

To: Willow Street Mennonite Church Family
Re: 2020 Annual Report
Date: January 5, 2021
From: Church Board

Dear Members of Willow Street Mennonite Church,

We have certainly been through a most unusual year living in an interesting time... unprecedented in many ways. We find ourselves wondering if the world has lost its mind, with words such as COVID-19, face masks, ventilators, and lockdowns. Out of necessity we have made changes in the ways that we live and worship. In the midst of these times, it can be unsettling...until we calm our emotions and place our eyes back on Jesus, and He calms the storms and brings hope in times of need. (Luke 8:22-25)

During this past year, the board was using a video series for our devotional time titled "Sticky Teams" by Larry Osborne. I believe we're becoming a better board learning Unity, Communication, Relationships, and Knowing our Strengths and Weaknesses. Clearly communicate "the way things are being done" - and be willing to change them as needed. This statement was particularly helpful as we continually assessed the situations with how we should hold worship service, Sunday School, and other activities.

As you read the following annual reports, you will see God is still at work, "even in the midst of these times".

Please continue to pray for leadership, as we discern God's will and vision for our congregation this coming year. God is good...all the time.

In Christ's love,

Ken Leaman
Church Board Chair

REFLECTION & VISION FROM THE MINISTRY TEAM

LEAD PASTOR *(Joe Sherer)*

2020 was a year unlike any other. The pandemic changed so much of what we do, but change we did, and we did it with grace. Never before did we offer only on-line services, although that fortunately didn't last long. Never before did we worship outside for months. Never before in our memories did we shut down all programs other than Sunday morning worship, including preschool, because of illness, or for any reason for that matter. Never before in our memories did people worship wearing masks. Never before did we do our best to keep a distance between us at activities. We could go on.

We've done these things for good reason. I know of fourteen people from the congregation who have had COVID, and I'd be fairly certain there have been others. While in 2020 we had to say goodbye to Arlene Hege, Lem Metzler, and Catherine Mills, gratefully COVID did not play a role in their deaths.

The impact of the pandemic has made us think about what church is, and what it means to us. When we think about what some Christians must endure to worship, especially those who are persecuted, it humbles us. They would tell us that it's still church even if we're not sitting in pews. It's still church even if we can't shake hands and give hugs. It's still church even if we have to wear a mask. It's still church even if we can't celebrate communion as often as we'd like. Like every group of people, we've had varied opinions about the pandemic and its prevention, but our mutual commitment to Jesus has kept us loving one another, including those who see things a little differently.

As individuals, we've been tested by 2020. Hopefully we know ourselves better than we did a year ago, things like our motives, our tolerance, and how our faith impacts our daily lives. What have we done with what we've learned about ourselves? Have we grown as a result of what we've discovered?

We welcomed babies in 2020, lots of babies: Jeremiah Joseph Mertel, Darla Ann Landis, Leighton John Martin, Jax Scott Watkins, Landon Connor Reifsnyder, Daisy Hope Hostetler, Griffin Lee Shultz, Gracelynn Aleeza Schoenfelder, Eliyah Zuri Feddes, Dominic Ray Menditto, and Brayden Alvin Miller. We also welcomed Miguel Herr, AJ Herr, Jose Herr, and Sean Wenger who were adopted into congregation families, and two children who are being fostered by congregation families.

It seems like a long time ago but in 2020 we renovated our main floor restrooms and upgraded paint and carpet in the older second floor areas, making these areas look great!

We enter a new year more mindful than ever that there are unknowns before us, but we have a known God. He has not changed. We have a known mission: it has not changed. We're still called to love Jesus radically and to serve others practically, and we need to throw ourselves into doing both. We need to be creative in how we love others and how we convey Jesus's love to them, as well as how we work at discipleship.

Let's continue to allow whatever challenges come our way to make us more like Jesus!

YOUTH PASTOR *(Eric Herr)*

Where does one even begin to summarize the past year? We have all lived it, so I won't go into too much detail. We all have experienced being faced with the reality that we are truly not in control as much as we'd like to think we are. This year has taught us (hopefully) many things, but one of the greatest seems to be that we need to look to the Lord above all else and trust in Him – not any earthly/human thing. With our eyes fixed on Him – our world can go through all kinds of radical changes, but our focus will remain steadfast.

