



February 2017, Number 7



## Church Together

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### **THE POWER OF WELCOME**

In January, 2013 Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Gilroy received our Reconciling in Christ certificate from Reconciling Works. We had voted unanimously in December 2012 to become a Reconciling in Christ congregation by adopting our statement of welcome:

*Good Shepherd Lutheran Church of Gilroy is an inclusive Christian community. St. Paul, in Galatians 3, reminds us that baptism makes us children of God, and therefore "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Therefore, we welcome people of all sexual orientations and gender identities fully into the life of our congregation.*

We sent that statement to Reconciling Works, and received their approval. Now with the certificate on the wall, on our website, and in our newsletter and Sunday's worship folder, we wondered what would happen next.

In October of 2013, I got a phone call from Kelly, asking about having her child baptized. I suggested that their family attend

worship at Good Shepherd in order to become acquainted with the community of faith that would be supporting them as they raised their child in the faith of the church. Nothing came from that phone call until January of 2014, when a lovely mother with her baby attended worship one Sunday, and reminded me of the phone call a few months ago. I was happy to see that they had taken me up on the invitation to check us out. After that, we talked some more, and they attended worship more. When it came time to schedule the Sunday of the baptism, I learned that little Tommy's godparents were to be a lesbian couple who were good friends and neighbors of Kelly and Tom's.

After standing up for little Tommy at his baptism, Trudi and Marla began attending worship with Tom, Kelly, and Tommy. Soon they all joined Good Shepherd. Trudi and Marla next became part of our Handbell Choir. They are fully integrated into the life of the congregation, as we stated in our Welcome. They have read Sunday lessons and assisted with the distribution of Holy Communion. They are on one of our Sunday Brunch teams and bring potluck dishes to share when their team's turn comes up. Trudi has a Black Lab service dog named RJ who accompanies her to everything, including kneeling at Holy Communion. RJ receives a blessing, of course.

Still later I learned from Trudi that the reason Tom and Kelly chose Good Shepherd for little Tommy's baptism is because we were the only congregation in Gilroy that would welcome a lesbian couple to be Tommy's godparents. We had no idea that our statement of welcome would make that kind of impact on the lives of this family, and on our congregation. We have since baptized Tommy's little sister, Taylor. What a great gift all of them have become to us at Good Shepherd.

We needed to make a statement of the wideness of God's inclusive love so that it could be seen on our website and in our newsletter and in our Sunday worship folder. It's important to say specifically who is welcome because for too long churches have "said" welcome, but the LGBTQ community has not heard that the welcome applies to them. They now know it in Gilroy, and we are blessed.

Pr. Ron Koch

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*Do you have a story that you would like to share? Send any Church Together story requests to [mic@spselca.org](mailto:mic@spselca.org).*

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