

Dear Friends,

Summer is finally here! I've personally felt ecstatic about it! I've been working in my yard, going on walks, eating some meals on my patio, and basking in the warmth whenever Mr. Sun decides to show his face. Winter is always tough in this country! I know we're anxiously awaiting the warmer weather.

Many of you have been traveling. Others have been busy with graduations and school ending. Several of you need a much-needed break from the commotion, the daily grind, and the need to escort your children to-and-fro. However, I want to take a moment to encourage you to find your solace, that inner quiet, and your need for comfort, in the folds of your church community this summer. I know it's tempting to adventure out or stay home on warm summer days. I know the beauty of a sunny Sunday morning might make an activity or walk outside more enticing. But if you're around for the weekend, I encourage you to come to church to be with us. Without you, we aren't complete. You and your family members are a part of us and we are a part of you. We could use just an hour of your time and we also want to share our time with you.

Fact is, there's been a shift in culture regarding church. As in, we're finding it justifiable to put it lower on our priority lists. Church sometimes feels like another "something" we have to do. I get this but unless we're intentional about attending church, finding the balance we're seeking in life will actually become a lot harder. Don't underestimate the importance of your spiritual well-being. Along with eating healthy, getting adequate sleep, and getting your house in order, it's important to be spiritually grounded and connected to your church community, particularly during those critical times when the going gets tough.

Maybe church isn't always as "fun" as we want it to be. However, church and community life weren't designed by God for our entertainment. There's work to do when we gather. For instance, we practice a four-part liturgy when we worship so we can leave well-trained for everyday life. We come together to uplift our joys and concerns as we praise and thank God; we listen and learn about God's word; we partake in God's meal together with friends and even enemies and strangers; we're sent out into the world to share God's love alongside God's chosen, who aren't always people we choose to befriend. Better stated, church is like working out so you can stay spiritually fit. God knows, exercise isn't always as fun as we'd like it to be but we consider it essential for our health. Church is the same way when it comes to living out and fulfilling God's purpose for our lives to love both God and neighbor with integrity.

Did you know the term liturgy stems from the word *leitourgos*--*leitos* meaning public and *ergos* meaning work? Sure, we don't have rock bands and flashy lights. We're not as fancy as some churches with their espresso machines and technological acrobatics. However, church should never be an experience. It is communal work and an opportunity to practice or strengthen the many ways we can connect with God and each other, in good times and in bad.

Finally, church life has shifted in that membership has become a more passive venture. If one wanted to, they could watch church from their computer every Sunday these days without having to do any of the heavy-lifting God requires. Church professionals aren't performers, however, and church is about observing others as they do all the planning and prepping for our work ahead. Church is, first and foremost, about praising God through our actions. Therefore, if you aren't already, I encourage you to get involved in deeper ways this summer and into the future.

If there's something you want to change about worship, for example, offer us your suggestions or join in on the planning! Become a lector or worship assistant. Encourage your children to be acolytes. Volunteer as an usher or a musician or share your wisdom when it comes to our plans and strategies for outreach. Zion Lutheran is your church and you have a say in all that goes on! I guarantee you will feel blessed when you are active in what is God's blessed community.

I hope to see you more often than not this summer. You're missed when you're not with us. We notice when you're gone. And if you are off traveling or dwelling in what is the beauty of our state, nation, or world (because we all need to escape from the daily grind occasionally too), be safe, be careful, and God's travel mercies be yours. Know my prayers go with you.

Your Sister-Servant,
Pastor Stacey