

Dear Disciples of Hope,

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:14)*

When the Apostle Paul wrote those words to the church in Corinth, he was writing to people whom he had known for, at least, a short time. Sometimes, however, Paul wrote to churches of people whom he had not yet met- as is likely the case with the letter to the Romans. Whether or not Paul knew the congregation, he always had a similar greeting and blessing for them- because he believed the Holy Spirit was still working in those congregations, through them and for them, regardless of Paul's presence among them or not.

That is how I feel in these few weeks before I join you officially as your pastor. I know the Holy Spirit has been at work in the people of the Lutheran Church of Hope for over fifty years. God has been gifting and using you as a congregation and as individuals. God has been shaping me as well, so that in this moment- we can join together to learn about and bring God's love to Anchorage, Alaska and the world.

I know that you have learned a little about me, but I'll repeat a few details. I grew up in a rural area of North Carolina with a sister and two brothers. My parents and my siblings still live there, but they have known for a while that I have made a new home in Alaska. I moved to Nome in August of 2002 to work as a news reporter for KNOM radio. I greatly enjoyed the work there, traveling to villages and getting to know people. I quickly fell in love with Alaska and was determined to stay here.

I worked at KNOM for two years, before starting my studies at Yale Divinity School. Despite being outside for the school year, I hurried home to Alaska for every summer and winter break. I did not want to miss one week of fishing, hiking, camping, skiing, canoeing or complaining about the weather that keeps me from any of those activities. I was glad to be home for good after graduating with my Master of Divinity degree in May 2007.

My husband, Rob, and I have been married for two years. We met in Nome and hit it off right away. We enjoy many of the same activities and we are always accompanied our dog, Ivan, who would be very offended if we left him behind. Rob and I are relishing our time together this summer. Between my education and his deployment, we've spent more time apart than together and to finally be with one another is a cherished treat. Rob is a pilot and technician for the Alaska Army National Guard. He flies C-23s (Sherpas) and spent six months in Iraq last year.

Having spent my life in church and the past couple years helping to lead congregations, I can say there are many things I enjoy about the life of faith and about being a pastor. I take pleasure in teaching about and discussing the Bible. I believe God is revealed to us through one another when we talk about the Living Word together with open ears and hearts. I benefit from fellowship with my neighbors in Christ. Your work inspires me and shows me the presence of the Holy Spirit in our everyday world. I relish the nuances and highlights of being Lutheran. I believe the notion of "saved by grace through faith" was revolutionary when Paul wrote about it, was when Luther "re-discovered" it and is today when people need to hear about it.

We live in a world that longs for a message of grace in the midst of to-dos, must-dos and can't-get-tos. We all constantly need to be reminded that salvation is not on any of those lists. It was CROSS-ed off by God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Thanks be to God that our *only* to-do is sharing the joy of that with everyone around us.

I look forward to this work with you- the work of forgiveness, healing, justice and neighbor love. I hope that you are as excited as I am about the time to come. In the meantime, I know that the Spirit is alive and working in us- preparing us for the ministry we will do and receive together.

Peace,

Pastor Julia