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Philippians 1:3-6

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

I can confidently echo Paul's thoughts towards the Philippian church as he thanked them for the partnership they were providing in the advancement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I truly appreciate the ways you have partnered with us as we strive to Experience His Kingdom Together. Each of the partnering churches have been a great blessing to me in this church planting journey. Thank you for praying for me, for meeting with me, for inviting me to share our vision with the people of your church, inviting them to pray about joining this church plant, and for all of your encouragement and support.

I wanted to give you an update on our journey to date, as well as outlining the next steps for us as we move forward. During the summer and fall of 2016 I spent much time attempting to develop relationships with potential partnering churches as the Lord brought into my path—Alliance churches, churches of other denominations, and non-denominational churches. The pastors of the five Alliance churches in the Buffalo area have been a huge support to me in this process, as well as a few pastors of non-Alliance churches. Church planting can be a lonely journey, plus it can be a ministry position with more extreme swings of highs and lows, but I am confidently walking this journey knowing that I am following His calling and He has provided me with others who are supporting me and encouraging me each step of the way.

After inviting more than 2,000 people to pray about joining our core team we began to work with those who responded to that calling beginning January 1, 2017. Since then between 15-20 have gathered together from 6-8 every Sunday night for a time of Bible study, prayer, and leadership development. These meetings have been going very, very well. As we've been covering the WHAT and HOW of The Alliance Church of Cheektowaga, covering the vision of the purpose and ministry focus of this new church plant, we've gained great buy-in and excitement. At first I thought my high expectations for the CORE team had the potential to cause a few to say, "Ah, this probably isn't for me!" - but I've seen this group that the Lord has called to be part of this new church plant respond very positively to our sessions and become more and more excited about what the Lord has ahead for us.

We will continue to meet for this leadership training on Sunday nights until we officially launch Sunday morning services and invite the people of Cheektowaga to join us.

The next phase of our plan is to recruit and meet with a LAUNCH team. Ideally, this LAUNCH team is made up of about 100 people who are willing to be sent from their existing churches for one year. During this time they serve the important role as "people in the pews." This way, when new families come into the church there is more than 30 people in the pews, more than 1 or 2 kids in the kids' ministry, more than a couple in the youth group, and we have more than one small group to be part of. Following this adapted version of the Alliance Greenhouse Church Planting plan, most of the members of the LAUNCH team will return to their sending churches during the first year as they are replaced by new families coming into the church. Some will stay, making The Alliance Church of Cheektowaga their new church home.

The earliest date for us to launch on Sunday mornings is September, but we're also considering the beginning of January of 2018 as another realistic launch date. My research and coaching tell me that we're better off delaying the launch to be sure that we have the necessary components in place than we are to rush the launch and then scramble to catch up to the needs that new people bring in a church planting situation.

Merge Ahead?

There is one other exciting development the Lord may be writing into this church planting story. I've recently been contacted by an existing, struggling (probably dying) church about the possibility of merging with them or exploring the possibility of us using their building as we launch on Sunday mornings. The coolest part of this story to me is that I wasn't pursuing a possible partnership with this church—they contacted me out of the blue. They are preparing for a pastoral transition and realize that they might not be able to support a new pastor, but would be willing to merge with an existing church or a new church plant. I've met with their search committee a few times and they're very interested in pursuing a possible merge. I see this as a potential win/win situation for both of us. They would receive healthy leadership, a healthy vision, about 120 people on our launching Sunday, as well as the hope that their congregation would continue on for another generation. We would receive a building in a good location, an established group of givers, prayers, and participants, and property that would allow for future growth. I know that this path would require many steps before becoming a reality. I would not entertain this opportunity unless they fully embraced the Alliance, the vision and proposed ministry outline for our new church, and for their leadership agree to undergo our leadership training program. I have a few friends who have been down this path before and I've been talking with our district leadership about this potential. If the Lord give us the green light to pursue this possible merge we shall take steps forward with great caution and prayerful dependence.

Our Current Needs

While we are so excited about the positive steps we've made in the past year—developing partnerships, seeing people be called to be part of this church plant, and the positive fruit of our Sunday night sessions—there are a few more things that we require before we can put a launch date on the calendar. Will you prayerfully consider how you and your church can respond to help meet these needs? Thanks!

CORE Team

- We need about 10 more people in our CORE team. These are people who are going to leave their existing churches to be part of our new leadership team. Please pray that the Lord would call these key people into these crucial positions.
- We need a family with teenagers to be part of our CORE team. Every other age demographic is represented in our CORE team. We have a youth pastor lined up—but we don't have any youth yet.
- We need a worship leader/team that will be on board with our vision and ministry plan.

Launch Team

- Once we have our CORE team complete we can put a launch date on the calendar and I will begin to recruit our LAUNCH team.
- Can I come back to your church to present the opportunity for people to give us one year to help The Alliance Church of Cheektowaga get good traction from the start?
- Is there an elder and family that you can send to our church plant for a year?
- Are there families that you can send to our church plant for a year?
- Would you and your elders prayerfully consider personally approaching people in your congregation and ask them to pray about being part of our LAUNCH team? Keep in mind that studies have shown that churches who send their people to be part of a church plant see the Lord bring new people into their churches to replace those they sent!

Finances

- Because of Centerpointe Community Church, to date we have had NO building rental costs. They have provided me with office space and have invited us to use their building free of charge on Sunday nights. They are a true blessing to us!
- My salary is on a decreasing percentage plan from the District Office. The Alliance Church of Cheektowaga has to pick up 25% of my salary starting June 1st. Please pray that the Lord would provide this monthly shortfall.
- When we launch we will probably have facility costs, as well as equipment costs. The district has pledged to help us with these costs, but we still don't know what they will be.
- We are going to send out a series of mailings to the people of Cheektowaga to inform them of our new church plant. I don't have a definite number of this cost as of yet, but I know that this project is going to be costly—but it will be very helpful in building name recognition with the people of Cheektowaga as we launch.

Throughout this entire process I have been amazed and blessed by what the Lord has been doing! I KNOW this is what He wants me to do right now. I KNOW that He brought me back to WNY. I KNOW that He has amazing things planned ahead of us. I KNOW that I couldn't do this without your help, prayer support, encouragement, and friendship. THANK YOU!