

## Total Inclusion Task Force - Record of Formation

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### Summer 2021

Summer staff member approached a board member about considering undergoing the Reconciling in Christ (RIC) process. The summer staff member had been in ministry situations involving LGBTQIA youth over the summer. Although the summer staff had navigated the ministry and supported the campers well, they wondered whether a more formal statement from the board regarding Fortune Lake's welcome & inclusion was in order.

### November 2021

Pr. Jared Howard (Board President), Charlotte Strom (Hospitality Coordinator), and Amanda Rasner (Camp Director) attended the annual Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM) Conference with the theme of Total Inclusion. Keynote speakers, workshops, and worship experiences emphasized the importance of welcoming people from historically marginalized populations who have often been left out of outdoor experiences. Particular attention was focused on people of color, LGBTQIA individuals, and people living with disabilities.

### April 4-7, 2022

Christina Maki (Board Treasurer) and Amanda Rasner attended the LOM Total Inclusion Symposium with other regional camp leaders at Lutherdale in Elkhorn, WI. Sessions delved deeper into similar themes and camp leaders were encouraged to bring back a series of action steps to implement at their camps. It was expressed that many regional camps are exploring the RIC process.

- Objectives identified by Amanda Rasner and Christina Maki as initial priorities for Fortune Lake as a result of the Total Inclusion symposium:  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BLi\\_oVh8m0Wos6z\\_Z6yIhAXU57TOi7M6FyRjml98Bv4/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BLi_oVh8m0Wos6z_Z6yIhAXU57TOi7M6FyRjml98Bv4/edit?usp=sharing)

### Saturday April 9, 2022

The Fortune Lake Board approved moving forward with what would now be known as the Total Inclusion Task Force, with the goal of living into a welcoming and inclusive camp culture, not only to LGBTQIA individuals, but for all those who have been historically marginalized.

- Audit of camp through the lens of inclusion, to be completed by Board members by our June meeting:  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vKH8tEhZjDBc0tmAf5j2iCWy7FosM-la/edit?usp=sharing&oid=107601870707805839093&rtpof=true&sd=true>

## **Monday, May 9, 2022**

*Present: Jared Howard, Amanda Rasner, Christina Maki, Charlotte Strom, Sarah Semmler Smith*

The group met to discuss the formation of a Total Inclusion task force. It was agreed that the parameters for the task force would include:

- Between 8 -10 people involved, with a diversity in representation, especially those who are a part of the LGBTQIA community for this year of RIC focus.
- The commitment would be at minimum a monthly commitment for one year.

## **Tuesday May 24, 2022**

*Present: Jared Howard, Amanda Rasner, Christina Maki, Suzanne Tusa, Charlotte Strom, Sarah Semmler Smith, Bucky Beach, Ruth Almen, Dave Van Kley*

This was the initial meeting of the Total Inclusion Task Force, which was largely an introductory conversation, with the goal of electing a chair and secretary. Sarah Semmler Smith agreed to serve as chair of this task force, and Dave Van Kley to act as Secretary.

Time was spent talking about various experiences of going through the RIC process and how this may be different and similar to other contexts. The question arose as to how summer staff might be invited into the taskforce work, or sharing of their own stories. Charlotte agreed to take the lead on this initiative about how/when.

Research will be done as to other ELCA camps who have already gone through the process of becoming RIC (Crossroads, Sky Ranch, Rainbow Trail, etc).

## **Wednesday, June 22, 2022**

*Present: Sarah Semmler Smith, chair; Amanda Rasner, FLLC director; Bucky Beach, Suzanne Tusa, Ruth Almen, Kelly Ylitalo, Christina Maki, Dave Van Kley, Taryn Mason*

Each task force member shared an individual story why the work of helping FLLC become an RIC camp is important to them and their faith. We discussed the question as to whether or not the vote to become a RIC camp should be taken at the annual meeting or could be a decision the board itself could make. Either way would be possible according to camp bylaws. This is a question for the FLLC Board deliberation.

