

8/27/2025

People of God at St. Mark's Lutheran Church,

Several times over the last few years, I (Pastor Matt) have had folks who are new to our congregation make an appointment to talk with me about St. Mark's, and the conversation has gone like this: "I've enjoyed visiting, and this seems like a wonderful congregation. But before I go any further, I just need to know—I'm gay. Will I be accepted here?"

As part of our Vision 2027 goals, a team from St. Mark's has been working for more than a year to help St. Mark's answer that question with a resounding "YES!" by becoming a "Reconciling in Christ" congregation through the organization ReconcilingWorks. The Reconciling in Christ (RIC) program is an opportunity for congregations to publicly welcome, include, celebrate, and advocate for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. ReconcilingWorks maintains a public listing of RIC congregations as a tool for folks to seek out welcoming congregations.

To join the RIC network, our congregation would affirm this welcome of all God's children by making four public commitments:

1. **Adopting a "Welcome Statement"** that is intentional about a welcome to the LGBTQIA+ community and working against racism. The proposed St. Mark's welcome statement is:

Following the example of Jesus, the people of St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Asheville, NC, are committed to being a welcoming community for all of God's children. We welcome you and people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, socioeconomic conditions, educational backgrounds, abilities, family situations, ages, physical or mental health conditions, or places in their faith journey. We are committed to fostering anti-racism and inclusion within our congregation and within our community.

*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. (Galatians 3:28)*

2. **Being open to calling LGBTQIA+ people and people of color** as pastors or deacons. There is not a commitment that we will call people from a certain category, only a commitment that this congregation would not refuse to consider a candidate because of identity.

3. **Allowing our church to be used for LGBTQIA+ weddings.** To date, no one has ever asked us to do this, and it could be that no one ever does. This commitment is simply that we would not refuse based on the sexual orientation or gender identity of the folks asking for God's blessing on their public commitment to love and support one another.

4. **Making a meaningful annual contribution** to the ReconcilingWorks organization in support of their work of welcoming all people in Lutheran spaces. What is "meaningful" is open to interpretation. The RIC team recommends that the council consider \$500 a year.

We hope you'll join us on September 21 during the faith formation hour for some conversation about the logistics of this process and our ultimate goal of making St. Mark's a welcoming community for all of God's children. In the meantime, please reach out if you have any questions.

In Christ's Love,

Pastor Matt, Deacon Katie, and the St. Mark's RIC team,  
Linda Kinsinger, Randy Warren, Judy McKay, Josh Kersey, & Tom Stewart

### **What happens next?**

Mark your calendars and plan to join us during the faith formation hour between services on September 21 for a congregational forum with the RIC team. We'll go over the commitments above, and we hope you will bring your questions and feedback. From there, we anticipate that the St. Mark's congregational council will take up a decision on a commitment to the RIC status at the regularly scheduled October meeting.

### **How can I provide feedback to the congregation council?**

You may use the included feedback form to communicate your support or concerns. Please return it to the church office by October 3rd. The office will compile all feedback, remove identifying information, and pass it on to the congregation council for consideration.

### **How did we get here?**

- 2017: One of St. Mark's Core Values is welcome. We welcome and include all people regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, appearance, or anything else that may divide us. [Romans 8:38-39]
- 2019: Call process conversations include a desire for St. Mark's to become RIC congregation
- 2021: Group of St. Mark's members attend RIC training and conversations begin about St. Mark's becoming a RIC congregation
- 2023: Vision Team identifies welcome to LGBTQ+ community and RIC status in their recommendations
- 2024: St. Mark's Council adopts Vision 2027 goals, including pursuing RIC status. RIC Team forms. Electronic and print survey responses solicited to gauge congregation's sentiment were overwhelmingly positive
- 2025: Wake Forest New Testament Professor, Rev. Dr. Katherine Shaner, visits St. Mark's to speak about biblical interpretation (see Dr. Shaner's talk at: <https://youtu.be/6r7r8NVlj18> ). RIC team drafts welcome statement and makes recommendations that it be adopted by council along with the other RIC commitments.

**Reconciling in Christ Feedback**  
St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Asheville

Name:

Do you support St. Mark's Lutheran Church making a commitment to welcome all people by becoming an RIC congregation?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Is there any further feedback you would like to provide to the St. Mark's Council?

Please return to the church office no later than October 3.  
You may also fill out the form electronically with the QR code  
or by visiting <https://forms.gle/ow8j8kd541G7XNUW8>

