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Description automatically generatedAbiding Peace Lutheran Church

**“A supportive and accepting place to grow in faith”**

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NEWS RELEASE: Local Lutheran Church Recognized for Public Welcoming Statement

Budd Lake, NJ, Nov 2, 2022

Abiding Peace Lutheran Church has been recognized by Reconciling Works (formerly Lutherans Concerned/North America) as the most recent Reconciling in Christ (RIC) congregation in Morris County, NJ. This recognition comes after the congregation voted to officially adopt a public statement of welcome for people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions, and a commitment to racial equity. The statement reads in part,

“We extend a loving welcome to those who are single, married, divorced or widowed; those of all sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions… We welcome those of all ethnicities, races, immigration status, and primary languages and we affirm our commitment to racial equity.”

The Rev. Serena Rice (she/her), Pastor of Abiding Peace sees this statement as “An important public affirmation of the church’s long-standing commitment to embody the love and grace of God that is open to all God’s children in the fullness of their God-created identities. Although this welcome is nothing new for our community, we have been intentional about reflecting on all that this public step means for our witness and our ministry, and we are committed to continuing to learn how to be a truly welcoming space where all are seen and celebrated.”

Heather Nilsen (she/her), a member of the church Council and also of the core team that led the congregation in the RIC process, explained the reason this step is so important. “When someone who is LGBTQIA+ walks into our church for the first time, they are asking the question, “Is this a space I can be my whole self, or do I need to hide and misdirect?” Our answer to that question, both overt and implied, will make a tremendous difference in determining if they can truly connect to God and be nourished in faith as a part of our community.”

Aubrey Thonvold, Executive Director of Reconciling Works, said “We welcome Abiding Peace Lutheran Church, Budd Lake to the Reconciling in Christ family. It is with love we are called to welcome all God’s children into our congregations, communities, and our world. We thank Abiding Peace for being an active member working for reconciliation and growth within the church so all of God’s Beloveds can share a lived experience of love, welcome, and family.”

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Since 1983, the RIC Program has been a public way for faith communities to see, name, celebrate, and advocate for people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions in the Lutheran Church. More recently, the mission of the program has expanded to include a commitment to work for racial equity and commit to anti-racist work. The RIC Program is made up of congregations, synods, colleges, seminaries, outdoor ministries, and other Lutheran organizations. Every ministry setting begins this journey from their own unique context and Reconciling Works is a resource to help diverse communities create an authentic welcome journey.

Abiding Peace Lutheran Church, Budd Lake has been an active congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (formerly Lutheran Church in America) in the Budd Lake area for 51 years. Its mission is to “make Christ known by welcoming all people to a supportive and accepting place to grow in faith and community, and to serve the Lord as people created by God, saved by Christ, and nurtured by the Holy Spirit.”