We discussed as a next step engaging in one on one conversations with various stakeholders, including camp staff, campers/families, pastors, congregational representatives, donors, etc. Sarah and Jared were commissioned to write a letter to pastors/deacons/licensed lay ministers regarding the decision to explore the RIC process and that task force members would be available to meet with them or would be calling them to initiate a one-on-one conversation.

## **Thursday, July 28, 2022**

*Present: Sarah Semmler Smith; Amanda Rasner; Bucky Beach, Suzanne Tusa, Ruth Almen, Kelly Ylitalo, Christina Maki, Dave Van Kley, Charlotte Strom, Heide Gallagher, Jared Howard, Olivia Mai*

Most of the meeting was spent discussing the next step in the process, namely, one-on-one conversations. We discussed what kinds of questions might/should be asked, the various constituencies from which we will need to identify people to call and visit. The expectation was that everyone would try to make at least one 1-1 conversation prior to our next meeting. We decided on a way to report on these visits and to maintain a file for reference as we go forward. Several task force members also agreed to engage in 1-1 conversations with directors/representatives of camps that have become RIC.

### **Monday, August 29, 2022**

*Present: Amanda Rasner, Charlotte Strom, Olivia Mai, Heide Gallagher, Christina Maki, Suzanne Tusa, Kelly Ylitalo, Ruth Almén*

Some one-on-ones have been completed with others remaining. We clarified the process of reporting on one-on-ones, so that an accurate and complete record is kept in the one-on-ones folder, accessible to task force members. We assigned members of the task force to call on individuals/families on the one-on-one visit list. We reviewed the spreadsheet Amanda developed containing information about association member congregation involvement with FLLC.

We talked about responses to two questions that may arise during one-on-ones, as follows:

*Q: How will RIC status change the the Fortune Lake experience?*

*A: RIC status will only expand campers experience of intentional Christian community during their time at Fortune Lake. Our goal is to be more open and inclusive to all God's children, through our regular activities of Bible Study, time in nature, singing, games and worship. We have always leaned into the belief that all of God's children are made, known, and loved by God. We believe that all children and adults should be able to come and experience Fortune Lake!*

*Q: Why can't we just say "all are welcome"? Similarly: Why do we have to rock the boat with naming the LGBT+ community in our welcome?*

*A: This language, while seemingly inviting, is the same language used by denominations and churches that are not actually a welcoming or safe space for members of the LGBT+ community. Making our welcome statement more explicit makes it clear that we really do mean "all are welcome."*

Christina and Suzanne shared their conversations with other camps that have become RIC. Both had key differences from our situation at Fortune Lake (One resides in an

RIC synod and one has no governing board or association, just three staff members who made the decision), but some insight was still gained.

### **September 12 and follow-up meeting, September 28, 2022**

*Present: Amanda Rasner, Charlotte Strom, Jared Howard, Sarah Semmler Smith, Ruth Almen, Heide Gallagher, Olivia Mai, Suzanne Tusa, Taryn Mason, Sam Brink (Camp Intern)*

We decided that the time has come to bring the Board of Directors back into the conversation. The task force needs clarity from the Board as to how a final decision on becoming an RIC camp will be reached.

The task force brainstormed a list of affirmative responses and concerns derived from one-on-ones. Overall, the responses from one-on-ones were more heavily weighted in the affirmative than concern.

#### **Affirmative**

- A. This is what we've always done at Fortune Lake, we're just putting language to it now.
- B. Fortune Lake is a place of love for all, this is making that authentic.
- C. This is exciting work that's going in a direction that makes sense for Fortune Lake.
- D. We (community pillars) trust in the people working on behalf of the organization to make the right decisions when it comes to these issues.
- E. We are grateful to be asked/listened to and glad to give our full support.
- F. As a queer person, Fortune Lake was the place where I felt safe to be myself!

