

Atonement Lutheran Church

Church Council Update on Welcome & Reconciling in Christ

May 18, 2025

Where we've been

Many of you may remember that about two years ago in 2023, a team was formed to talk to the congregation about our perspectives on welcome, inclusion, racial equity, social justice, and outreach here at Atonement; a continuing discussion that first started almost 16 years ago.

What it revealed

The recent listening sessions and survey revealed two key themes from our members. The most important one is that we all firmly oppose discrimination and collectively desire for Atonement to be inviting & welcoming. The second key theme is that Atonement is diverse and cannot be represented by a singular voice. That we have a wide collection of perspectives on how we should approach outreach – that the statements, symbols, and partner associations we may choose are deeply important to our members.

The central discussion

The main backdrop to the many perspectives, centers on how to meaningfully communicate our church's commitment level to our siblings of all races, sexual orientations, gender identities & expressions, and mental & physical abilities.

Specifically, becoming a Reconciling in Christ partner congregation is what generates the most discussion when listening to the range of perspectives. Reconciling in Christ is a program within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) sponsored by Reconciling Works, an organization focused on racial equity and the full participation of LGBTQIA+ Lutherans in the life of the church.

Perspectives of support for becoming a Reconciling in Christ partner congregation anchor on making it clear to visitors of Atonement that we see, celebrate, & embrace every child of God, and each person is truly welcome and accepted here. Becoming so would publicly affirm the commitment to racial equity, a consideration for differing abilities, and a place to find support and safe harbor for individuals and families seeking refuge. Members of current partner churches have stated they look for it when transferring to new congregations, and our Central States Synod last summer similarly became a Reconciling in Christ partner.

Conversely, those objecting to becoming a Reconciling in Christ partner congregation associate Reconciling Works' LGBTQIA+ advocacy with political action, and how it could imply overall member agreement. There is worry that those who hold what they believe to be valid scriptural, ethical, or political disagreement with some Reconciling in Christ positions, may leave the congregation, no longer feeling comfortable or accepted because of those views. Their belief is that being truly welcoming could be achieved by continuing and expanding actions of outreach without specific designations, similar to other divisive social-political disagreements.

Shared common ground includes the belief that Christ's church should actively welcome everyone regardless of social views, and distinctly as Lutherans, we have the obligation to care for our neighbors by helping underserved groups that have faced historical discrimination and underrepresentation. Through faith, we have the opportunity to hear and accept each other, infusing our actions with love as the means by which God helps us care for ourselves, our neighbors, and the world.

What comes next

After the completion of the survey process 18 months ago, the Welcome and Inclusion Team proposed a series of action items for the council to consider. After a period of pause, the council is now actively discerning what steps will come next and a clear timeline.

Over the years, because there has been many start and stop moments of deliberation, many highly-charged discussions, in this moment now we are being mindful as we move purposefully toward closure – not rushing, but also not deferring – as we plan for milestones over this coming summer and fall.

As part of the path forward, we plan to spend time communicating more about the possibilities and difficulties, and to share the collection of diverse perspectives at Atonement, not to convince each other and to arrive at a unison, but to find each other in the spaces that exist in-between.

Ultimately, our intent is two-fold: to give the congregation the opportunity to arrive at clarity and discernment, and to provide an avenue that keep us all in this congregation together throughout the process, recognizing and understanding each other.

Our request to you

We are not taking any questions today or asking for feedback here; we are just providing you with an update. We ask you to be patient while we determine exact details of the path towards this conversation. Know that through all the feedback we have gathered – we see you, we hear you. If you feel moved in the meantime, please contact any council member afterward with your thoughts or suggestions. The council will continue to incorporate your feedback.

Thank you.