. The main reason we do these things is education.

So we've tried our best to show what this is about. This is part of what tonight is. I don't know that there's more than four we can do.

I mean, Recaton Works does that on the website. People can go look at the website. So I would say at this point, I'm not sure there's more we can do.

I don't know if I'm 100% fully confident. Yes, all of our members understand this, particularly as I do, like you said. But I go to bed thinking we've tried, we've talked about it.

So I don't know if I have the question or the feedback. I think I'm more, let's get the feedback and see what it is. And, you know, if the survey results come out, and if it's 50-50, and, you know, people do things, and people write down, I don't even know what this is.

That might say to us, you know what? Before we get to a vote, we need to have even further education about it. So that might be something we take from it.

I don't know. But that's kind of what Neil said earlier. The council's really gonna look at the survey results and use it to guide what we're going for.

[Speaker 5]

Unfortunately, so Pastor Sara's church, you probably, maybe some of you, you're probably able to reach all of your, how much of you guys moving through the right side? Kind of speak to that, it's a little different question. Like, how are you guys navigating?

[Speaker 4]

That's a really good question. The team did a really great job when they were presenting to the congregation, not only the proposed welcome statement, but then to say, these are the four or five commitments of Reconciling the Christ congregation. And they were up front, so that was actually part of our vote.

So it was like a two-pronged vote. We're gonna vote, you know, understanding that we're gonna agree to these four or five things, and also the welcome statement. I think they did a really good job of covering the congregation of those who came to vote, understood what they were voting on.

What I say, there's 100% knowledge from the congregation, you just can't. It's hard to get people to read an email on a normal week, let alone something about something of this magnitude. Does that answer your question?

Thank you. Okay.

[Speaker 5]

Sure.

[Speaker 13]

I just have to say, it's kind of nice that you all are here. And also, I'm very concerned, and I just feel like they must not wanna be involved. They wanna come to a good sermon, they wanna sing, see their friends, and go home.

And they're kind of disinterested in this whole process, which is something I knew as being the church that they're used to being in the whole time. That's just a point I wanted to make. But I did have a question.

I see the proposed welcome statement is on the front page of our website. You are welcome here, that statement, the welcome statement. And in another place where it talks about, it still has our all are welcome.

Those conflicting statements on our website, I just thought I'd point that out.

[Speaker 2]

Well, one is the proposed welcome statement, so that's why they're different.

[Speaker 13]

Yeah, it doesn't say that.

[Speaker 18]

It's on our main page of the website is actually the one that was approved by the council and the congregation, I don't know, eight, nine years ago? Actually, it was further back than that. So the one that is on the homepage is the actual, what our welcome statement is currently.

The one that is on the welcome journey page is the proposed one.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, so the one on the main page, Greg, is the one we've had for nine years. When you click on the welcome journey, it'll take you to the updated one, which is a little different, as you pointed out, but that's just it's proposed. And we want you to be able to see it.

[Speaker 5]

So one of the, I'll speak to that, Greg. So with our welcome statement, so if you look in the bulletin, there's actually four proposed, four changes in the proposal. The all our welcome isn't actually part of, whereas it's here, it's a statement of welcome and affirmation.

You notice that it doesn't have that title. And then on an inner bulletin, it doesn't have that title. It has the first paragraph.

And so that one piece, yes, is one of the things that the group has to have clarification on. If sometimes we say all, sometimes we say even. Even if you're, you will hear it sometimes during the service.

So that's not quite what we need to take it as both welcome statement changes. So if you look through all the other printed versions, those three other changes are not present. It's still the existing welcome statement.

So I noticed that title is a little misleading. It looks like, oh, because that's different.

[Speaker 20]

Not everything's different.

[Speaker 5]

Yeah, we didn't change the, yeah. We had to change the whole thing. Yeah.

Again, then it might just be the title. We'll put it in and see how it is. We'll check on it.

Yeah, that's, it's not, to speak to that, I'm not sure in a full fashion if there is, that it's proposal as seen.

[Speaker 14]

Since we started this journey in 2009, there has been an ongoing voice sense of fear that we're going to lose members. We have visited congregations. We'd like to hear that.

With the Senate now, delegates from all over the Senate, voted to be RSA Senate, are losing congregations.

[Speaker 2]

So first question about the congregations you serve.

[Speaker 1]

No, we've gained members. That is the same for Salem and First. I can't speak to, I'm sorry, Bob?