#### **Concerns**

- A. If we're already doing it, why do anything differently? Can we be inclusive without saying it and risking the loss of campers/congregations? How many people could we potentially lose?
- B. Some people were concerned that FLLC would be pushing "the gay agenda" and worried about what their children might learn about gender and sexual identity at camp.
- C. Some who had experienced difficult church fractures shared the grief that they felt and continue to feel around that process. They don't want to see the same thing happen to Fortune Lake.
- D. Some referred to various events in our communities and churches that highlight division around LGBTQIA issues.

#### **How might these concerns be addressed?**

- A. By referring to the long-standing value of FLLC as a place of safety and refuge.

- B. Calling to mind the beloved FLLC theme song, “One Blue Sky,” which speaks powerfully of inclusivity/diversity with the lyrics: *One blue sky above us, ocean lapping at our shore, one earth so green and round, who could ask for more? And because I love you, I’ll give it one more try to show my rainbow race that it’s too soon to die.* Or the lyrics from another popular camp song, “Life Should Be People”: *Life should be people, all the people holding hands, forming a circle across the borders of all the lands...We were meant to share our lives with one and all! So love, one another, love a brother, a sister too. We, we need each other, we need each other our whole lives through.* This must include all people, not just some. If we belong to God, we belong together. FLLC does not seek to separate people from God/community, but to bring reconciliation.
- C. The song lyrics/rainbow posted in the dining hall bring together the story of the biblical story of the flood, the natural setting FLLC occupies, and the imagery of inclusion for LGBTQIA folk.

The next phase of this process is to put into words the theological framework that supports the process. A top idea that surfaced is that FLLC has always been “a place of grace” — and we discussed its centrality in the life of faith, especially in our Lutheran tradition. Grace is not a static, but a dynamic experience—we grow in grace throughout our lives. The task force surfaced various biblical references to this kind of grace, as well as words that help to define its impact in our lives.

- i. Other biblical passages and themes also were surfaced, including the book of 1 Corinthians (we are Christ’s body, though we differ), Romans 8 (nothing can separate us from God’s love/other themes), Galatians 3:28 (There is neither male nor female, etc—all belong to Christ), 1 John 4:7-8 (Let us love one another).

From this point on, the RIC journey will enter its more public facing stage. We await board response to the questions above before moving forward.

## **October 18, 2022**

*Present: Sarah Semmler Smith, Bucky Beach, Amanda Rasner, Charlotte Strom, Sam Brink, Taryn Mason, Kelly Ylitalo, Olivia Mai, Heide Gallagher, Jared Howard*

Ruth Almen was asked and has agreed to serve as Co-Chair for the task force, serving alongside Sarah.

It was reported that a motion was made, seconded, and passed at the Fortune Lake Camp Board meeting to make the final vote on the welcome statement/becoming a Reconciling in Christ camp a board decision rather than an association decision (in keeping with association bylaws at 6.4,13), and for the task force to initiate along with the board a process of invitation, education, and transparency with/to the entire association, with the goal of making the final decision a consensus-based one.

The entire process would be framed by the “Growing in Grace” theme. Part of the education would involve camp-sponsored retreats, the first of which would be held May 5-6, 2023.

Discussion of a plan for communication with the association at large yielded various preliminary ideas, including the need to a) ground communication in Scripture and Bible Study, perhaps using the resources offered by Reconciling Works; b) share personal stories; c) use video, perhaps inspired by those offered by Reconciling Works; d) seek ways to offer learning through the Northern Great Lakes Synod and its communication channels; e) offer a path for people to respond/ask questions/express concerns – perhaps through email; f) attach a more public facing summary of our minutes to our website for people to follow.

### **November 22, 2022**

*Present: Sarah Semmler Smith, Heide Gallagher, Taryn Mason, Charlotte Strom, Jared Howard, Suzanne Tusa, Olivia Mai, Dave Van Kley*

Amanda contacted web developer and they are working to add new material to the website. Charlotte asked Summer Bachand to provide a draft logo for our reconciling work: Dave created summaries of minutes for July-October, designed for public transparency, which will be added to our tab on the website in due time. Sarah created a very basic Google form for people’s feedback and questions re: our work together, for the website. The Retreat will be held on May 5-6 at FLLC. It will be an opportunity for people to learn about the Reconciling in Christ process, why it is important for us to state clearly why it is important for all people, including people who identify as LGBTQ+ to have a safe place at camp. The Annual Meeting will be held on April 30. While there will not be a vote on becoming an RIC camp, task force members will be available to facilitate discussion/answer questions following the meeting.

