

Writing Tips for your Reconciling Statement

Who are we? What do we value? What do we want our neighbors to know about us? These are important questions to consider when crafting your Reconciling statement. (See “Four Steps to Affiliating with RMN” at <https://tinyurl.com/4StepstoAffiliate>.)

A ministry of Reconciliation includes an intersectional approach to justice and inclusion and therefore we encourage you to name and express your commitment to advocacy for the many people groups who, in spite of equal rights outlined in the Book of Discipline, continue to experience significant oppression within the UMC. Because the Discipline singles out and targets lesbian and gay persons for harm, because RMN is committed to ensuring that bisexual, gender-expansive, and transgender persons are equally valued and included, and because “welcome” means different things to different people, affiliation with RMN requires that your statement not only welcomes but explicitly **affirms** people of “all sexual orientations and gender identities.” Give careful thought to being as inclusive, affirming, intersectional, and joy-filled as possible.

Here are the required and recommended phrases, **one of which should be included in all statements.**

Required language - Example: “The Wesley Sunday School Class welcomes and affirms people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.”

Recommended language - Example: “The Wesley Sunday School Class welcomes and *celebrates* people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.”

Don’t hesitate to check in with an RMN Regional Organizer to make sure your proposed statement meets the minimum requirements before your community or congregation votes. We’re happy to help!

In addition to the required language, here are a few important things to consider.

LGBTQ - Currently, the most widely used and accepted acronym is LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer). It’s best to spell out each word in the first occurrence of your Reconciling statement and then common to use the acronym in all subsequent usages.

Seek to - “We *seek to* . . .” is an aspirational statement that expresses both a desire and a purposeful effort to achieve something. “We seek to welcome . . .” is honest and commendable, but falls short of the safety and respect that LGBTQ members and visitors deserve when giving our churches or Sunday school classes a try. Omitting the words “seek to” provides a stronger commitment and a more confident statement. Example: “We welcome and affirm . . .”

Other - No matter how inclusive and welcoming our intentions, the word “other” can sometimes sneak in and be segregating and hurtful. When crafting a statement, please avoid the word “other” in favor of fully inclusive language. If your statement can’t be restructured and demands a word to replace “other,” consider using “additional.” Example: “_____ and all additional _____.”

Regardless of - calls attention to differences in ways that often sound negative rather than positive. Instead of saying “We welcome and affirm all of God’s children regardless of _____,” consider saying, “We welcome and affirm people of all ages, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities”

Brothers and Sisters – In our celebration of having more than two genders, it's important to avoid using words or phrases that support an incomplete binary system. A few examples of a binary system are: "brethren" to represent all people, "brothers and sisters" or "brothers and sisters in Christ," as people of faith often say. This is a meaningful and long-standing phrase that we don't need to give up, but simply update based on current knowledge. "Siblings in Christ" is a lovely substitution.

Pronouns for God - In our desire to honor God as well as our desire to honor all of God's creation, it's important that we avoid assigning gender to God with the use of pronouns. Using pronouns for God, especially exclusively masculine pronouns, can limit human understanding of God and our ability to see God in ourselves and each other. No matter how unintentional, using he/him/his pronouns for God perpetuates unhealthy bias and inequality that harms people and entire social systems.