It was a challenging time to adapt as best as possible and make the most of the time with the youth over the Spring lockdown period. We moved to Zoom meetings for a couple of months and were able to keep pressing into the Lord together. I was so grateful to get back to meeting in person quickly, and we were able to keep our meetings outside for the entire summer. Kids were hungry to be together in-person, to worship together and experience true community. We actually saw our Jr. and Sr. High groups grow a bit over this past year. I continue

to be excited at the desire of these youth to run after Jesus and seek Him. What blesses me so much about this group is that they are all in – just as many come to our Bible Study nights as, say, a game night. I can't wait to keep building on this hunger as we approach 2021!

It certainly has been challenging, stretching, and at times extremely frustrating with all that has occurred, but I continue to see God at work in the midst of the madness and I know He is not rattled at all! We will keep crying out to Him, digging into His word together, and seeking to reach others with the incredible love of God. One month, week, day at a time. God is faithful – always!

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES (*Deb Hershey*)

I'm having a hard time thinking through my report this year as the past year seems to be a bit of a blur. With the pandemic upon us, we stopped all children's activities at church which included some of the most loved activities such as the Easter celebration and VBS. I won't dwell on what we couldn't do but focus on what we could and our blessings.

We had a children's story online with the church service a lot of the Sundays while we were virtual only. Nicole Herr and I gathered Sunday School papers together and made available to families to use at home since we weren't having Sunday School at that point. I did Zoom sessions with the children approximately every 1-2 weeks. This was a great way to connect with the children and them with each other as they weren't physically going to school or Sunday School. Once we started having church outside, we had Children's Church for the children, and it was amazing to see their excitement in being together again with their church friends! We had a Family Fun Night in August in place of VBS that was very well attended by families and everyone was happy being together having some outdoor fun! Most activities resumed in September and October for which we are thankful. Masks are needed but the children are so resilient they often do not seem to mind. And it is great to be together again on Sunday mornings. And to top off the year, we were able to do a children's skit for Christmas with it being recorded so that it could be shown at both services.

Looking ahead to 2021 – We don't know what the future holds but I pray that we will be able to continue meeting and have our Easter celebration and VBS along with Sunday School and our regular church activities. Reviewing my report from last year, I had stated that I wanted to meet with other Children's Ministry Directors to learn from each other. This happened in a very informal way with two directors this past year, but I would like to organize a group of us meeting together. Hearing how others do things and their thought processes are great ways to learn.

Most importantly, I pray for the children that they will feel the love of the congregation and of our Lord as we walk this next year together, no matter what it may look like. Thanks for continuing to pray for the children here at WSMC.

From Preschool Director, Marcia Harnish – Our 2019/2020 school year was cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic. Classes came to an abrupt end in early March. It felt rather odd and unsettling to not be able to have closure to the year. We did our best at attempting to stay in touch with the children in various ways...Zoom, email, mail, dropping packets off at their homes. Mrs. Weber made an awesome video recapping the year which we emailed to families. This was a great reminder of all the fun we had learning together. Each teacher set up a separate time to meet families at a drive through end of the year pick up. Again, I am so thankful for a staff that is creative and goes beyond the expected. The summer was a challenging time with registration changes because of COVID and preparing for all the new guidelines related to the pandemic. We had some staff changes but God provided in amazing ways. Our doors opened in September with both students and teachers really excited to be back. Drop-off and pick-up lines are going very smoothly. We miss connecting with families at the classroom doors. To help families see what is happening at preschool we have created a private Facebook group. We are thankful for healthy staff and children. The needs of our families continue to grow, with some facing an unexpected death in their family, illness, and the joy of new babies. Our preschool looks at creative ways to bless not only the

children but the families as well. As we look forward, we continue to pray for wisdom as we navigate through the changes that COVID brings. We are counting our blessings; God is faithful and has provided over and over again. The prayers offered on our behalf are needed and appreciated. God is in control; we are trusting in Him now more than ever. We look forward to growing with our mostly new staff and sharing the love of Jesus while teaching our little friends. We are so thankful for the ministry of preschool and a loving church that supports us.

DIRECTOR OF DISCIPLESHIP (*Justin Watkins*)

My vision for 2020 was to plan an Alpha Course campaign that would be an outreach to the community, time for growth and fellowship for families, and would launch into a strong small group movement. We all know why that failed to get off the ground...And while I believed in RightNow Media as a great at home resource, I couldn't foresee how impactful that could be given the circumstances of the world. Initiatives like Strong27, Alpha and Sunday School all took a major hit with the lack of in-person experiences this past year.

