

## DIVERSITY TASK FORCE ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER EXPRESSION 2020/2021 SYNOD ASSEMBLY REPORT

The *Diversity Task Force on Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression* is an official entity of the Southeast Michigan Synod. It is comprised of people from diverse sexual and gender orientations, both lay and rostered, and works to clarify issues surrounding gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex people. Additionally, the Task Force offers educational opportunities/resources to ELCA congregations and individuals seeking to explore questions of sexuality and gender. Our mission statement is as follows:

*The Diversity Task Force on Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression is committed to justice and full inclusion of all God's people within our congregations, the Southeast Michigan Synod and the ELCA through education, support, advocacy and faith!*

Our Task Force continues support of the **Reconciling in Christ (RIC)** program of ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation (formerly Lutherans Concerned) which helps people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, their families, and friends, who have been rejected or condemned by the church (or who fear they will be), find their way back to God and into a loving faith community. To become RIC, faith communities (congregations, synods, colleges, seminaries, and other Lutheran organizations) who believe God's love has no limits embark on a process of self-examination about what "Welcome" means in the context of Christianity and Scripture. The RIC roster now exceeds 950 settings, including the Southeast Michigan Synod and 12 of our congregations/campus ministries as well as 11 churches in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod, and the Lutheran seminary for our ELCA region in Columbus, Ohio. We can now also boast of our first RIC congregation in Alaska!

During the past two years impacted by pandemic closures and restrictions, the Diversity Task Force:

- Staffed a display table at the 2019 Synod Assembly at Calvary Lutheran in Clarkston, and celebrated approval of our resolution to update the Synod's "Affirmation of Welcome" to include "Christians of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions."
- Sponsored ads in *Between the Lines* (BTL) to promote the welcome ministries of RIC congregations for Christmas, Easter, and Pride Week (June) at an annual cost of \$2,225, and sent fundraising letters to RIC congregations in 2019 and 2020 resulting in generous donations for when our churches reopen.
- Celebrated Reconciling in Christ (RIC) status of Zion Lutheran Church in Ann Arbor, Our Savior Lutheran in Saginaw (NWLMS), and Zion Lutheran in Freeland (NWLMS) with presentation of RIC certificates, special RIC cakes, and appropriate festivities.
- Co-sponsored a special presentation by ELCA Pastor Lenny Duncan at Antioch Lutheran in Farmington Hills. Pastor Duncan is the author of "*Dear Church: A Love Letter from a Black Preacher to the Whitest Denomination in the US.*"
- Convened monthly meetings, excluding December and summer months, at RIC churches in Ann Arbor and Detroit—including Downriver as well as Antioch Lutheran and Hope Lutheran in Farmington Hills. Meetings ceased in March 2020 until we recently reconvened via Zoom for updates on congregations in the RIC discernment process, news from ReconcilingWorks, and initiatives moving forward such as transgender concerns and Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) training. Meanwhile, pastors, members, and friends were kept apprised of our activities and other topical news impacting the LGBTQ faith community through a secured and confidential e-mail distribution list of 150+ recipients.

Many Southeast Michigan Synod Lutherans have suggested that the *Diversity Task Force on Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression* is one of the more interesting and engaging synodical groups. In that vein and in the Spirit of Christ, we invite new members and allies to join us for fellowship as we work for justice and inclusivity in our congregations, synod, ELCA, and society. For further information, please contact us at 248-398-5510 and/or [fernzionoffice@gmail.com](mailto:fernzionoffice@gmail.com).