



September 14, 2020

Through Jesus Christ, God chooses everyone to be part of God's own family. Through the Spirit, the First Lutheran Cincinnati faith community chooses to embrace you in peace, whatever your age, ability, socioeconomic background, race, culture, faith, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, relationship status, or whatever other distinctions make you who you are.

Grace and peace to you,

Five years ago, on this day, First Lutheran mailed a letter to our faith community announcing that we affirmed the marriage of same gendered individuals. More than that we would welcome and celebrate such ceremonies. This decision was the product of intentional, authentic, faithful, and heartfelt conversation by our community.

Today, I am pleased to announce that First Lutheran has been formally recognized as a Reconciling In Christ congregation. We received this recognition by formally adopting the RIC Statement printed above. We are now one of 915 ELCA congregations, out of 9,000, that have adopted such a statement. In Cincinnati, we join Lutheran Church of the Resurrection which was recognized in August.

Thank you to the members of the Building an Inclusive Community Team (BIC) John & Angela Kinney; Jessica O'Rourke; Valerie Holocher; and Pastor Mike Oakley. They shepherded this process and kept the conversation going even during a pandemic!

There is certainly cause to feel good about this, but we must be mindful that the purpose of adopting this statement is not so we can feel good about belonging to an inclusive faith community. It is rather, first and foremost, a way to eliminate the indignity a person endures by having to ask the question if their sexual orientation or identity is fully affirmed at First Lutheran. Today is a good day. I look forward to a great day, when we can discard the RIC logo and label because everyone fully accepts their neighbor in the way God created them.

The RIC logo is certainly designed to provide, at a quick glance, a message of inclusivity to the LGBTQ+ community but being an RIC community means much more. The message of inclusivity is for all people. We still have much work to do. Consider the following:

- We are not inclusive when it comes to physical ability. First Lutheran, in 178 years, has never in a dignified way welcomed a person whose physical abilities made it impossible to climb a set of stairs.
- Last January, we celebrated the 150th anniversary of women becoming full voting members of First. With Cindy Schrader leaving the Leadership Team to Chair the Internship Committee, First is now led by four white, heterosexual married men with children. We could use some diversity in leadership!
- During my six years at First, we have welcomed 80 new members. This is certainly exciting but 95% of those welcomed have been white. The growth of our faith community reflects the divisions that exist in our community.

Our RIC statement will serve as a reminder that we still have work to do as we seek to share the love of God with the full diversity of people God calls to form the body of Christ.

Thank you for your partnership in the gospel.



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