### **January 12, 2023**

*Present: Sarah Semmler Smith, Ruth Almen, Bucky Beach, Amanda Rasner, Charlotte Strom, Sam Brink, Taryn Mason, Kelly Ylitalo, Olivia Mai, Heide Gallagher, Jared Howard, Dave Van Kley*

The logo is ready to go on the website, as is the record of formation, which will be updated month to month. The Kaleidoscope challenge from the Northern Great Lakes Synod planned for Lent will include a week or more on learning about and discussing LGBTQIA identity, justice issues, and experience in church and society. Several members of the task force will help to facilitate. Ruth will record an introductory video for the website. Each task force member will record a short (30 second-2mn) video for the website and social media, introducing themselves to the FLLC community. Charlotte has

developed a schedule for the retreat, May 5-6. We are working on fleshing out program and promotion for this event. An additional letter will be sent to pastors/church council presidents, informing them of what's going on, inviting them to participate in our events during Lent. We decided to begin work on drafting a Welcome Statement each time we meet.

### **February 8, 2023**

*Present: Sarah Semmler Smith, Charlotte Strom, Kelly Ylitalo, Bruce Thoreson, Sam Brink, Heide Gallagher, Ruth Almen, Taryn Mason, Amanda Rasner, Olivia Mai.*

The FLLC website has been updated to include Growing in Grace materials. The various task force videos are being posted to the website/instagram/facebook for one week at a time. So far, they are well received. Work is ongoing on developing an information workshop at synod assembly, as well as information for the annual meeting. Discussion on the retreat continued, and Charlotte is the point person on this. Amanda and Kelly will draft a second letter to the pastors/council presidents, calling attention to the upcoming annual meeting, retreat, and synod assembly workshop. After the letter is sent out, several pastors will call conference presidents in order to reinforce the letter. We looked at language from other camp welcome statements and from the reconciling works website. Heide and Kelly will begin work on a first draft to share with the board and task force.

### **March 15, 2023**

*Present: Ruth Almen, Kelly Ylitalo, Heide Gallagher, Bucky Beach, Sam Brink, Charlotte Strom, Taryn Mason, Christina Maki, Amanda Rasner, Sarah Semmler Smith, Olivia Mai, Bruce Thoreson, Dave Van Kley.*

Work on the website continues, with the need for more resources. Bruce suggested using resources from the Kaleidoscope Challenge, which is now underway. There will be two workshops at synod assembly dealing with our area of concern: one, centered on the effort to make FLLC a Reconciling in Christ camp and two, focused more generally on LGBTQIA experience, discrimination, and acceptance. We are working on getting Aubrey Thonvold of Reconciling Works to be primary presenter at the retreat. Various task force members will be present and offer assistance and support at the retreat. The second letter to pastors has been sent out, and calls to conference presidents were assigned. Heide, Kelly, Sam, and Charlotte will collaborate on a first draft of the welcome statement, with the goal of presenting a completed draft to the board and to the task force for reaction/editing in the next week. Several task force members agreed to stay after the meeting of the whole to work on the synod assembly workshop.

## **April 5, 2023**

*Present: Sarah Semmler Smith, Kelly Ylitalo, Bruce Thorsen, Ruth Almen, Sam Brink, Charlotte Strom, Heide Gallagher, Amanda Rasner, Bucky Beach, Christina Maki, Olivia Mai, Taryn Mason.*

The videos have been well received: no need for more videos. The website includes an updated resource list. Nothing new on Synod Assembly workshop plans, other than we are on track to provide a workshop. We discussed plans for the Growing in Grace retreat, including responsibilities for staff and task force members. Aubrey Thonvold from Reconciling Works will play a key role. Thrivent gift cards will offset the cost of several items used during the retreat. The proposed welcome statement will be going out to association congregations and leaders along with the annual meeting packet sometime this week. Information about the process will be shared with congregation presidents and clergy/rostered leaders—Amanda will send.

