Dear Spruce Street UMC,

Thank you for the extraordinary generosity you have shown to the Soldiers I serve during this deployment. Your care packages have become one of the most tangible reminders I have seen of the power of our United Methodist connection.

Recently, I received 61 packages in a single day, followed by another 35 packages just a few days later! Many of those boxes came from United Methodist churches across the West Virginia Conference. It never fails that when people see the volume of packages arriving, they are amazed and ask, “Where is all of this coming from?”

That question gives me a wonderful opportunity to talk about you and your generosity.

I get to explain that these gifts are coming from churches connected to one another by a shared vision of 'Transforming Appalachia through God's love' and a common mission to 'To Discover, Develop, and Deploy passionate spiritual leaders who make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.' These translate into a willingness to care for people they may never meet. In a very real way, your generosity is helping me show Soldiers what United Methodist connectionalism looks like when it becomes flesh and blood, or in this case, boxes of snacks, coffee, candy, and encouragement!

Much of what you send goes into our Agape Store in the chapel, where everything is freely given to any Soldier who has need. Most of the Soldiers who come through the store do not attend chapel services. My prayer is that through something as simple as a package of Oreos they experience a tangible expression of the love of Christ, and that those small acts of grace create opportunities for God to continue working in their lives.

Your support has become a tremendous enabler of my ministry here. It helps create conversations, build relationships, strengthen morale, and open doors that might otherwise remain closed.

I have attached a few pictures so you can see some of what your generosity has made possible: the Agape Store itself, SSG Perry and some of our favorite donations, and what we jokingly call our “warehouse,” where we keep the overflow from the incredible amount of support we have received.

Please know how deeply grateful I am for all you have already done. If your church is able to continue supporting us, those gifts will continue to be shared widely and put to good use. Every box becomes another opportunity to care for a Soldier and another reminder that the Church is connected across distance, across communities, and even across continents. I've included the address below.

Thank you for your generosity, your prayers, and for living out our connection in such a meaningful way.

Grace and peace,

Chip Bennett

APO Address:

BENNETT, CHRISTOPHER
111TH EN BDE / CAMP TITIN
APO, AE 09315
UNITED STATES