The way I heard the question was, has it affected people leaving our specific congregations? Is that correct? Okay.

No. Not with Salem and not with First. I can't speak to the Senate level only because I don't know.

[Speaker 4]

We've lost a couple of families. Saw that happening, but like I said, we had folks join as a result of it. When our council finally made the decision to vote, they realized they needed to make the vote because by not moving forward, by becoming RIC, they felt like we would lose a lot more people.

And I think that would have been the case. As far as has the city lost congregations after becoming RIC, I can't answer that, but I can tell you the city's been losing congregations since 2009. It's just been a continual thing.

So I don't know that the RIC decision may have sealed the decision for a congregation, but it's just a trend that's been happening.

[Speaker 2]

All right, folks. I got seven, 26, maybe one at the most, two more questions. Maybe somebody wants to talk to you tonight.

Jamie? After Jamie, maybe one more after. Yeah.

[Speaker 11]

It is officially time to get out of here. I see a few people actually in my new member group, so we make up 10% of the new members, so it's a pretty good day. And when I joined for the sermons, because I thought this was already, I thought it was already a thing, because that was the last day of sermons, I didn't realize you guys were still in the midst of it.

And I know, I already hear some, that they're very happy, but there's so many new faces, or newer faces, and, you know, it feels odd to be called young. It's why I left LCMS, and I only started looking for LCA churches because it was like, my question, should the people who heard, should those who didn't?

[Speaker 2]

That's a great question, Jamie. If, I don't know if I have an answer for you. What I would just say is, I'm trying to make, what I would just say is, more like if the survey is not clear on which way to perform, which to go, does this conversation just stop?

Does it continue? Do we take a hiatus, come back to it? I don't have an answer for you, because I think the council really wants to see the survey results, and see where we are.

And the council's been pretty clear about, you know, we're not setting this up for a certain result that we're gonna guarantee. We're not doing that. So I don't really have an answer for you.

Depends what the survey says. Hypothetically, hypothetically, if it's kind of in the middle, I think that maybe says, maybe we should not just stop it right now and have some more conversation. If it's 90%, we feel led this way, we wanna do it, great.

If it's 90%, we don't really feel like this right now. That might be a time to take a hiatus. It just, so it depends.

It depends on the survey. So that's why it's important to take part in the survey. It really is.

Maybe one more, one more, good question. Oh, Pastor Jordan is here.

[Speaker 6]

And I'm the associate, but I also do have a quick answer for this. Thank you. First, I'm gonna echo what she has brought up.

We hear this a lot, and we've had people leave because they thought we were already part of the RAC community. But we also listen to people a lot. So even if it does become, we need to take a break on this.

Pastor Zach and myself and our council, our leadership in the church, we listen to the voices of the congregation and that's where we lead, which is why this conversation has come up again, because we heard we need to have this decision made. And so I don't know that it would be ever a hard stop because that's not how the church works, right? And so if it becomes a, we hear from congregation again someday, this is how we need to go, then we follow where their voices are saying, because we're a lane-led people.

That's where our power lies as Lutherans. But we also trust the spirit to work on how we need to go as a church.

[Speaker 2]

I just wanna make sure, if there's anybody else who has not asked a question yet, I wanna make sure, you introverts out there, it's introvert time. Okay, we got Dave, let's stop waiting in chaos and we'll come back to you. I just wanna make sure everybody has to.

Here comes the firetruck.

[Speaker 19]

But Angie and the people that are here, I know we have been working on this for a long time, so I don't see it going away ever. It may slow down a little bit, but I feel like it's going to continue until we're there.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, let's go to Kay and then Dave, and then we might just call it a night. Sorry, our jury, jury's got questions. Okay, Kay?

[Speaker 12]

First of all, I thank all you guys for coming. I know Pastor Pat's story for some time, because in one of the situations we were in, that confided in me and shared this great story. So, thank you so much for being here.

And all you people that are still worried, people staying or leaving, and the many people that you're afraid are gonna leave, if we do not pass, if we go to RIC, there's a lot of us people that can go right from the street to Pastor Pat's church, because we are part of the LCA. We now are part of the Central State Senate that is RIC. We have Pastor Pat being open, and so I feel this is very, very important for our church.

Like I said, we're here to share the gospel with everyone, and that's what I want to see.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, Dave up here.

