

Dear friend,

I am writing to express a vision that has been in my heart for what seems like a long time. I write with hope that whatever I say that is true and of God will resonate inside of you. I write to invite you into this vision in any way that God sees fit.

What I desire is this: to bring together a small group of believers for the purpose of being an expression of Jesus' body together in the village of Chauncey, Ohio. I envision this group living together in a household or association of households with a common purpose. What follows is my articulation of the purposes I desire to lead this community into.

In a place where many people live with the reality of poverty, my hope is to enter, together, into this reality as much as possible. As an apprentice of Jesus, who gave up his power to live in our world and become a friend of sinners, lepers, and those in need, I hope to learn how to do this with other believers in our world today.

This means facing the unknown—an experiment if you will. Together we will ask the questions: What does it mean to live incarnationally? How do we set aside money, knowledge and power in order to build mutual relationships with people in need? What am I willing to sacrifice? What are the limits or margins of this kind of simplicity? Can we trust that God will use us when we are weak and not in control? I do not know the answers to these questions, but those who are interested in living in this venture must have openness to learning and being challenged in this value.

I do not seek simplicity for the sake of simplicity. Rather, this lifestyle is intended to bring freedom to first of all love God with all of ourselves, and secondly to value other people over status and security. So, to the extent that affluence hinders our relationship with God and our friends who face poverty, for example, through busyness, apathy, fear, or difference, let us set it aside.

My hope is that this lifestyle will allow us to build bridges of trust, understanding, commonality and friendship with our neighbors in Chauncey, particularly those in need. I want tune in to these neighbors, be available, and share the ordinary things of life. This means an intentional investment of time and many small decisions that prioritize the people living in this place.

This vision is meaningless and fruitless except that we do it out of joyful obedience to God—a heart that is submitted to Jesus Christ as Lord, and that recognizes our own deep need for him. Thus, our life and service must flow out of a desire to depend on and worship God in everything we do. Each potential member of the household would be expected to nurture their personal relationship with God through spiritual disciplines such as prayer and studying scripture, relationships of accountability with other believers, and corporate worship.

One context for this kind of spiritual growth is within the household itself. I am looking for people who want to practice their faith with others in a focused way and commit to

rhythms of common worship. This, also, will take an intentional investment of time. I realize that no household is the be-all, end-all for Christian community. In this way, members would be encouraged to seek out fellowship with other groups, such as a local church congregation or the Good Works community.

Simultaneously, I hope for members to find increasing trust and belonging with those they live with. I see the relationships that we would form as very important; they would be prioritized over our relationships with those in need. Thus, we will need to take time to be together—eating, washing dishes, having fun, talking about matters that are important to us, talking through things that are difficult. Being willing to do our part to be at peace, in unity, with each other is essential. This will be hard. May God give us grace.

Out of our relationship with God, each other and our neighbors in need, I believe that creative outlets for compassion, hospitality, generosity, belonging and healing for both ourselves and those in physical need will be born. These creative outlets are really just ways for the good news of Jesus and the kingdom of God to become tangible for specific people, in a specific culture, at a specific time.

Our mission then is expressly evangelical. In the end, I hope our presence in Chauncey will have contributed to the growth and renewal of the Church in this place. That is, that people who don't know Jesus will turn from the pain and sin in their lives to be welcomed into a new family—the family of God. I believe God's heart yearns for his Church here to be active, unified and full of life. Thus, I am committed to doing my part to building trusting relationships and to collaborate with believers and congregations who already live in Chauncey.

Rather than coming into the neighborhood with a pre-formulated program or church model, I hope to move slowly, live quietly, and build trust. After listening for a long time, I think it will become clear what kind of practical identity our household will take on, in partnership with those from the neighborhood. This stance of listening will involve immersing ourselves in the culture of those we are living among. I am white, but I am not Appalachian! I have a lot to learn about the language, stories, land, history, and values of this place.

Amidst these hopes, ideals and expectations I want to acknowledge that none of this will be possible without the sustaining grace of God, who gives us our daily bread. I believe that God is calling me to this life, and I am seeking others who want to explore a long-term commitment to living among people in poverty in Chauncey, Ohio. One of ways that God sustains me is through the gift of the Sabbath—a weekly day of rest and celebration in which I lay down all of my efforts at productivity and accomplishment. I believe this gift of grace is key to sustainable service in difficult circumstances and offer it as a potential rhythm of the household.

My desire to pursue this venture in Chauncey has been growing out of my connection with Good Works, a Christian community and non-profit organization in Athens, Ohio. Currently, Good Works provides most of the organizational and financial backing and

spiritual leadership to my initiative. Thus, at this time, Good Works has authority to make decisions about this initiative in keeping with the mission of the organization.

I intend to offer leadership to the household through making decisions personally and through consensus with those who desire to participate. I hope to serve the good of the members in whatever way I can, and make room for others to contribute and lead in a variety of ways. I also want to recognize that the “visioning process” is still in its infancy. I still have many questions about “what this will actually look like.” I am interested in collaborating with those who make a commitment to develop the vision.

Structurally, those who are interested in joining will be invited into dialogue and discernment process with Good Works and myself. To facilitate this, prospective members will visit the Good Works community in Athens. Initial commitments to living in the household will be up to one year, and an evaluation process will take place prior to extension. Members will be expected to contribute to the cost of housing, utilities and food, and some costs may be provided for through Good Works.

If you are interested in learning more about this venture, or think you want to explore participating in some way, talk with me! You can reach me by email at [goodworks@good-works.net](mailto:goodworks@good-works.net) (Attention: Dawn Tobin) or by phone at 740.594.3339.

Sincerely,

Dawn Tobin