

Coming and Going Letter¹

A truckload of furniture, boxes, clothes and a heart full of baggage: With moving comes a myriad of feelings ranging from grief to joy, anxiety to excitement, and faith to fear. You are no doubt leaving many favorite (and familiar) sights, sounds, and smells, and more profoundly, many close friends. You will pull away with many fond memories and shared experiences that will no doubt shape the way that you pull in to your new location. It is our sincere hope that your days at Christ Church prepared you well for this next big step. Please receive this letter as pastoral counsel and a gracious commissioning from your church. It is our hope that you will (1) make friends, (2) stay rooted, (3) plug in, and (4) give back.

Making Friends

One thing that you might forget, in leaving such a bevy of good friends, is that building friendships will take time. Breaking into a new community can be challenging. So many people you will meet are not “*new to the area*” like you are. They have been there for years—they have full schedules brimming with friendships. Few will have the excess relational time that you have. Don’t assume people are not being friendly; simply recognize that *breaking in* will take some time (most people say 6-18 months).

Also, if you are leaving school (undergraduate or graduate), you should recognize that making friends in the context of your first job or your first foray into *neighborhood life* will look quite different than it did in school. Going through classes together, overlapping schedules, and sharing experiences naturally bond you to those that you *did life* with. Bosses, meetings, spouses, families—your life will become fuller than it ever has been before. Be realistic about what friendship in this next phase will look like.

For those of you who are married, be aware that your spouse (and your children) might approach making friends and adjusting to new life very differently than you do. They might need more or less time—they might find energy in having more alone time or might need to have people over more frequently. Your spouse might build more casual friendships while you need to take more time cultivating a few close relationships (or, vice-versa).

Finally, for everyone, making friends in the context of *first impressions* is both stressful and enlightening. You will learn a lot about yourself in these initial conversations—Who am I? What sort of perception or impression do I hope to create? What am I trying to hide, defend, or prove? What am I proud of? Be sure you practice some self-awareness during this season for it will teach you much.

Staying Rooted

Jesus often uses agrarian metaphors that demonstrate our union with him. In John 15:4-5, we read: “Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” Remaining in Christ, staying rooted in him, will involve the intentional practice of spiritual disciplines, including regular prayer, Scripture reading, and connecting to a new church where you can participate through the corporate prayer, word, and Sacrament.

This *new* season in this *new* place will be a spiritual intersection for you. Being overwhelmed by change will probably result in either more fervent time with God or an eclipse of this time. We urge you, because you are setting a *new* schedule, to set aside time in the morning and evening to be with God. The Book of Common Prayer has become a fixture of Spiritual Formation at Christ

¹ While this letter is written for those who are moving away from Christ Church and from the Bay Area, it might also be helpful for those who are new to this area and also new to Christ Church.

Church. Be sure you get one, and use our tools on the website if you don't yet know how to use it. Praying through the Psalms and prayers in the prayer book is certainly not the only way to pray, but it is an accessible and structured way to pray that will make it easy to form and shape spiritual habits and rhythms over a lifetime. Furthermore, it unites you to other Christians at Christ Church, and all over the world, who are, through the Holy Spirit, adoring and praying alongside of you.

Plugging In

If you take anything away from your experience at Christ Church, we hope it is a sincere love for the local church. We have tried our best to model and teach that an unchurched Christian is a Biblical anomaly. No church will be perfect. No Christian will be perfect. We each await that day when Jesus will complete his good and final work within each of us (Philippians 1:6). *Plugging in* to a local church is an opportunity to experience the reality of "iron sharpening iron," – bumping into other people's pointy elbows, knobby knees, and chips on shoulders—it is the opportunity to see grace abound as God is taking sinners and forging them into the image of Jesus.

We recommend taking some time to locate a church in your area, but don't take too much time or in two years, you will still be searching. We recommend taking around six months to find a new church home. During this season, plan to visit five or six churches, but plan to stay at each for 3 or 4 weeks. It is impossible to pick-up the values and understand the mission of a church by just dropping in for a week. Ask the pastor why the church exists and what the church is passionate about. Attend a seminar for newcomers. Ask questions: Does the church honor the authority of Scripture? Is it credal? Is it confessional? Is it connected to a larger governing body with oversight and accountability? Is it serious about mercy and justice? Is it a place that will challenge you to grow spiritually? Is it a place that you will be able to bring your new friends?

