

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Dear siblings in Christ, dear friends, mentors, and companions on the journey. This is a bittersweet moment. My time as your diaconal resident is coming to an end. And as I've been thinking and praying about what I'd like to leave with you, I couldn't think of a better passage than today's text from Our Epistle Reading.

"For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26–28)

1. Our Differences Don't Divide Us – They Belong to God

Paul was writing to a church that was struggling with division—people were questioning who really belonged. Sound familiar? We live in a world, and yes, even in a church, where we still draw lines: young and old, rich and poor, city-born or immigrant, LGBTQIA+ or straight, white or Black or brown, liberal or conservative.

But Paul says: *In Christ, those old dividing lines don't define us anymore.*

Notice something important: Paul doesn't say we're all the same. Our differences aren't erased. They're just no longer what *defines* us. Because what defines us now is something deeper and stronger: We are God's

children. We belong. Not because we fit in, but because we are baptized into Christ.

And that's something I've seen and cherished here at WPLC:

- the way young adults wrestle out loud with their faith and bring hard questions, and help by Anti-Racism and Refugee work or supporting Night Ministry

- the way older members offer wisdom, hospitality, and a kind of holy patience, and still help with sacristy or gardening and stewardship.

- Our younger members having fun at Sunday school or nursery or having joy at our prayers space or releasing butterflies.

- the way different voices and stories and MUSIC shape worship, ministry, and community.

You are a community that reflects the beauty of God's diversity. That is holy work.

2. Baptized into Christ – A Shared Identity of Grace

Paul says we've "clothed ourselves with Christ." I love that image. We don't need to dress up in someone else's expectations or try to pass as more spiritual, more perfect, more anything. We wear Christ.

That's what baptism means: We're wrapped in grace. Covered in mercy. Clothed in a love that doesn't change, even when everything else does.

In this city—this beautiful, complex city of Chicago—so many people are longing to be seen, to be included, to know they matter. This Month Pride History month this letter of Paul feels up to date. We had June 19th and the refugee day. And YOU matter and respond. We the church as a whole. Not the building, has something to offer that no institution, no trend, no

algorithm can replace:

A place where everyone is invited to wear Christ.

So don't be afraid to be bold in that. Create space. Make room. Let people show up as they are. Let Christ be what holds you together.

3. Leaving – But Not Letting Go

It's not easy to leave. I've learned so much here. I've laughed, prayed, struggled, grown, and been deeply blessed by being in ministry with you. Thank you.

What comforts me is this: The work of the Spirit doesn't stop when a residency ends. The Church is not built on any one person—it's built on Christ, The Holy Spirit. And GOD is not leaving. Not only in this building or the city. I love the image of my Deacon ministry being a bridge between the church and the outside world. This location, with pet blessing, the prayer garden, halloween or supporting activities in the actual Wicker Park have been a blessing.

So even as I go, you keep going:

Keep welcoming.

Keep listening.

Keep serving.

Keep surprising people with the grace of God.

4. A Final Blessing

Let me leave you with this:

May your community always reflect the wideness of God's mercy.

May the young and the old dream together.

May the loud voices and the quiet hearts both find their place.

May you wear Christ with joy.

And may this be a place where nobody has to pretend to belong—because they already do.

In the name of the One who makes us one—Jesus Christ.

Amen.