

DIVERSITY TASK FORCE ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER EXPRESSION 2025 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 individuals from diverse sexual and gender orientations, both lay and rostered, and works to clarify issues surrounding LGBTQIA+ 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 to support the Reconciling in Christ (RIC) program of ReconcilingWorks. Since 1974, ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation has advocated for the full welcome, inclusion, and equity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual/aromantic (LGBTQIA+) Lutherans in all aspects of the life of their Church, congregations, and 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-assessment about what "Welcome" means in the context of Christianity and Scripture. The RIC roster now exceeds 1,090 settings, including the Southeast Michigan Synod, FedUp Ministries (Ypsilanti), 15 of our congregations/campus ministries, 13 churches in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod, Living Water Ministries (Stony Lake Lutheran Camp), and the Lutheran seminary for our ELCA region in Columbus, Ohio.

During the past year, the Diversity Task Force:

- Welcomed Emmanuel Lutheran Church (Livonia), Holy Cross Lutheran Church (Livonia), and All.together Campus Ministry (Dearborn) as our newest Reconciling in Christ (RIC) faith communities. There was also an uptick of congregations that embarked upon the RIC process.
- Sponsored full-page ads in *Between the Lines (BTL)*, the award-winning LGBTQ+ publication, to promote the welcome ministries of RIC congregations for Pride Month, Christmas, and Easter. Over \$3,000 was raised from Task Force members and RIC congregations for the three ads.
- Hosted the 2024 Southeast Michigan Synod Pride Worship, *Queerfully and Wonderfully Made*, on June 23rd at Zion Lutheran in Ferndale. The joyous service celebrated LGBTQIA+ siblings in Christ, with speakers that included the Rev. Dr. Roland Stringfellow and Joanna Whaley.
- Informed pastors, members, friends, and allies of our activities and other topical news impacting the LGBTQIA+ faith community through a secured and confidential email distribution list of 150+ recipients in both the Southeast Michigan and North/West Lower Michigan Synods.
- Celebrated the life, gifts, and love of former Assistant to the Bishop Joanne Chadwick. Joanne called together the founding members of the then named *Task Force on Gay and Lesbian Concerns* in 1988. The ELCA lost a tireless justice advocate and dear friend this past year.
- Convened a discernment meeting in October to re-envision who we are and where we are going, and discuss next steps forward from leadership and meeting format to mission and goals. Assistants to the Bishop Robin McCants and C.J. Clark graciously facilitated the deliberations of the 15 members. After allowing space for the Holy Spirit to guide next steps, Synod staff suggested a pre-assembly Task Force electronic questionnaire to gather information for a potential 2025 Synod Assembly workshop led by an outside consultant to move through this discernment process.

In the Spirit of Christ, we invite new members and allies to join us as we work for justice and inclusivity in our congregations, synod, ELCA, and society. For further information or to be added to our confidential email distribution list, please contact us at 248-398-5510 and/or fernzionoffice@gmail.com.