



Faithfulness in the face of adversity

Dear Friends,

I had planned to send an update when we had solidified our Cohort plans for the fall. These days, however, plans never stop changing, and it seems best I bring you into the middle of the process.

Please join me in prayer as we navigate new realities. As of early July, we had accepted two young adults to full-time, 10-month placements here in Detroit. A third young adult and placement was in process. They would join our pilot's Cohort members in mid-September as we launched our second Cohort centered around service-learning, spiritual formation, and conversations on leadership, faith, and justice at the margins. I couldn't wait to see the expansion of a vision in the works for nearly two years.

Then, one by one, several local partner organizations either moved their programming online in anticipation of a second COVID-19 wave, or were forced into transition by the pandemic. Because our model for immersive discipleship is built on partnering with local organizations—many of which could no longer receive our accepted Cohort leaders—we have been challenged once again to get creative.

Please join me in prayer for:

- Current Cohort young adult leaders, who have completed our six month

Cohort pilot, and are in places of significant transition.

- My ministry work in the fall, which will look quite different due to COVID adjustments. I will likely be co-leading a 'Cohort junior,' a group of teens and early twenty-somethings who show potential for Christian leadership, but are facing significant social, emotional, and economic barriers.
 - Convening a Zoom-based regional cohort that will encourage young leaders in Detroit and across the region to grow in their commitment to ministry at the margins and spiritual formation.
 - Planning and inviting young adults for the return of our originally planned Cohort programming in the winter or spring, depending on COVID.
 - My upcoming ordination as Minister of the Word in the Christian Reformed Church (date to be announced).
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Rev. Dr. Emmett Price III (bottom), Executive Director of the Institute for the Study of the Black Christian Experience at Gordon-Conwell Theological, joined us to close out our book study on Howard Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited*. He finished with a challenge to to be courageous in the midst of adversity.

Becoming Neighbors

I wish you could all have been a part of the deep conversations our Cohort has shared over the past six months over socially distanced barbecues and weekly Zoom calls.

We have had the privilege of learning from local and national pastors and experts, wrestling with the ongoing systemic racism that affects every square inch of our participants' lives, and continually circling back to the all-important question of self-worth and identity in Christ. Raised in failing school districts, restricted by

expensive transportation, and often living in fear of law enforcement, many young adults of color in Detroit neighborhoods inherit an internalized sense of low self-esteem that can only be overcome by relationship—with God and with neighbors. Nearly every week, I think of a prophetic outburst from Josh during one of our Cohort conversations: “I don’t want a charity that tries to make my neighborhood a slightly better place! Why don’t you just make me your neighbor?”

Making neighbors and restoring relationships, with God and with people, is at the heart of our mission. This is slow and plodding work, full of roller coasters, trust-building, and setbacks. Honest outbursts like these remind me that we’re on our way.

How has the news of George Floyd and the reality of COVID-19 affected Detroit?

I’ve fielded many versions of this question. I cannot speak on behalf of Detroiters, but in my short experience ministering here, I’ve learned that young adults in Detroit have not just lived in a pandemic for five months. They were born into a pandemic, a web of traumas, domestic abuse, federal and state disinvestment, violence and racism that met them on day one with underfunded hospitals, closed schools, and separated families. Most days, the battles against addiction, fear, and self-hate that these young adults face are unimaginable to me. For young adults in our Cohort and young adults across Detroit, George Floyd’s murder was not shocking or incomprehensible. Their uncle is George Floyd, their cousin is Breonna Taylor, their brother is Jacob Blake. Police abuse isn’t an anomaly, it’s dad’s head slammed onto the hood of the family Buick.

Detroit, as my mentor says, is a city of compounded grief: trauma after trauma dating back to the slave plantation, transplanted to Detroit by slave catchers and slave wages, reincarnated by [redlining](#), reinforced by [educational and socio-economic](#) barriers. This ongoing trauma shows up in our Bible studies, our service projects, and our conversations about anger, self-hate, fear, and despair.

AND YET, perhaps the most profound wonder is the resilience of local Detroiters in the face of the pandemic, ongoing injustice, and webs of abuse. This resilience against all odds is a testament to God’s grace. In the span of the past six months alone, our Cohort leaders have witnessed a deadly car accident near our ministry partner’s front lawn, grieved the loss of a community member to a house fire and the death of a friend to a gunshot wound, all while facing systemic barriers, like car insurance premiums of \$700

per month. Through all this, young adults have shown a steely resilience, rooted in a faith that God will be faithful. That, for me, is deeply encouraging as we press ahead.

Rest and Rejuvenation: In June, Katie and I took a socially distanced 5,000 mile road trip across the US to meet our new nephew, Wesley, and to belatedly congratulate my sister, Alyssa, and new brother-in-law, Samuel, on their wedding! We camped through Michigan's upper peninsula, the badlands, and Yellowstone on the way!





Thank you for your continual prayers for our advisory council (Mark Van Andel not pictured)

I am so grateful and humbled by all the financial gifts and partnership you have extended. Thank you for your commitment to our ministry. I do still need monthly giving partners. Please reach out if you would like to partner with me, and a BIG thank you to those who have been faithful in supporting our work here in Detroit.

I am taking some time today to pray for each of you in all the challenges we are facing together.

You can recap our vision and follow a [link to give here](#). Thank you again!

Email me at nathan@cohortdetroit.org. I'd love to hear from you!

[Partner with me](#)

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I send these emails as periodic updates and prayer requests regarding my ministry work in Detroit.

Our mailing address is:

Resonate Global Mission

1700 28th Street SE Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407

Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407

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