But I echo the same words I wrote in last year's report: Discipleship is not an optional call and it is one that all of us at Willow Street Mennonite have been given. It is not a department or program; it is the way of Jesus. And while we have all benefited from a turn back to some of the normal routines, it was the creative realization of families not relying on church programs to meet their discipleship needs that was truly encouraging.

Families began to meet more intentionally within smaller groups or over Zoom, Tea Time found an alternative meeting schedule, and I hope we'll continue the refreshing experience of outdoor worship services. Some families have been called into missional community outside our church walls, while other families were introduced to us after driving past one of our parking lot services. What a beautiful picture of the missional growth of the Gospel!

2020 has taught us all to hold very loose our plans for the future, so I have little in terms of concrete goals to lay out for the discipleship department. I am simply excited to see the "*continuation of what Jesus began to do and teach*" (Acts 1:1) through His family at WSMC. And may we learn the same lesson as the disciples and stop looking up to the clouds expecting the same things we've been used to, and instead continue to radically love Jesus and practically love others no matter the circumstances around us.

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS (*Karen Bender*)

Radically love Jesus, Practically Love others. That is a charge for each of us in our personal lives. And it is a charge for each of our departments at WSMC to seek to live out that mission statement in our specific area. 2020 has obviously brought many challenges for all of us in innumerable ways. We had to change or alter so many things, including trips, FMSC, Community Meal, CommUNITY 5k/Strasburg Days...to name a few. And while all of those things are hard and disappointing, we have seen and heard of many people creatively reaching out to friends, neighbors and coworkers to support, encourage and provide practical help with Jesus' love during the course of the pandemic. We have been able to continue with Operation Christmas Child, been involved with Mission Church Food Pantry, provided encouragement and prayer for our healthcare workers, and been able to provide health care kits through MCC just in the recent months. It is my hope and prayer that we can resume some of the "normal" things in 2021 and, at the same time, continue to seek out new and creative ways to reach out to the community (and world!) around us with the love and hope of Jesus. I pray that this crazy year of 2020 is able to give us fresh vision for the future to live out this mission.

DIRECTOR OF PRAYER MINISTRIES (*Greta Short*)

Oh my what a year! I had no sooner began in the role as Prayer Director when COVID-19 hit. Prior, I had felt God had given me some vision and things to do and share, but COVID and the existing restrictions put a damper on these things...for now. I have continually been asking, "Lord, what are you doing, and what do you want to do???"

I don't feel like I've gotten a lot of insight into those questions, but I believe God is wanting to do a new thing in us and in His church. I've heard new wine and new wine skins. I keep hearing Isaiah 61, believing Willow Street is commissioned and anointed to be that kind of church. To preach good news, to bind up the brokenhearted, to set the captives free etc. etc.

I believe WSMC is also called to be a pioneering church, especially in the Lancaster Mennonite Conference. I was inspired and felt God speaking this to me throughout the book *Living on the Cutting Edge* by Marian Garber Leaman. In the book, she documents the rich heritage and past foundation laid by WSMC as a pioneering Mennonite church. I don't think that call has passed. I would encourage all of us to keep pressing into what these missional calls may look like as we enter 2021.

Many of this year's goals of 2021 will be trying to continue to reach the unmet goals of 2020, Lord willing. However, I want to be open again if God has other plans. I keep thinking what things may have to die to either be reborn or make room for the new. My heart is to see each of us as individuals at Willow Street and as a congregation continue to be growing in our prayer journeys and cultivating more of a culture of prayer. I would love to see an increase in corporate prayer opportunities. My dream list: more prayer groups, and that they would also be more highly attended, spontaneous times of prayer as we gather, organized prayer partners, times of regular corporate prayer in the Sunday service. I'd also like to see more people going for prayer after the service whether that is being prayed for by prayer ministers, or seeing people initiate praying for one another after the service or other times that morning. Both of these too would be lovely. I would like to help plan some ministry nights where there can be a longer time of prayer and worship with more time and freedom than we have on a Sunday morning.

