

Spring blessings, my dear family in Christ:

I am writing to you about a big change that my family and I have decided to make. I have been blessed for 31 years in calling Our Father's Lutheran Church our church home. Our Father's is the place where my faith was born and fostered. I have grown so much in my faith through this community. My husband, Dave, and I have decided that the time has come to find a church home closer to our home. I feel that after 31 years of worshipping, singing, grieving and rejoicing with you, you and I needed some deeper explanation for this change. I thought a letter might be the way to talk to all my comrades in Christ that I wanted to reach.

It is so bittersweet to make this decision. I have made beloved friends. I have been encouraged to use my skills to serve God. I have found things inside of me that I didn't know I had in me. I have found a profound and meaningful relationship with God. I have been touched and changed by this community. I need you to understand, dear friends, that we are not leaving as a result of anything bad that has happened. In fact, I love what is happening in our church and I feel so energized by it that I want to spread this joy in serving with others.

There are many logistical things that have led to this decision as well. Our daughter, Dorothy, presents new opportunities and new priorities into our lives. In addition, as you may know, we live in New Hope which is 30 minutes away from Our Father's. It is very important to us to be a part of a community. It has been difficult to really feel a part of our own community when I am so involved in the Rockford community. While this has been an obstacle, it is also hard for us to be completely present and involved in the Rockford community due to this distance.

I would like to leave you with some things that I have learned from you all whether you meant to teach them to me or not:

- Use your gifts to serve God, yes in church, but not just there, in your career, through volunteer work, in your relationships and anywhere else you feel moved to spread His love.
- When I started directing the choir, we would get done with a song and I would ask what parts they would want to run. I would get silent stares and shrugs. Fast forward a year, I would ask this question and I would get 10 spots that needed working on and also, someone wants to do a flash mob. :) Just my ears are not enough to hear what needs to be done. It takes everyone's ears, voices and thoughts to come together and prepare a beautiful song. In the same way, it is not just up to the pastors to hear and speak and think, but also the congregation to engage and make change. And we can go bigger than that into our nation and the world. You get the idea.
- Our choir may be small but the love and trust you find there is one of the most organic and humbling things I have ever experienced. When I took on the choir director position, I was 25 years old. The people I was directing are people who have known me since I was a baby. But the respect

and trust they gave me made me blossom, and I gave that respect and trust right back which made them blossom. Respect and love each other in the most respectful and loving way you can, brothers and sisters. If a flower grows better by talking nicely to it, so can we.

- Trust that God and the congregation will catch you when you fall. There is a vulnerability in coming up front and singing a song we are pouring our hearts into. You have to trust in each other that others are going to do their part and if they don't, you have to trust that you will all work at coming together again. I believe this is such an important thing to feel at your church: trusting in each other to bring your best and coming together when you fall short.

Lovely people of God, from the bottom of my heart, thank you. Thank you for these lessons that you have taught me and that I can then share back to you and, in turn, spread into the world. Change is so hard. This has been one of the hardest decisions to make because I love you all so much and I just care so much about the Our Father's Lutheran Church community. I thank you for everything.

I say goodbye as the Rejoice Singers' Director and as a member of Our Father's Lutheran Church. As a friend, I say "see you later." I hope to be back once in a while!

Love, gratitude and blessings to you all.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amber Stefan". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long horizontal flourish extending from the end of the name.

Amber Stefan