

Letter of Thanks

Voice 1: This letter contains the voices of many of our youth group members combined into one voice. Dear St. Mark,

Voice 1(cont.): This church has provided me with a place where I feel welcomed, supported, and loved. A place where I can be comfortable with where I am in my faith journey, and a place where I can be myself.

Voice 2: Before writing this letter I didn't really think too much about how many things the church has going on for us kids. I don't know of any other churches that do a youth Sunday. Getting to have a major voice in worship is special, and I'm excited to be able to participate.

Voice 1: There are so many things to be thankful for here at St. Mark. The one that influences me the most is the choir. They were so kind to me when I joined and continue to help me learn and grow to this day. They have shown me compassion and fellowship through music.

Voice 2: I discovered this church after careful consideration of several local churches. After contacting St. Mark about their stance on important issues regarding equality, I received an overwhelmingly positive response in support of people such as the LGBTQ+ community. I knew this was the church for me. Thank you for your strong stance on equality.

Voice 1: Thank you for being loving and welcoming to me. I feel like I belong to a happy community where I can be myself and love God with others. Thank you to the sweet ladies who sometimes compliment my dresses and to Jenn for always welcoming new ideas into youth group. A special thanks to the wonderful choir who inspired me to join vocal ensemble at my school. Thank you to Julia from youth group for being my first friend here. Thank you for being a congregation that appreciates and loves everyone in our community.

Voice 2: I'd like to say thank you. I have really enjoyed my experience at St. Mark, and every time I come here I always feel really welcomed. I know a lot of you work hard to know our names, and to fulfill the promise you made when we were baptized: to be the people we look up to, and to help our parents raise us in the church of Jesus Christ.

Voice 1: I would like to thank the youth group for showing the world to me through a different lens. The group has changed my view of the world by exposing me to the fact that we are truly blessed and fortunate to have all the gifts we have. Also, it has shown me that there are more people that need the world's help than we think.

Voice 2: The winter of 2016 was a very turbulent time in my life. With struggles in school, the larger political situation, and even my faith, I was feeling weighed down. Around that time, Jenn McCullough became the youth leader of St. Mark. Thanks to her leadership, and the general impression she left on me, youth group became an important part of my week, in turn strengthening my faith.

Voice 1: I have been extremely thankful for the people here and the great experiences I have had growing up in this church. When I was younger, my Sunday school teachers were always extremely nice and calm. They would teach me how to be kind to one another, teaching lessons such as treating others how you would want to be treated. I carry these values with me where ever I go. I have many people to thank, and some of those are Diana Light, Mr. Wright, Mr. Kelly, Mrs. Thornton, and Lynn Gifford.

Voice 2: I am thankful for Pastor Mark because I am able to stay engaged and understand his sermons. Also, I am equally thankful for the staff at St. Mark. They continually seek to get me involved in events like VBS and Worship. I tend to shy away from public speaking or trying new things, but St. Mark has been a very kind and supportive congregation. I am so glad that St. Mark has provided me with a passionate and welcoming congregation, staff, and youth that are willing to grow and learn along side me.

Voice 1: For these reasons and so many more, we are full of gratitude and love for you, the people of St. Mark.

A Letter of Hope

Voice one: Dear St. Mark,

This is our letter of hope, written by the collective voices of the M68 Underground.

You are a wonderful and loving congregation; however, we all have things we can improve upon. First of all, the youth won't hurt you! We'd love to help with anything the church needs help with. We are members of this congregation just as much as you are, and we want to help give back to the church and community too.

Voice 2: Here at St. Mark, we strive for inclusion of all people. One simple thing we could improve is language regarding gender. If we could use non-binary language such as "everyone" instead of "men and women", we could set a tone of even greater welcome.

Voice 1: I know it seems unimportant, but perhaps we could offer a wider variety of snacks on the patio. Being unable to eat donut holes leaves me just a little disappointed every time.

Voice 2: We all love the music here. However, could we occasionally consider using a wider variety of musical genres in our worship? For example, at the most recent Los Ranchos youth gathering, we had a band playing here and it was so exciting and inspiring to worship in a different way. I know this is an area where change is hard, but maybe we could challenge ourselves to hear God differently through different musical genres.

Voice 1: St. Mark does such amazing work. I want to see us do more of the work we're already doing, especially addressing climate change and human trafficking. We're all worried about the future, and I think we can do much more.

Voice 2: I hope that the youth group will continue to grow so that more people will hear about the organizations we talk about and will want to help.

Voice 1: Please be kind about the way we dress. We express ourselves AND we come to church. This is our home.

Voice 2: Get to know us as individuals rather than just as "the youth". Don't mix up our name with the name of someone who looks similar. We are each a unique individual.

Voice 1: Another thing we could work on is being careful regarding stereotypes. Statements such as "boys will be boys" or "all children love playing in the mud" can overlook all kinds of stories and complexity. Not all of our backgrounds are the same.

Voice 2: We are all members of the same congregation; there's no need to have a big gap between people sitting in the pews. Don't be afraid to sit next to someone you don't know!

Voice 1: I hope that St. Mark continues to pursue understanding and respect for the transgender community. We can help the world know that God created people in many different ways, and that includes all people regardless of gender identity.

Voice 2: We believe that we all can bring hopeful and positive change to our church and I encourage you to do so. Thank you for being a thoughtful community of growth and engagement. We know that we can share our hopes with you and be heard. We hold you all in our hearts. With great love,

the youth at St. Mark.