

## **Midvale Community's RIC Story**

Midvale Community in Madison officially became a Reconciling in Christ (RIC) congregation in June of 2018. Several months prior, lay members and pastors recognized that it was time for Midvale to be bolder and louder in its proclamation of God's love for all people, and especially for God's LGBTQIA+ children. A task force was formed to study the RIC process and lead the effort. The task force was formed to include both members of the LGBTQIA+ community and those who were not, long-time members of Midvale and those who were newer, and both older and younger church members.

The task force determined that education was the first priority. A Sunday adult forum was dedicated to discussion of the discrimination, dehumanization, and risk of violence many LGBTQIA+ people have faced; the higher risks of anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicide in the LGBTQIA+ population; the harm being done to these individuals by churches which have weaponized the Scriptures and God against LGBTQIA+ people; and the sense of not only being unwelcome, but unwanted by churches.

A second adult forum was devoted to putting faces on these issues. Two transgender women shared their personal stories. Other comments came from LGBTQIA+ members of Midvale who have been at Midvale Community a long time but never risked sharing their story. A parent of a transgender youth also shared their perspective. These two adult forums were quite illuminating for Midvale members. The task force felt the support of the congregation in moving forward with the RIC process and developing a welcome statement. Once developed, the statement was approved by the church council and the congregation. There was little to no loss of members due to the congregation becoming RIC.

How Midvale Community has lived into our RIC calling:

Visibility - Our welcome statement with the RIC logo appears in each Sunday's bulletin. It also appears prominently on the home page of our church website. One does not have to dig into the website to find out that we are RIC and what that means. Our RIC status is visible on our outdoor church sign and on each of our exterior doors. A colorful banner proclaiming "All Are Welcome" is displayed outside during Pride month in June, in August when the Madison area has its Pride celebration, and in January when we celebrate RIC Sunday.

Midvale Pride Team - This team includes original task force members and others who have joined in this work. Current leadership for this group is a gay couple and a parent of a transgender youth. In 2019 and 2022, the team used a church endowment grant to design and sell Midvale-specific Pride t-shirts to members and friends of the congregation. A flyer/bookmark was designed to proclaim our welcome. These flyers sit on the welcome table in our gathering space at church. Members also hand them out at Madison's Pride celebration. The Pride Team has also organized a group from church to attend a Madison Mallards game on Pride Night in June. Ongoing efforts include exploring ways to connect LGBTQ Lutherans from around the synod in fellowship, support, and advocacy. A remodeling project in a few years will

include gender-neutral bathrooms on our main floor. The team is also looking at worship name tags which include pronouns.

Annual recommitment of the congregation - Reconciling Works designates the last Sunday of January as RIC Sunday and provides worship resources for congregations to use. Part of our worship that day is recommitting ourselves to the work of fully including, celebrating, and advocating for our LGBTQIA+ siblings, whether or not they are members of Midvale. For RIC Sunday 2022, members of the task force provided special music for worship by singing a song entitled, "Welcome to This Circle," by Trish Bruxvoort Colligan.

Here's what being RIC means to a few Midvale Community members:

*"Being a member of the LGBTQIA+ community I was more than happy when I was asked to be a member of Midvale Community's RIC team. Over the years we have led adult forums, hosted hospitality hours, raised both our hearts and voices in song at one of our church services, and more! It has touched me how members of the church have come forward to show me support, and the same support for our Pride Team. I have made many new friends both through our team and within our congregation. It was difficult growing up, I never felt totally welcomed attending church due to my own sexuality. Now I am very proud to be a member of Midvale's Pride Team, as well as being welcomed as a member of Midvale Community Lutheran Church." - J.W.*

*"It's important for Midvale to be RIC because it signals to anyone looking for a welcoming, faith community that this is a spot for them. Since research is often done online first, Midvale being included in a "church that welcomes all because Jesus welcomes all" search is exactly what I want my faith community to signal. There's no guessing or questioning whether your values align. The minute you enter you will be met with an inclusive community excited to celebrate you just as you are. It is literally a safe sanctuary." - S.G.*

*"My son came out to my husband and me as trans when he was 16 years old. We were loved and supported fully by the pastors, church staff, and many members. People gave us encouragement as parents who were trying to learn as quickly as possible and to find local resources to help keep our son healthy and safe. They affirmed our love for our son, and they shared how much they loved our son as well. With full awareness that there are churches out there who would absolutely not welcome our son, and perhaps not even welcome our family because we are wholly supportive of our son, the fact that Midvale Community treasures our son and supports us fully is a blessing that I cannot take for granted. Their support has made all the difference. I want other parents of LGBTQIA+ youth to know about this faith community that loves each one as God's child and created in God's image." - L.S.*

*"I have always loved being a member of a congregation that is inclusive and welcoming, so taking the extra step to become an RIC congregation feels like we are getting just a little bit closer to being who God wants us to be as a community. It means that my friends and family who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community can walk through the door without fear of judgment, condemnation, or exclusion. When we believe that God is love, how can we live any life but one centered in love, inclusivity, and justice?" - B.B.*

*“Being able to get married in our RIC church and be recognized as a married couple and family has made us feel validated, seen and spiritually whole.” - S.H. & A.C.*

*“I am proud that Midvale Community is part of RIC because it helps marginalized people feel accepted by our members, and God. I am especially thankful for the youngest members of our church to know they are able to be their true selves and still feel cared for and able to develop a relationship with God, our pastors and members. I support Midvale being a part of RIC because I want members of our church to feel that they will remain loved and accepted should they be afraid of sharing their LGBTQ+ status. I am proud to share with the community that the right thing to do is to show grace and acceptance to ALL, in the hopes that more people will feel able to show love.” - T.M.*

Midvale member Laura Svaren, who serves on the synod RIC Task Force and has a transgender family member, is willing to speak to any congregation in the synod who would like to know more about the RIC process or how to better live into one's calling as an RIC congregation. She can be reached at [laura.svaren@gmail.com](mailto:laura.svaren@gmail.com).