Even though there has been much shaking, difficulty, loss, and uncertainties in this Pandemic Year. I also celebrate the unexpected victories and blessings that came to me personally as well. In the Spring, I had a break from subbing and also serving with Chad as relief houseparents at the Milton Hershey School. Both I had been doing for years and was feeling that the grace had run out. However, I wasn't sure if it was right to close the doors. I asked that if it was my time to be done, that God would close the doors. Well, those doors closed as schools shut down and so did the Hershey school to outsiders. It was a refreshing break to be home more and have a lot more family time. We took so many walks and hikes and had no idea there was so much beauty to be explored in Lancaster County. Also, receiving unemployment for the first time in my life was a huge blessing and provision that helped us out financially. We were so blessed too that Chad was able to continue to work through it all. Perhaps our biggest blessing arrived September 12 in the form of Baby E. We have been waiting 7 years for another baby, and are enjoying him immensely. He has been such a gift and hope and pray he will be able to stay with us permanently.

This season I believe for all of us has been both blessed and cursed it seems? I'm reminded of this passage...Deuteronomy 30:19 – "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you LIFE and DEATH; BLESSINGS and CURSES. Now CHOOSE LIFE, so that YOU and your CHILDREN may LIVE, and that YOU may LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD, LISTEN TO HIS VOICE, and HOLD FAST TO HIM. FOR THE LORD IS YOUR LIFE, and He will give you many years in the land..."

I pray we would all re-center and re-calibrate ourselves after this crazy year, and continue to CHOOSE LIFE...the Lord...and ALL HE HAS FOR US THIS NEW YEAR! Thankful for a new year!! I pray blessings on you all and your year!!

DIRECTOR OF STEWARDSHIP (Wilson Roth)

Looking back at the annual reports from last year, I couldn't help but think "we had NO IDEA what was coming!" But then again, do we ever really know what a year is going to bring? Typically, at the beginning of a year, we make resolutions with the assumption that life will be relatively the same as the last year. We may make some small tweaks to our schedules or try to challenge ourselves in certain areas of life where we are lacking, but many

times we get caught in the rut of normal life. Well, 2020 was definitely a year that pushed many of us out of the rut of “normal!”

Personally, I thought a lot about money this past year, specifically how money controls and consumes our thoughts and reactions to life as a culture. Buzz words such as lockdowns, inequity and recession were ever-present in 2020 and caused huge divides and anger between political parties. Were we as a church united in promoting a godly perspective on money or did we get caught up in these worldly arguments? As Christians, we know that we don’t own any money or possessions on earth. Rather, we are stewards of the resources that God has entrusted to us. Do you live by this perspective or are these just words that sound good but ones you brush aside because it is easier to live by the world’s perspective on possessions? There is no doubt that it is difficult to live with God’s perspective of money, but if you do attain this perspective it frees you of stress and worry about money, because you know that God will provide!

For 2021, my vision for us as a church is to renew our perspective of what it means to live with an eternal perspective in a world that values money over everything else. How are you living to bring those around you to a relationship with Christ in your daily lives? This is what life is all about!

In this year of uncertainty, we ended the year with a surplus of \$29,105.64. Our expenses for 2020 were under budget by \$56,517.80 and our giving was under budget by \$27,412.16. At our finance committee meeting in November, we discussed that some churches have experienced financial hardship in 2020 and have had to make difficult financial decisions—ones that we have not had to face. As a church, let’s be thankful for God’s provision but be aware of those who may be struggling around us. Within the next month, the Finance Committee will discern how to best use these surplus funds and present those suggestions to the board.

DIRECTOR OF WORSHIP (*Geanna Steinmetz*)

Wow! This year has seemed to crawl along and yet, at times, fly by! 2020 certainly had its challenges. There were times when planning was difficult because of COVID-19. I mean, how does anyone plan for the unknown? And yet, even through the difficulties, worship ministry has not only survived but grown in some ways. We have added to the tech and worship leader teams. We have introduced an online planning program called Planning Center which helps centralize information, including team members and songs. It also helps with planning the order of service and it allows everyone in the Worship Ministry department to access these items.

I have also enjoyed getting to know everyone on the Worship Ministry Team over the past six months! That too has been challenging because of masks and social distancing but Willow Street has proven to be full of grace and love. I look forward to getting to know everyone even better this coming year.

The Worship Ministry Team – from Ushers to Tech people and everyone in between – are dedicated and hardworking people who take ownership in their area of service. This year could have gone differently but the team members stepped up to keep things running as smoothly as possible. And for that I am so very grateful.