When you feel that you are ready to plug in, don't ask the question that everyone else asks: "How will this church serve me?" Rather, ask the counter-cultural question that few ask: "How can I serve in this church?" Also, please respect your new church's standards for membership. It is easy to assume, "Well, I already know that, and I have already committed to this." Churches not only want to connect you to their ecclesiastical and theological heritage (something you might be familiar with), but also to their unique personality (their vision of for the city and philosophy of ministry). If you are moving to a new state you will have to apply for a new driver's license (and may even have to take a driver's test). Approach membership the same way—don't roll your eyes in the seminar or begrudgingly complain about jumping through the hoops. Have a good attitude about establishing residency in this new church much like you will in your new state.

We all take experiences (good, bad, and ugly) from previous churches. As you get involved, do your best to not compare your *new* church to your *old* church. If you dwell on what your *new* church doesn't do that your *old* church did, then you will set yourself up to become embittered and resentful. If you dwell on what your *new* church does, and what your *old* church didn't do, then you will set yourself up to soon have your naïve, untested expectations dashed. Rather, recognize that your new church will do a lot of things better than your old church did, and vice-versa. No church is the same—each church is the collection of gifts and sins of its people and it functions as such.

As the romance of your new church wears off (maybe 9 to 12 months in), you will be tempted to say things like, "Why isn't this church more socio-economically diverse?" "Why doesn't this new church pray more?" "Why doesn't this church care for the poor?" "Does this church not have any faith?" "I wish this church cared a lot more about evangelism?" Etc. Etc. Etc. While you might have some very legitimate concerns, please recognize that so often, that which most bothers you about your church corresponds with that which *you* are most gifted to do by the Holy Spirit. Those who feel that their churches don't pray or exercise faith often have the gift of prayer or faith. Those that wish their church was more merciful or cared more about evangelism might be brimming with those gifts. If you were to leave with these gripes, then you might very well be taking away the gifts and passions that your new church most desperately needs.

Finally, please know that pastors receive five criticisms for every piece of encouragement. Churches and their pastors often become the punching bags that parishioners use to take out all of life's

frustrations. Work hard to encourage your pastor. He or she feels many of the same frustrations that you feel – life is disappointing, God is both invisible intangible, and ministry is so difficult to qualify or quantify. Take time to encourage your pastor (a note, a meal, a kind word, a gift certificate, babysitting), and when it is necessary to offer critical feedback, ensure that you (1) have prayed about it, (2) haven't gossiped about it, (3) don't throw it into a comment before or after a worship service (Sundays aren't good times to provide feedback), (4) don't attempt to strengthen it by saying ("Several of us have...") and finally, (5) that you own the comment. By "own the comment," we mean that you should use first person and not third person pronouns. It is much easier to receive a critical comment when someone says, "I feel that our church is..." rather than "Why do you..." or "Why does this church..." Make feedback concrete and constructive, and for every critical comment offer several encouraging comments with it.

Giving Back

Finally, we hope that Christ Church will exist long after you have gone, and even long after its founding pastors have gone. It is bizarre that so many Christians have an assumption that churches exist without thoughtful, generous, systematic, and cheerful giving. Christ Church is in one of the most expensive parts of the world. Christ Church is in an area that is one of the most secular parts of the United States. Christ Church has a congregation that is more transient than most (the average Christ Churcher will spend three years in our midst) and is younger than most (average age is 28). Finally, Christ Church serves a population with a high percentage of students. So often, people spend their *poorest* years at Christ Church, unable to give to her ministry and support her work.

Because of our unique situation, particularly if you are one of those who wasn't able to fund our efforts while you were here, we would ask you to prayerfully consider supporting Christ Church in an ongoing fashion. Perhaps that means giving to Christ Church for the same period of time that you spent at Christ Church or saving a special year-end gift for each of those years. Not everyone will be able to do this, and it is a matter of discretion and conviction. You might find yourself in another church like Christ Church – a young church, or a church in an expensive area, or both – and it might be important to begin funding her immediately. Or, you might join an established church and have a season in which you can indeed give back to us. In any event, remember that after you have left, Christ Church will be comprised of the same types of people that were there when you were there (young professionals, students, new Christians, not-yet Christians, etc.), and many will not have the means, Biblical training, or spiritual maturity to give adequately until they pack their moving truck too.

Final Word

We close with some of Paul's final words to the church in Rome: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13). As you go, you leave a hole at Christ Church that will never be filled and you take a piece of us with you that will hopefully never be taken from you. We are so grateful that you would give yourself to Christ in the context of Christ Church, and in so doing, would share life with us. We are so confident that our great God will cause this unfailing *hope* to overflow within you through the power of his Holy Spirit, and that its fruit would be *joy* for you and *peace* in your new place.

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