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Community Based | Personally Engaged | Outreach Oriented | Worldly Aware

Dear Cantonites...

When the thought first came to for our 8th graders to take their mission trip to Canton, I have to admit that I thought I was going a little crazy. In some ways it would seem to make sense that the older you get, the farther from home you get to go to experience missions. But the more that I thought and prayed about, the more I became convinced that it hadn't been a random idea, but that God wanted to do something pretty exciting through this crazy idea.

I grew up in Canton and have been connected to the city my entire life. And yet it wasn't until the last 3 years that I started to really learn more about the city and to see a whole myriad of opportunities to serve others that I had somehow been blind to before. I used to think I had to travel somewhere to do missions, to serve people who struggled in poverty and needed to experience Christ's love in tangible ways. But it turns out that people from all over the country actually come to Canton for their mission trips every summer. The same week that we'll be serving in downtown Canton, 440 middle and high school students from across the US will be descending on Canton as their mission field. Wow!

But do you know what the difference is between those students and yourself? You won't be leaving at the end of the week. The relationships you form, the projects you begin, the people you serve...it doesn't have to stop when finish our week. Instead of being just a week or a moment in time, this week of missions can be the launch pad for a lifestyle of serving Christ through serving others.

When asked what the greatest commandment was, Christ said that it was to love God and love others. Leroy Barber, in his book *New Neighbor: An Invitation to Join Beloved Community*, shows that you don't have to travel to some far away place to love others. There's poverty and pain and struggle just down the street and you can make a difference. Just like we're flipping mission trips on their head by staying "home" for a week, God wants to flip your world on its head by showing you his heart for your hometown. We're going to read this book together in preparation for our trip.

But I hope that you'll join me in the next couple months in not just reading a book because you have to, but in taking advantage of an exciting opportunity to learn about our neighbors and the unique opportunity we have to serve them this summer.

Here's how this is going to work. Every week you'll have reading that you need to do (you'll find the reading schedule on the back of this letter). Then you'll need to log onto <http://flipd8.wordpress.com> and join in the conversation. You'll find a post for each week's reading and you need to respond to the questions in that post. You'll also need to visit the post from the prior week and interact with at least 2 of your teammates responses.

Looking forward to learning how to be new neighbors with you...

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Reading Plan (all reading/posting is due by the end of the day **Saturday, the date listed**):

- April 24 Read Chapter 1 - Who is my neighbor?
- May 1 Read Chapter 2 - This is my neighbor.  
Respond to prior week's conversation
- May 8 Read Chapter 3 - What's so beloved about community?  
Respond to prior week's conversation
- May 15 Read Chapter 4 - This is my beloved community.  
Respond to prior week's conversation
- May 22 Read: week off of reading because of the MMT  
Respond to prior week's conversation (do *before* we leave for MMT)
- May 29 Read Chapter 5 - Where is the justice?
- June 5 Read Chapter 6 - This is my justice.  
Respond to prior week's conversation
- June 12 Read Chapter 7 - Where do I begin?  
Respond to prior week's conversation
- June 19 Read Chapter 8 - This is my beginning.  
Respond to prior week's conversation
- June 26 Read Chapter 9 - What do I bring?  
Respond to prior week's conversation
- July 3 Read: week off of reading because of July 4 holiday  
Respond to prior week's conversation
- July 10 Read Chapter 10 - This is what I have
- July 17 Leave for Canton!

\*the best way to do the reading for this book is to read a story a day. Each story is only a couple pages long and you'll get a lot more out of them reading them spread throughout the week instead of cramming them all together on Saturday night. Just jot down a few notes each day so you can remember what stuck out to you and then put your final post up on Saturday.