

Girdwood Chapel's Vision Statement

At Girdwood Chapel, we envision a community of *grace* where every person belongs.

Rooted in Christ and grounded in prayer, we embody dignity and neighborliness through listening, service, hospitality, and shared life.

We gather around real bread and real stories, uniting across differences in worship, study, and daily living.

Together, we lift one another in joy and in grief, cultivating hope when the world feels unhopeful.

Our vision is to be a heartbeat of Girdwood connected in love and committed to Christ, with faith that makes room for grace and honors differences.

Strategy 1: Gathering in Presence and Story

Purpose: *To create hospitable spaces where neighbors can gather together — discovering belonging through shared presence, story, and relationship, rather than through faith or effort. These gatherings echo Jesus' first invitation: "Come and you will see."*

Theological Grounding:

*In John 1:38–39, Jesus meets seekers not with demands, but with invitation — "What are you seeking?" and "Come and see." Here, discipleship begins with **abiding** (μένω) — dwelling with Christ and one another — and with **seeing** (ὁράω) — coming to perceive grace at work through relationship.*

Action Steps:

- **Regular "Gathering in Presence and Story":** Open meals in the Fellowship Hall or outdoors, co-hosted by Chapel members and community partners. These gatherings invite neighbors to share a meal and a story — not a program or sermon — around themes like *seeking peace, belonging, home, or hope*.
- **Hospitality as Presence:** Train volunteers to offer genuine curiosity without agenda.

- Offer simple classes for those curious about faith.
- **Story as Sacred Text:** Invite one or two people at least quarterly (from within or beyond the Chapel) to tell a “story of seeking and seeing.” These testimonies of ordinary grace help participants perceive God’s presence in daily life.
 - Laity sharing stories during worship – quarterly.
 - Collaborating on a sermon
 - 10/10/10 practice (previous format)
 - Girdwood Inc. – revisit this as a partner
 - Outreach to community –
 - What makes Girdwood Special
 - 10 pictures – 10 minutes – 10 people
 - Community members gather and share a story from their life.
 - Celebrating graduations (example).
 - Storywood
 - Fundraiser (previously)
 - Not always about Girdwood
 - Regularly (twice per year)
 - Community gathering to share theme based stories, seasonally.
 - Monthly Food Pantry Dinners
 - Food Pantry – 1st Sunday during school year
 - Community partner provides a hot meal
 - Continue to include stories during a meal.
 - Perhaps schedule a couple of stories to be told – or a theme.
 - Include members of the congregation to expand participation (in addition to clients).
 - In January, request Alyeska resort might be a sponsor to participate in the community.
 - Brings us back together to be a heartbeat and bring people together.
 - Providing opportunities for unity during divisive times.

- **Blessing Practices:** End each gathering with a simple blessing, moment of silence, or communal prayer that honors all stories shared — no altar call, no follow-up requirement, just space to abide.
 - Read a quote (Mother Teresa example shared).
 - Word of the Day – Gratitude practice.
 - Acknowledgement and thanks to First Nation people.
 - Against Food Pantry policy.
 - Gift from community and federal gov't
 - Acknowledge volunteers – and sources of food.
 - Whenever there is a meal together – there is a prayer before.
 - Prayers and Concerns in worship, during Bible study, during Leadership, and through Chapel Ladies Text Group.
 - Idea of having a prayer or short liturgy for a season that everyone knows.

Desired Fruit:

- The Chapel becomes a place to *dwell and perceive grace*, intentionally avoiding being a place to prove belonging.
- Relationships deepen across faith and difference.
- Leadership learns to listen the way Jesus listens — asking, not assuming.

Strategy 2: The Dwelling Path – Learning That Transforms Vision

Purpose:

To offer biblical learning experiences that invite seekers to **come and see** — discovering how Scripture reshapes our desires and re-narrates our lives in community.

Theological Grounding:

Transformation in John's Gospel does not come from willpower but from **presence**. As Jesus says, "*Abide in me, and I in you*" (John 15:4).

This strategy helps participants rest in that abiding — to see Scripture not as a rulebook but as a window into God's loving presence and the false narratives we are being freed from.

