



**Pastor of St. John's
at the time of the
All-Church
Conference,
10/18/98:**

"The journey of reconciling ministries began, for me, as I listened to stories of pain from the rejected and those who loved the outcasts. Two

mothers helped me not only to listen, but to hear as they unfolded the stories about their gay sons. I was on the brink of a journey, yet unknown to me, but nevertheless taking seed in my soul as I began listening to more and more stories of rejection. Stories came from many segments of life: from closeted men and women from every vocation and walk, including clergy, young teen-agers, moms, dads, brothers, sisters, in short – people you and I know, but really do NOT know. As is the case with seeds of ministry, others plant seeds, and then God does the nurturing, so that those seeds mature and even spread into the soil of other lives. So it was for me, as I encountered one person after another who told me their stories.

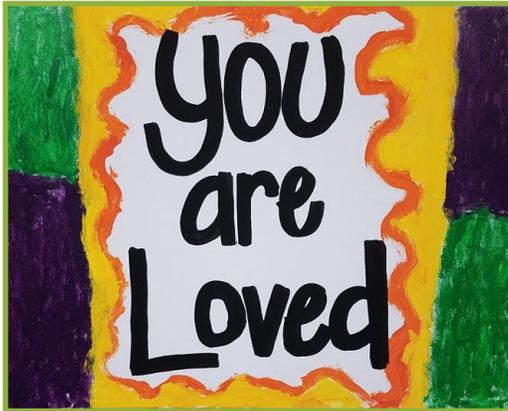
In 1992 many members began discussing the possibility of St. John's moving along the journey of becoming a Reconciling Congregation, but we were not there yet. The seed of PFLAG was planted when the mother of a gay son and Tech student wanted to help start a chapter in Lubbock. She was a leader in the national PFLAG organization and they needed a place where this meeting could be held safely and "discreetly." The Board of Trustees gave its wholehearted support and Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays started meeting at St. John's. With its presence, we, as a church, began listening more and more to the stories of pain, rejection, and longing for acceptance, inclusion, and dignity by the church, particularly THIS church, which had as its motto, **Open Hearts, Open Arms, Open Minds**. The seeds of unrest that were planted were transplanted into the soil of a committee appointed by the church council to study the possibility of our becoming a Reconciling Congregation. The "Committee on Reconciling Ministry" was formed, with a membership made up of a cross section of many views in the beginning, some of which were totally committed to our church becoming a reconciling church, and some that were not totally supportive, but willing to be part of the process.

The Committee on Reconciling Ministry led the church in study that spanned four years of discussion, open forums, special classes, sermons, and many, many meetings both formally and informally. It was not an easy journey, but we were now on the road, and even though there were many times of painful losses, we stayed

on the journey. We lost long time members who were dear and sacred to the life and legacy of St. John's. We met and listened in most cases, as these persons made the decision to leave St. John's, they did so with the assurance of our love and blessings. To be reconciling, we had learned, meant the inclusion of ALL – even those who cannot join the journey or stay with the journey. The church received letters of criticism and letters of support. Our Bishop and District Superintendent disapproved of the direction in which we were moving.

Finally, after four years of study, discussion, heights, depths, and many, many more stories shared by people who now risked telling the story of their own struggle for love and acceptance, as well as those stories told by their moms, dads, loved ones and friends, the date was set for an **All-Church Conference** at which we would vote on whether or not St. John's United Methodist Church would become a Reconciling Congregation. The date set for this meeting was October 18, 1998. A Mission Statement of Reconciliation had been drafted by the committee, and if approved by the vote of this All-Church Conference, would officially declare that St. John's UMC would henceforth be a Reconciling Congregation. The meeting was highly publicized and every effort was made to insure that all members of St. John's were invited and urged to be present. Over 200 persons remained after the 10:30 am Worship Service ended. A summary of the four year study was presented and then copies of the Reconciling Mission Statement were placed before the conference. The meeting was opened to discussion and debate, and those who were in full support, those who were not supportive and those who were uncertain, were given the opportunity to be heard. It was truly a time of grace and gentleness prevailing. All spoke with gentle dignity and love, All were received in the same spirit. A written ballot was distributed to every member in attendance.





