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Subject: Fall update from Cleveland
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To:



Dear friends and partners,

A real tension exists in the content we are sharing in this longer update letter.

First, God is the God of this city, Cleveland. In His Word, He demonstrates a heart for the city, and our role is to be ambassadors of Christ, spreading His aroma in the place He has called us to serve. We love the city and its people, and we believe that God is perfecting His work in His children in this place so that many more can know the forgiveness and reconciliation available through a right relationship with Jesus Christ. We are intentional about building His church in this place as a city on a hill in the midst of darkness.

BUT, this is HARD work, and we are all feeling it. Sharing this truth may feed into some of the narratives of the city we don't want to amplify because the city is more than the place of unknown dangers and lurking assailants that many who do not live here envision. YET, the reality of crime and the lack of hope felt at every level of our nation has touched us in profound ways over the last few months, and we are finding ministry a heavy lift as we share in the heartache of others.

We covet your prayers and ongoing support as we share these concerns and joys of CityView.

Just today I read 1 Kings 5:1-12. Solomon says in vs.5, "I intend, therefore, to build a temple for the Name of the Lord my God...", and Hiram replies, "I have received the message you sent me and will do all you want in providing the cedar and juniper logs. My men will haul them down from Lebanon to the Mediterranean Sea, and I will float them as rafts by sea to the place you specify..." This passage goes on to outline the arrangement between Hiram and Solomon that continued year after year (vs. 11).

My mind immediately went to you, our Hiram, who are hewing trees and floating them to Cleveland in order for this work to continue. In return, we offer the eternal rewards God promises when you partner with Him in His work. When we began, we thought there would be a decrease in needing support from you. We had a dream and a timeline of what it would look like to be self-supporting, but serving a poor community in an expensive area has extended that timeline and caused us to seek wisdom from others on how to be sustainable in the future and stay downtown. Our church plant has stayed in the downtown since we began. Others have come and gone because they experienced the same barriers we have. Yet, God has supplied our needs through you over and over again. In this neighborhood of 20,000 people, we are one of three churches (and the oldest) we know that preach the gospel. Three. For 20,000 people.

Toward the goal of funding our work, we have applied and been accepted into a multi-year training program to help us establish a 501c3 under the Christian

multi-year training program to help us establish a SOFCC under the Christian Community Development model. We hope this allows us to be eligible for more grant funding in the future to alleviate some of our ministry costs. We have another year of training in a leadership cohort, and then 3-4 years after, we hope to have made significant progress. We have become skilled in partnering with social agencies that provide services for individuals so we can focus on the spiritual ministry of the gospel while meeting physical needs. In the meantime, you continue to be our lifeline, supplying cedar and juniper logs to what God is building. And He is building! It is amazing and energizing for us to be a part of this work and see the freedom that people are gaining in Christ. God has shown us favor in giving CityView an excellent reputation.

However, we need to acknowledge violence. There are seasons when it seems to encircle us.

- Our building suffered more vandalism at the end of the summer. A mentally-ill individual off his meds threw a small boulder from street landscaping through our plate glass door as well as that of a local Subway restaurant. We are grateful no one was injured. Please pray our landlord will extend our lease to us as this is the fourth incident of broken glass. You will recall the others were of one-story high plate glass panels that cost our landlord 10K each to replace. Despite this, we have only had one robbery of items from the building, a microwave and table oven.
- In an earlier update, I shared the story of Ms. K and that her grandson with mental health issues murdered her son and forever damaged her daughter-in-law. We are certain Ms. K, in her 80's, came to know Christ as her savior at CityView last year. She has since been transferred to a nursing home and insists that her son, in his 50s, pick her up and bring her to church every week. Please pray for him (N) and his wife (A). They are lovely people who faithfully serve Ms. K but have no interest in the gospel. In the meantime, Ms. K continues to give testimony of the forgiveness she has found because of Christ since coming to CityView. It is beautiful.
- Three weeks ago Ms. Y kept getting calls on her phone during second hour women's Bible study. Finally, after hearing her repeatedly say, "I can't, I'm in Bible study, "I stopped teaching to ask if she was okay. Catching her breath, Ms. Y. leaned forward on the table, "This world makes no sense, it makes no sense." Unraveling before us was the shock that her brother had just shot her nephew. In the hours that followed, we learned her brother had killed two adult nephews in the home of their 97-year-old grandmother. There are layers of tragic details in this story, and we walk through this heartache with our sister in Christ. God has equipped us for crisis.
- That same week, a 24-year-old young man attending from the Allerton building, who had recently expressed in a long conversation with Pastor Jesse his desire to be clean from drugs, overdosed, dying in his apartment. The next week, another young man in the same building was found dead on a well-check. Please pray for our friend Charnetta who works security in this building. We have known her for