EXAMPLE Action Steps:

- **Seasonal “Dwelling Groups”:** 4–6 week gatherings centered on open-ended reflection rather than instruction. Each session begins with Jesus’ question — *“What are you seeking?”* — and explores how a passage from John or the Psalms speaks to our longings.
 - **What are we hearing from the message or Scripture.**
 - **Example – theodicy (why do bad things happen?)**
 - **Integrate into existing forums**
 - **Men’s Group – place of fellowship and education, Biblically based & secular readings.**
 - **Lean on this in times of crisis.**
 - **Affinity group for prayers & support (including physical).**
 - **Be more intentional about the “dwelling” practices.**
 - **Women’s Messaging Group**
 - **Biblical focus – might take a break from Scripture to be intentional.**
 - **Also an affinity group**
 - **Brainstorm sessions where ideas can be shared regardless of the topic.**
- **Integrative Learning:** Combine Scripture with local reflection: what does dwelling with Christ and each other look like in Girdwood? How do we perceive grace on the trail, in the pantry line, or in art?
 - **Being a light in the community and sharing that light.**
 - **Jesus invites us to “come and see” – not just stay**
 - **Active voice – sharing a piece of that light**
 - **Sharing the love of Christ in all that we do.**
 - **Example – snowmachines on the trail**
- **Practice of Seeing (ὁράω):** End each session with an invitation to see differently during the week — to notice where Christ is present in the ordinary. Participants may journal, create, photograph, or simply observe where they sense God at work.
- **Leadership Shaped by Presence:** Train leaders to facilitate by listening and wonder, not by teaching answers — cultivating a posture of abiding alongside participants.
 - **Guideline/Practice to bring into Chapel friends, own families, and community.**

- Use existing forums – Bible studies, fundraising, worship, etc – not new practices – integrating into what ministry is already happening.

Desired Fruit:

- A shared rhythm of reflection and rest forms across the Chapel's ministries.
- Participants begin to internalize a new narrative: "*I am already loved; I already belong.*"
- Biblical learning becomes a practice of seeing Christ in all things — not an intellectual exercise but a way of living.

Strategy 3: The Listening Path – Forming a Leadership of Presence and Discernment:

To develop leaders who listen deeply to neighbors and to the Spirit and who trust that transformation happens through God's grace in our lives.

Theological Grounding:

When Jesus begins his ministry in John 1, he starts with a *question* and an *invitation*: "What are you seeking?" ... "Come and you will see."

Question, invitation, presence is the foundation for Christian leadership.

True leadership in the Body of Christ begins by dwelling in Christ, with one another, and with our community.

The Girdwood Chapel's vision becomes embodied when leaders themselves live as listeners, neighbors, and participants in God's unfolding story of grace.

Action Steps:

- **Leadership as Spiritual Practice:**
 - Begin meetings with prayer, a moment of silence, and joys and concerns, acknowledging Christ's presence before business begins.
 - **Why:** This reorients leadership from problem-solving to presence.
- **Listen to Neighbors First – and then Plan:**
 - Yearly, assign 2–3 leaders to conduct Community Listening Walks:
 - Visit local partners, businesses, and Chapel users (food pantry, recovery groups, youth, hikers).

- Team of leaders create and ask open questions.
 - Share these reflections at leadership gatherings.
 - **Why:** Just as Jesus asked “*What are you seeking?*”, the Chapel’s first movement toward mission is listening.
- **Practice Seeing (ὁράω): Discerning God’s Presence:**
 - Develop an intentional practice called “**Sightings of Grace**” — brief reflections after community events or partnerships.
 - Ask: *Where did we glimpse grace? Where did we sense belonging? Where might Christ be inviting us next?*
 - Record these as “sightings of grace”.
 - Invite all ministries (worship, pantry, hospitality, maintenance) to name where they see Christ at work in their area.
 - **Why:** Transformation begins when leaders learn to perceive differently — to see the sacred in the ordinary, the divine in the daily.
- **Church Retreats:**
 - Hold one or two **retreats** each year.
 - Include space for rest, nature, and silence — not just planning.
 - Reflect together: *Where have we been striving through willpower? Where is God inviting us to simply dwell?*
 - End by blessing one another as co-seekers in Christ’s grace.
 - **Why:** People cannot offer belonging if they themselves are hurried, exhausted, or striving.

Desired Fruit:

- **A Culture of Graceful Leadership:**
Meetings and decisions become slower, deeper, and more Spirit-led—anchored in discernment rather than urgency.
- **Deeper Connection with Community:**
People begin to connect with neighbors.
- **Embodied Theology of “All Belong Here”:**
The posture of listening and invitation models the unconditional welcome Christ extends to all.