

A Biblically Based Reflection for Fan Into Flame
If St. Paul didn't have a famine in Jerusalem to write the Corinthians about and instead had a special funding appeal to reach the "ends of the earth" with the "Good News" do you think Second Corinthians chapter 8 might have sounded something like this?

Sisters and brothers in Christ:

First of all, I want you to know about the grace of God that has been shown in the churches of Jenison, Detroit, Monroe, and Newberry. I want you to know that I am aware that these are tough days all over the church not only in the Michigan District but also in Wisconsin and Florida and throughout the Synod. As a matter of fact, those two districts (S. Wisconsin and Texas) have led the way throughout our Synod and their abundance of joy has overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part in this ***Fan into Flame*** offering we are receiving for the work of the Lord in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the "ends of the earth".

Why is it those churches and others have been able to offer over \$45 million so far to the Lord's kingdom work through ***Fan into Flame***? I can testify that the main reason was that they gave according to their means and beyond their means, of their own free will. They did not give out of duty, nor did they simply give in order to meet their suggested goal, but rather they considered the blessings of God to them, and then gave in proportion to those blessings. Some gave 1 or 2 % of their income in addition to their regular gifts. Some gave a missions thank-offering out of their accumulated assets. Some sacrificed a worldly pleasure and instead offered the cost equivalent to this mission effort. But no matter how they made their decision they made their commitments out of love for God and of their own free will ... begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in this great effort - pleased to be in partnership with God and His church.

We never expected such a good response, but it was possible because they all started by first giving themselves to God. For God does not want our money ... He doesn't need our money. In His great power he could turn the stones along the side of the road into dollar bills. How arrogant for us to think God Almighty should ever need us or our money at all. Yet we know what He really wants is our lives, devoted to him in faith and committed to him in obedience.

In accord with all this, we have urged your pastors to lead the way for you in this gracious work. Now you in Owosso (Insert your community) have the reputation for excelling in everything ... in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in your love for us missionaries. So OK then ... see to it that you excel also in this matter of the ***Fan into Flame*** financial support.

I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. Stewardship, after all, is just that; a proof of your love for

Christ and His kingdom and for the billions that do not yet know of this love despite 2,000 years of Christian effort.

Folks, you know of the real example of genuine love. It is in Christ Himself. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich. Oh, how rich and blessed we are. And knowing this, I give my advice to you; it is best for you to carry on what you began in Richmond 150 (Insert your congregation and the number of years since founding) years ago. For if this kind of readiness to be Christ's people is there, then stewardship is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he has not. I do not mean that other congregations will be able to slough off while you have to bear a heavy load. That's the beauty of this effort ... You do not have to do more than your share. But as a matter of equality you should give according to your abundance in this present moment to supply the extra needs of the kingdom here in the Michigan District, throughout the nation, and the rest of the world. At other times when you are not so blessed, other parts of the kingdom will make up for you're not being as blessed. For it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."

Now let no one of you blame me for writing to you in this bold way about such a thing as money, for the purpose we have is honorable in the sight of God and man. And so we have to talk about money in the church and quit apologizing for it. And when your pastors do talk about your money in relation to the Word of God, they are my partners and fellow workers ... and messengers of the glory of Christ. It is a part of the sharing of the gospel that you have called them to do among you. And we have bragged to others about how much you desire the Gospel ... so now then, receive all of it.

And may God's peace rest upon you as you give prayerful consideration of this special mission cause.

Rev Dr David Buegler
Ohio District ***Fan into Flame*** Chair