The ballots were collected and counted. The count was 85% in favor of St. John's becoming a Reconciling Congregation. We are still on the journey of learning how to live and to be a Reconciling Congregation. Now St. John's, is among those listed as a Reconciling Congregation in the Reconciling Ministries Network, a network of

hope for those who may be asking today: Where can I, my son, daughter, brother, sister, friend - find a Church that will welcome and include me/them?"

Chairman of St. John's "Committee on Reconciling Ministry" in 1998:

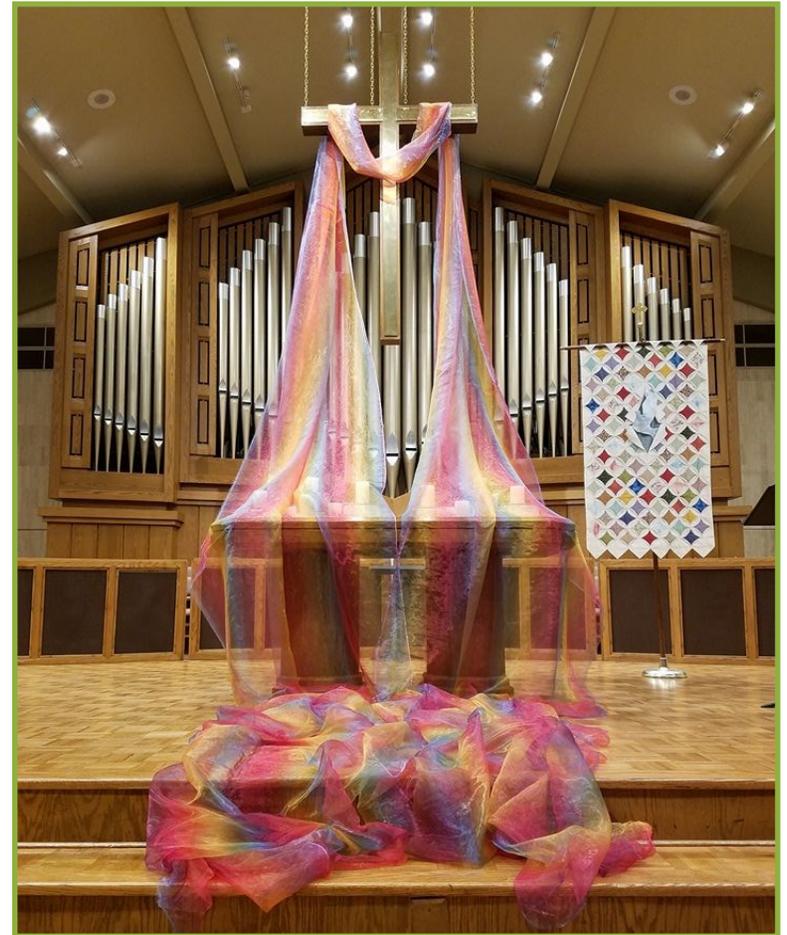
"It's been a long, hard road, but I'm glad in the end we took our time. I don't want anybody to feel we were forcing anything on them. All the label (reconciling) means is we have made an official statement as a church that we want to be open and welcoming to all persons. That's really all it is. The main thing for me is that I came away with a real good feeling about our congregation, and my faith in the church affirmed, mainly because we can love each other as a body even though we don't necessarily agree. There is still work of reconciliation to be done. Our statement is a clear journey toward reconciliation. I'm not sure you ever get there, but we're called to keep striving toward it."

St. John's United Methodist Church has been affiliated with Reconciling Ministries Network since 1998, when we adopted a statement affirming the sacred worth of all God's children, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. We celebrate our diversity, and we welcome all people to join us in our journey together toward greater understanding and mutual respect.

Learn more at www.rmnetwork.org



Our Reconciling Journey



 **ST. JOHN'S**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH