

September 30, 2011

Dear Body of Christ,

In two short weeks, a good portion of our church family will be going to Minot, North Dakota (and our sister church, Our Redeemers Church) to help in the vast relief effort after their devastating flood. You may have heard plenty of the 'What?' of this effort (though I will repeat some core information), but I would like to more address the 'Why?'.

We are asking our church family to offer themselves, their energies, and their weekend of October 14-17 to go together and show Christ's love to this weary community. As of yesterday, I heard that 115 people so far have committed to going, with many others who have expressed verbal interest!! (Our goal we are praying for is to send 200+ people -- please ask God for that with us!)

Some will take off work on Friday, and arrive earlier to Minot. A chartered bus (costing \$75 per person) is scheduled to leave around 4PM. We will put in a full (a FULL!!) day's work on Saturday the 15th, then worship together as two church families on Sunday the 16th. Some will need to return to Eau Claire that afternoon. Others (with many schools and students out on Monday for Parent-Teacher conferences) will work also that Sunday afternoon, and return to Eau Claire on Monday, October 17th. The bus will also return on Monday. So, you have options!

While there, depending upon your gifts and health, most will be involved with light (or heavy) demolition, tearing out carpeting, sheetrock, siding; others can be of great help delivering meals, giving rides to workers, helping prepare meals, answering phones, and praying for the people of Minot and ministry to them. There is a place for everyone with a heart to serve. Students and older children also would be of great help! We need you to sign up soon for all the coordination involved in providing housing, and people planning their travel. We will each be personally responsible for the travel and food to get to and from Minot. However, once there, you will have a place to sleep in one of the church gyms, and food will be provided.

Now for the 'Why?'. **Bethesda has the means, the relational connection to Minot, and the vision to be the incarnational, sacrificial expression of being the hands, the feet, the arm around the shoulder, and the smile of Christ to this community, and to a sister church weary but passionate in ministry to it.** We have God's calling from scripture, and opportunity to 'bear another's burden'. We can live out the reality of 1 Corinthians 12:27,26, "*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it.*" "*If one part suffers, every part suffers with it.*"

True, we can't help in every natural disaster, but we can in this one. (You might recall here the 'punch line' of that story questioning if it really matters that this boy is throwing back beached starfish into the ocean...: "It matters to *this* one.") We can be a great blessing to the flood-swept community of Minot, to a sister church of ours, and most importantly we can raise valleys and shave down mountains to make a clearer path for the Gospel relationships between Our Redeemers Church and their community.

We will also be greatly blessed as well. Our C3 vision of *knowing and growing in Christ, belonging and caring in Community, & serving and sharing His Cause* confirms the opportunity before us. Serving like this and praying and coming alongside other believers can nurture our relationship with *Christ* who unites us. This is a great *Community* chance for people of different generations, groups and worship services to work, sweat, and pray alongside each other! And, God's great *Cause* is powerfully served, not only in the vital 'way-making' of the Gospel in Minot fleshed out in Jesus' deeds, and opportunities for Jesus' words; but also for our own witness to our own community! The love and reality of Christ might be seen in us by our friends, and Jesus' words have opportunity to be shared.

May I also propose that another 'Cause' opportunity is before us! Do you have a friend you can't get to come to church? Well, what about getting *church* to your friend?! Maybe God's gospel path into your friend isn't going to be getting her through church building doors, but just at first through the door of your car, or a rented bus, and then the flood-soaked door of a house where she can work and talk, and watch the church being the church in a different setting! I would ask you right now to consider and pray, and then pick up the phone if God puts someone on your heart, and invite that friend along to Minot.

We fully understand that not everyone from Bethesda will be able to go to Minot. But, we *are* asking everyone to *go in their hearts*! We are asking the same incarnational presence and giving of our whole church to support this mission in prayer and sincerity. On Sunday morning, our vision is to combine the Bethesda and Our Redeemers congregations in an expression of our unity in Christ, and of Bethesda's solidarity with a sister congregation. This will also be a powerful expression to our brothers and sisters, and to us. When I posed the possibility of this mission trip to Pastor Rod Spidahl, lead pastor from Our Redeemers, his immediate email reply back to me was, "We are elated to have this happening!! I've alerted flood recovery teams, worship folks, and staff. We want your group to do worship and bring the message – the whole morning!" I know they are weary in many ways, and even serving them and being with them in worship can be a great encouragement.

We want everyone to be engaged and owning this mission. A team of Bethesda staff, Our Redeemers staff, and volunteer communications experts are working to provide a live simulcast link between the two sanctuaries. Bethesda will have worship services in our sanctuary at our regular times: traditional at 9:00 and 'Sanctuary' contemporary at 10:30. Our Redeemers' service times are slightly earlier and later (8:30 & 10:45), so if you are in Eau Claire you can expect the simulcast sermon right near the beginning of the 9:00 worship hour, and a bit later than normal in our 10:30 service. Bethesda's worship teams will be leading live worship singing at both sanctuaries, and I will be preaching by live simulcast for both congregations. We will plan to share together a photo slideshow of the ministry being done in Minot, and may even share singing a hymn or song together as congregations in response to God's Word and mission shared between us. We don't want anyone to be left out, but to embrace this opportunity to give ourselves to God, and to worship with spiritual family in need.

Finally, if you haven't already read the last edition of *Faith & Fellowship* magazine, you should. This edition is devoted to the concepts of *mercy* and *community*. Our own congregational son, Pastor Brent Juliot, writes on the back cover of the intriguing connection between the two. If you don't get F&F, or misplaced it, I have included below online links to several of the articles.

But make sure you at least read the first one, "My Grandmother's House is Underwater". It is written by Our Redeemers' pastor, Rod Spidahl. It is powerful. I will have paper copies for you this Sunday. If you have doubts or disinterest about Mission Minot, please read it. I believe you will come to see the great need, and the huge impact we can have going to Minot or *going in our hearts*, showing a community and a sister church the great love of Christ.

Grace & peace,

Pastor Paul

<http://ffmagazine.org/issue/community-and-mercy/article/grandmothers-house-underwater>

<http://ffmagazine.org/issue/community-and-mercy/article/have-mercy>

<http://ffmagazine.org/issue/community-and-mercy/article/mercy-and-community>

<http://ffmagazine.org/issue/community-and-mercy/article/mercy-mercy>

<http://ffmagazine.org/issue/community-and-mercy/article/his-mercy>