

**June 14, 2009 To: Church of the Covenant, on your occasion of
Commissioning your mission trip to Iowa [following 2 Corinthians 8]**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

I have heard about your upcoming trip to Iowa City and am overjoyed at the prospect of your work through St. Andrew Presbyterian Church. I want you to know about the grace of God that has been granted many other churches: St. Adalbert Catholic Church, Berea, Ohio; and Southminster Presbyterian Church, Prairie Valley, Kansas for these churches, too, will be sending teams there at the same time. I, also, want to tell you about Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church, Blue Springs, Missouri, and their trip last week with 14 youth. Even though Chapel Hill Pres doesn't have an installed pastor, their abundant joy and overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. They sent their team of youth and adults and applied themselves so well, with a minimum of complaining and hearty fellowship with their hosts at St. Andrew for four days, that I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints. And even though they were merely youth, they gave themselves generously, even above their abilities, not merely as I expected. They gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to the continuing ministry of the whole church. That was just one group last week. St. Andrew Presbyterian Church in Iowa City will host over 400 volunteers, scheduled into the summer and fall to work on reconstructing homes damaged by the floods of the summer of 2008.

So now I urge you that, as you have already made a beginning, so you should also complete this generous undertaking. I want you to know about the two other churches that will be housed with you at St. Andrew's next week. St. Adalbert Catholic Church, Berea, Ohio, is a large church, in the southwest Cleveland suburbs and has a school academy of K-8 grades. Their motto is "Our Parish-Our Love-Has No Boundaries." Curiously, their website does not mention this upcoming mission trip, but perhaps that is because it is a new small venture for them. Or perhaps that are breaking some conventions by staying at a Presbyterian Church and don't want to aggravate their bishop. In any case, I want you to show the love of Christ that you have

for them, even though you come from very different traditions. Perhaps they will be inspired to do more hands on work for the brothers and sisters all over, so that the love of Jesus Christ will spread across traditions.

The other church, Southminster PC in Prairie Village KS, is more than three times as large as Church of the Covenant. It produces a large Christmas pageant every year where visitors take a guided 30 minute tour, interacting with characters of Nazareth, King Herod's court, and Bethlehem en route. An average of 800 people every year take the tour. Their trip to Iowa City is a youth Work Camp, the annual summer trip for youth. Their past work camps have included working with Native Americans on Tribal land, Charleston and New Orleans homeless shelters, repairing houses for the elderly and repairing and updating other Presbyterian retreat centers, and a trip to Agua Prieta, Mexico, so you can see that these are well-traveled youth. I would like you to show them that service in the name of Christ is a very adult thing to do. I hope that they will be inspired by Church of the Covenant, that, even though it is small, it is exceedingly generous. May the youth from Southminster see your generosity and sacrifice and be encouraged to grow in faithfulness as they see the faithfulness of your small congregation.

Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness—so in my love for you, I want you to excel also in this generous new undertaking. I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others, particularly compared to these other two churches. That is, I'd like to spark some friendly competition among you, coming from different parts of the county, different economic circumstances. Let you compete in servanthood for the sake of each other. For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. [see my letter to the Philippian Church 2:6-11]

The following is my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something—now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to

what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. You remember how it was written in the Exodus, when the children of Israel were wandering in the wilderness and the Lord fed them with manna. They had to, each one, gather what they needed for the day, and 'The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.' So it is with your possessions and the needs of the saints in all the church.

But thanks be to God who put in the heart of Barb Fleming the same eagerness for you that I myself have. For she not only accepted my challenge, but since she is more eager than ever, she is leading you of her own accord, and along with the whole Fleming family have supported this endeavor from the beginning. With her you are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his love of the good news; and not only that, but he is well-respected among your leadership and will apply himself unselfishly while you are administering this generous undertaking for the glory of the Lord himself.

I intend that you should be absolutely transparent about this generous gift that you are administering, for I know that you intend to do what is right not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of others. You raised money by appeals, by a car wash and bake sale, so with you, you are sending our sister whom I have often tested and found eager in many matters, but who is now more eager than ever because of her great confidence in you. She will be very diligent in making a good report for you. As for all the saints in your church who are not traveling with you to Iowa, they are also my partners and co-workers in your service; as for our travelers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. Therefore, openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you. Greet the brothers and sisters in Iowa with the kiss of Christ.

Your brother in Christ, Paul an Apostle