

Pastoral Letter

Dear Girdwood Chapel,

When you move to a new place — a new State, a new part of the country — you often have to learn everything from scratch: the culture, the history, the land, the people, your neighbors, the rhythms of daily life, even the local stores. This July marks the start of my third year here in Girdwood, and I have been learning this community the whole time.

After a year, I thought I was finally getting to know this place. Then my family arrived, and I began to see it differently. After two years, I thought I understood this community better — then my baby arrived, and once again I saw Girdwood in a new light. The truth is, this community keeps changing, just as the world keeps changing around us. Even when I visit my hometown in Korea, I find that everything there has changed too.

That's a long way of saying: today I want to share something I'm only now beginning to understand — how grateful I am for summer in this community, and how deeply you all treasure this season. It took two winters before I understood what summer means here. I hope you enjoy every single day of it.

And yet, even in the middle of summer, some of you still hold fast to Girdwood Chapel's Sunday worship — a service of less than an hour that welcomes visitors from around Alaska, tourists passing through who want to worship, family and friends who come to observe, and others who simply feel called here, seeking God's guidance and the Spirit's leading. Our building is large; our congregation is small. But we sit at the heart of this community, and our vision is to be the heartbeat of Girdwood.

This summer, we've been listening to messages on evangelism and mission in our own context. Along the way, one question keeps returning: What does hospitality look like for us? How do we welcome people well? What might keep someone from staying — right at the start of worship, or in those last few minutes before it ends? How do we make room for people to feel truly welcomed in our worship space?

Some of you have already taken this seriously — drafting a greeter instruction, and our greeters have done a wonderful job each week. Still, I want us to be

honest: hospitality isn't only the greeters' work. It belongs to our whole congregation, our whole community. We have plenty of resources and hands — people with the time, the energy, and even the passion for this.

So I'd like us to talk about it together, as a larger group — not because I think something is wrong, or because we need to change things, or do them differently, or even because it's time for a different pastor! I simply want us to arrive at a shared sense of what hospitality looks like for us, together — with no pressure that you need to be back in these pews every single Sunday afterward. I invite all of you — whether or not you usually attend — to Brunch Church on Sunday, August 16th. It will be our regular Brunch Church: we share the dishes we bring, we talk, we share our lives and our faith. This time, though, our focus will be hospitality. Bring a dish if you'd like, or simply come to the table. Share your experiences of hospitality in other communities of faith, and let's think together about how to reshape those practices for our own context — in words and ways that are truly ours, not simply borrowed from somewhere else.

And if you can't make it to this late-summer Brunch Church but still want to share something on this topic, please send your thoughts to us beforehand [by email](#). We'll share them with everyone on that day.

– Pastor Hyunghee