

# Expanding Our Welcome

February 2026 Edition

The Synod's RIC Work Team seeks to cultivate a culture of hospitality toward LGBTQIA2+ people and remove barriers to full participation in the life and ministry of the Southwestern Washington Synod.

A Newsletter from the  
Reconciling in Christ Work  
Team of the Southwestern  
Washington Synod

## Stories Are Reality, even if they are not always the truth

As we enter into February, then March and beyond, we use the calendar to help remind us of past events to celebrate or learn more about, including President's Day, Black History Month, Women's History Month, and more. People are born story-tellers and story-makers. Stories shape our entire lives. You tell stories about yourself and about others all the time, often without even realizing it. We make up all kinds of stories when trying to ponder why this person cut you off in traffic or chose to wear that particular garment. We search for answers when trying to figure out why we were rejected in some interaction or why those people on TV or social media did such a terrible or stupid thing.

All of these are stories and they shape who we are, how we feel about ourselves or other people, how we live in our world today, and what we will do tomorrow. We daydream about our great successes or scary failures. These stories we have some control over, but we also live inside big giant stories that we have little control over. Stories created by our families, our communities, our nation. These stories affect us in profound ways and are often based on older stories, which we call history. Some history gets censored or ignored, while other history gets amplified and repeated.

People want to be heard and seen and loved. We know this was true for Jesus as well. We know the heavens spoke more than once to share "This is my son, the beloved" and also "Listen to him." It can be hard to remember Jesus' story when there is so much noise and competition in our world. Yet, the stories we and others around us listen to, shapes our lives tremendously. Now some stories we hear can be true or false or a little of both. Some funny or sad, some hopeful and others terrifying. Lately, I keep hearing the term "narrative" as in 'to control the narrative.' This is someone else taking a story and trying to shape or change the story to meet their desire. I would ask that instead of listening to an influencer or pundit or politician in the spin-room that we consider listening as much as we can through the ears of Jesus.

Turn to each other and have a flesh and blood conversation. I suspect you will find there is a lot more than two viewpoints about anything and winning is not the point. Online conversations often devolve into debate. Worse, we are learning that a lot of online content is not even human but rather chat-bots meant to influence us while we have no chance of influencing a machine.

Jesus spent his entire life connecting with others in the flesh; at meals, in worship, and serving others. It is his story that we love to tell because it is one of love and forgiveness, hope and redemption, justice and peace. It does not sugar-coat the work and suffering and risk inherent in living as a follower of Christ. It is the story that softens our hearts and opens our ears and eyes to care for our neighbor. Learning each other's stories with all the messy details, often brings us closer to each other. So, leave the judgement to God and arm yourself with humility and kindness and enough courage to be vulnerable. You may find more than you could ever imagine. Now that is a story we all want to hear about.


*-submitted by Deanna Eichler, Synod RIC Work Team member*




## Celebrating February RIC Anniversaries

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Olympia WA - 2025

**THANKS BE TO GOD!**



We invite you to visit our friends at **Reconciling Works** "Lutherans for Full Participation" for helpful resources or reach out to the **Synod Administrator** - we're happy to assist!



### Our Team *(in alphabetical order)*

Pastor Jonette Blakney *team chair*

Pastor Anna Czarnik-Neimeyer

Stefanie DeZarn *synod liaison*

Deanna Eichler

Mary Ann Nelson

Pastor Nate Sutton

The RIC Work Team serves as a resource for congregations and ministries throughout the synod as we all seek to expand our welcome in creative and life-giving ways. In this publication we hope to provide practical ideas for your congregation to consider. Each month will have a different focus and some resources you may find valuable.

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