[Speaker 7]

I'll just ask about the welcome statement. Well, first of all, it's a question that if you want to kind of answer. And the reason I ask is that I may not be RIC, I've never had problems, you know, adding anything, a bullet list, and the reason we do that makes sense because some of them I don't think that are real at all, so we can say also anybody.

I think some folks, including me, the RIC is the association, this partnership that kind of pushes any kind of group. So the question is, I mean, are there alternatives that people consider before performing?

[Speaker 6]

There are no other organizations that have this kind of connotation with them. This is what the ELCA recognizes. We try as the church, if you remember this two years ago, to say, okay, we're just gonna do the ministry, and the conversation still bubbled up all on its own and was re-brought back to the council again.

There are no other organizations with this kind of status within the ELCA. Now, other denominations have their own organizations that are very similar, and they're open and affirming organizations, that's their own denominational one, right? The other thing that I bring up with this is for a worry about working with reconciling where, like, what does that mean as an affiliation?

We are a part of other organizations that have affiliations in other places within this county. Good Faith Network, we are also, we are sitting in support of the Kansas Interfaith Action. So, if we're looking just solely at reconciling works and are worried about that, Atonement's involved in many partnerships as well within the community.

So, we can't, it's hard to pick and choose just one affiliation or organization.

[Speaker 2]

Terry, you have one more question, then Pastor Mulgrew wants to say something, go ahead. And by the way, thank you for all your questions tonight. You guys have asked really good questions.

Yeah, Terry?

[Speaker 10]

And actually, this isn't a question. I would just like to address and understand, are I safe or not, and we're the same people.

[Speaker 2]

Pastor Marvel's asked to say some closing, can you pray for us too? She's gonna close us out and say a prayer to us on the way.

[Speaker 1]

Okay, I wanna remind you that Salem's also not that far from here. I mean, not taking away from Pastor Peck, but Salem, no, his things are, so yeah, if you bring the dhamma with you, that's even better. Yeah, a couple things.

The wrestling that you're doing is holy and it's hard, and I understand that. Over 50 years ago, this denomination argued whether or not Pastor Sarah, myself, and Pastor Jordan could be pastors. And people did not agree with it.

Over 10 years, 15 years ago, this denomination voted whether or not Pastor Sarah could be a fully called pastor, Pastor Jordan could be a well-called pastor, and people left over that. I'm asking you that if you disagree with whatever the outcome is, if you choose to become a Reconciling in Christ congregation to stick it out for just a little bit. I think the fear is if you become a Reconciling in Christ and the next Sunday is gonna be Drag Queen Sunday, which I'd be here for that, but that's not what's gonna happen.

So I beg of you to stay and continue to wrestle. And if six months, one year, six years down the line, I'm like, actually, I stay, I did what that lady told me to do, and I can't. But stay and wrestle with us, because I know all of us are excellent pastors.

And if you call and say, Pastor, I'm in the hospital, I'm gonna say, well, I know you voted no, so I'm not coming, right? We are pastor to all people. I'm pastor to people I vehemently disagree with, and I love them all the same.

So stick it out. But I also beg of you of this, for the sake of my safety, Sarah's safety, my son's safety, Jordan's safety, my daughter's safety, if you choose to not become a Reconciling in Christ congregation, make that crystal clear on your website and anywhere else. Because I cannot walk into a situation and put my child at risk.

I refuse to do that. So thank you all for being here, and thank you for welcoming us. Let us pray.

God, you have called us to such a time as this to study your scripture, study your word, wrestle with what you have called us to do in the future. And we don't know what that is exactly, but we trust that wherever you are guiding us, not only will you lead us, you'll lead us where we are going. Help us to welcome all.

Help us to see the hurt in the world and to be your hands and feet in a broken and hurting world. Lead our conversations with love. And even if we don't agree, Lord, allow us to walk away in peace and respect.

We pray for the people of atonement, for counsel, for the staff, for the executive teams, for all the congregation members here who will discern and wrestle. And we thank you for sending the spirit upon this place. As we depart tonight, may we allow each other to go in peace as friends, as colleagues, as neighbors, as those who are just trying to do your will and walk in your ways.

All this we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Speaker 2]

Thank you, Pastor Millay. Thank you. Thank you.

Let's give a round of applause, especially for our guests here tonight. Don't forget, homemade pumpkin bread, homemade pumpkin bread in the cafe. Thank you all for coming.

Go in peace, serve the Lord.