## **April 30, 2023: Welcome Statement Review**

*Task Force members present: Sarah Semmler Smith, Jared Howard, Christina Maki, Suzanne Tusa, Kelly Ylitalo, Amanda Rasner, Charlotte Strom, plus many Association delegates and clergy who were in attendance at the annual meeting*

*Absent: Bucky Beach, Sam Brink, Heide Gallagher, Olivia Mai, Taryn Mason, Bruce Thorsen*

A special meeting was held after the Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp Association Annual meeting to discuss the draft of the Welcome Statement. The Welcome Statement had been drafted by a writing team (Kelly, Charlotte, Heide, and Olivia), approved by the Task Force, and approved by the Board of Directors to be moved to this meeting. It had been sent to congregations via email and postal mail as part of their Annual Meeting packet. Questions and comments were made by those in attendance, including about living into the statement, accompanying it with additional mission and vision language, and how the statement might impact our work with international partners. The group was informed that eventually, the Welcome Statement would go to the Board of Directors for approval.

## **May 4-5, 2023: Growing in Grace Retreat**

*Present: Ruth Almen, Kelly Ylitalo, Bucky Beach, Charlotte Strom, Taryn Mason (via Zoom), Christina Maki, Amanda Rasner, Bruce Thoreson plus registered retreat attendees (in-person and via Zoom)*

*Absent: Dave Van Kley, Heide Gallagher, Sam Brink, Sarah Semmler Smith, Olivia Mai*

Weekend Retreat hosted at Fortune Lake was attended by 17 people in-person and 3 people via Zoom. The keynote speaker, Aubrey Thonvold, contracted COVID, so she attended via Zoom. The weekend include introductory activities, bible study, authentic conversation, opportunities for private pastoral care, worship, and meals. Those present stated that the relationships and conversation were meaningful to them, and they would like to see an annual retreat be added to the Fortune Lake calendar.

### **October 27, 2023: Welcome Statement Ratified**

In mid-October the Welcome Statement writing team (*Kelly Ylitalo, Heide Gallagher, Charlotte Strom, and Sam Brink*) submitted the draft of the Welcome Statement to Reconciling Works for their feedback. Reconciling Works suggested more intentional language around anti-racism efforts. The drafting team updated the statement and submitted it to the board for approval. At the board meeting on October 27, 2023, the following was approved unanimously by the Board of Directors:

*Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp commits to live into the truth that all people are made in the Image of God, and we recognize that without the affirmed presence of all people, especially the historically marginalized, we are not fully represented as the Body of Christ. We deem it necessary and imperative to recenter and reaffirm the beloved humanity inherent in all people and to further this emphasis in our outdoor ministry setting.*

*As we seek to be a place of grace where all may grow in faith, Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp clearly and deliberately welcomes people of any sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, racial/ethnic/national identity, age, religious affiliation, economic status, relationship status, physical and mental ability, education, and other characteristics necessary for the whole Body of Christ into the life and leadership of our ministry.*

*We confess that while Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp has long-identified as a “place of grace,” we have not fully extended this same grace (“grace” being the unmerited favor of God freely gifted to all of humanity out of God’s radical, inclusive love for all creation) to each of our human siblings. We pledge to continue the work of total inclusion by intentionally turning away from systems that marginalize and dehumanize. We commit to dismantling those systems which have caused us to fracture and devalue the whole people of God. In doing so, we turn instead towards the beloved community revealed to us in the Good News of Jesus Christ with specific focus on racial equity, LGBTQIA+ inclusion, and equal access for those living with disabilities. In this we acknowledge that there is work to be done, and we aim not to attain perfection but to celebrate, affirm, and uplift the diverse and beautiful body of Christ.*

Amanda was asked to submit the welcome statement for approval by Reconciling Works.