As I focus on where Worship Ministry needs to go in 2021, the following verse comes to mind. “I tell you,” [Jesus] replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.” (Luke 19:40 NIV)

In this place, the Pharisees were trying to silence the people who were worshipping Jesus. In these strange and crazy days of COVID it would be easy to forget to give the praise and worship due to God. But even if we lose everything in this world, we can still praise God for the gift of His Son, Jesus. And that is something that no disease, or anything else for that matter, can take from us. It is for this reason that we must press on and continue to worship Him!

And how can we worship Him best? By loving God first and others second. This is the focus for 2021: Radically loving Jesus, practically loving others. It is nothing new to Willow Street but it will be an intentional focus of the Worship Ministry department in the coming year. What a revival we could start in our part of the world if only we focused on these two basic things: loving God and loving others. My focus is to make it so the rocks never

have to cry out in Willow Street and the surrounding areas because God's people are so into worshipping God by loving one another. Yes, songs are important but without love, music is an empty, hollow sound to God's ears.

Lastly, thank you so much for the privilege and opportunity to serve with you all. Our family is so glad that we have made our way to WSMC. Thank you for loving us and taking us in as one of your own.

Additional items attached in the Annual Report:

1. Church Bylaws approved revisions
 - a) Transfer of Members – section 2.4
 - b) Church Board Selection Process – sections 5.5.1-5.6.1
2. Organizational Flow Chart

CHURCH BYLAWS APPROVED REVISIONS IN 2020

2.4. **Transfer of members** – The pastoral team follows up with members who discontinue their involvement. Those desiring to transfer to another congregation are provided with any documentation which their new congregation may request.

5.5. Church Board Selection Process

5.5.1. The Church Board and Discernment Team shall work together to oversee the selection and appointment process of new Church Board members, with an affirmation of the congregation.

5.5.2. The Church Board and Discernment Team shall continually seek to identify individuals among the congregation who are capable and suited for board service. In order to facilitate the changes in the Church Board, a Discernment Team shall populate a candidate list of such individuals, equal to the number of openings to be filled when vacancies are anticipated. Discernment Team shall consist of not less than 6 members and include the Lead Pastor, Board chair, at least one other current member of the board, and the remainder coming from the Ministry Team. The majority not being current board members. The Discernment Team shall be so appointed by the Church Board and reviewed annually. A candidate will be given not more than two weeks to engage in self-appraisal and personal evaluation. The candidate may respond affirmatively or ask to remove themselves from candidacy earlier than the two-week period.

5.5.3. Once a candidate has affirmed the Discernment Team's call, the Lead Pastor and Board chair shall interview the proposed candidate(s) to gauge their sense of call and willingness to serve.

5.5.4. The congregation shall be presented with the Discernment Team's recommended candidate(s) for Church Board service and shall be asked to conduct a two-week period of prayerful consideration. If during this period any Member knows of a reason a recommended candidate is unqualified to serve, they are asked to express their concern first to the individual candidate and then to the Discernment Team, aligning with Willow Street Mennonite's conflict mediation policy. If any candidate is subsequently found by the Discernment Team to be unqualified, they shall be informed of the reason(s) for their disqualification.

5.5.5. Following the above processes, those recommended for Board service shall be presented to the congregation for a vote of affirmation. A candidate is appointed to the board with a 90% affirmation from the received ballots.

5.6. **Release or Removal:** Individual members of the Church Board may be released by mutual consent of the Board member and the remaining Board members (voluntary withdraw), or be dismissed by consensus of the remaining Board members and Oversight Team members for reasons of:

1. Persistent doctrinal error
2. Misconduct in reference to the Biblical qualifications for a leader
3. Inability to fulfill the responsibilities of their position.

5.6.1. In the case of a release or removal from the Church Board, an abbreviated process of the Church Board Selection Process shall occur (Refer to Section 5.5) with the following modifications. The

candidate to replace the departing Board member shall complete the remainder of the term of the departing Board member; however, if the departing Board member was on their second term, this does not disqualify the new candidate from serving a second 3-year term before taking a mandatory 1 year 'Sabbath' break.



WILLOW STREET MENNONITE CHURCH
 Radically Loving Jesus,
 Practically Loving Others!

CHURCH BOARD
 Chair & Vice Chair
 Lead Pastor
 6 Members-at-Large
 Intern

BISHOP