years. She is the person who does the well-checks and has suffered the trauma of finding these men and others. Pray that Charnetta will have fresh ears to hear the gospel.

- This week, extended family of long-time member Bonnie lost their 18-year-old son after he was mowed down at a gas station by 4 young people with AK47s. Social media postings had us believe at first that this was Bonnie's grandson whom we have known since age 6 which sent us on a roller coaster of emotion until we understood the details. Please pray for R who is a high school junior and under house arrest. This same young person, at the age of 8, expressed that the story of the good Samaritan would not work on the streets. It was that challenge that has pushed me in the deepest places of my faith to believe and seek out Christian practice as the solution to our city's lostness. Pray R will recognize his way leads to death, and that the path of life is set before him. He was not the victim of this crime. Our pleading for him is renewed. Please pray for this epidemic of gun violence to subside.
- This Sunday, a frequently high woman from the streets whom we have been getting to know came into church without the controlling man she is usually with. We believed her to be trafficked by him, but our every effort to help her was refused, likely due to the supply of drugs she had access to. Usually very standoffish, she hugged me several times (and later Bill, much to his shock), informing me she was now at the women's shelter and hoping to get into rehab. She had been in touch with her dad too. All this because the man who she had been with, who often beat her up, had been murdered. Also, a friend of hers was killed the same week. In her words, "I am sad, but I am better." Please, please pray for the work God is doing here. She has come into community with us. I see seeds of freedom!
- Please pray for Kayla Taylor, choosing to teach middle school math in one of Cleveland's worst neighborhoods. Her students test at an elementary level and are full of disrespect. There are regular fights in the school. Pray for God to strengthen her and keep her.
- A few months ago, a single pregnant mom was murdered in the home across the street and a few doors down from Julia and Caleb. The neighbor's son across the street, a dealer, has been charged. The Kudlo's security camera often picks up prostitution activities within sight of their home. Stolen Kias are repeatedly left in the adjacent parking lot. A few weeks ago, the Pausch's car window was smashed, and several items were stolen during church. Julia and Caleb welcomed daughter Jubilee 6 months ago. Jesse and McKenzie welcomed son Jonah 7 months ago. The commitment of these pastors to raise their families in the city is foundational to the future of CityView. Please pray for their ongoing protection and the spiritual and physical refreshment they need to persevere and flourish.

But not all is heavy. We have joys as well.

- We are an amazing training ground for young professional people to learn how to serve in the city. This means how to carry sorrow and serve coffee at the same time; how to recognize mental illnesses but still uplift the God-given dignity of each individual and serve them in Jesus's name; how to connect the glory of God to the hardships of urban living. Perhaps you know someone who would like to be a volunteer summer intern?
- We rejoice in our international impact as we count at least 10 faithful CSU students from India as regular attendees. Please pray for Sushna, Joel, and Naina to find jobs. Please pray for the ministry of International Friends as they use our building monthly to reach out to mostly Muslim, Arabic-speaking students living nearby.
- We recently held services for Michael who passed away of cancer. He was a faithful attendee of CityView, and we were able to bless his family through comforting and caring for him and them.
- The end of the year brings many, many, opportunities to feed families and give Christmas gifts to children. Pray for the new and renewed gospel contacts we will make.

And you. We praise God for your prayers, your partnership, and your investment in the kingdom of heaven. You have no idea the impact your support has, and truth be told, we know we only see the tip of the iceberg. God is busy in Cleveland, one of the poorest, most racially divided cities in America. You are keeping us here, doing the work we are called to do. Pray that others will move here and join us.

We are so grateful. May God bless you 100-fold and more for the blessing you are to us.

Faithfully,

Natalie for all of us