

2020 Annual Report



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This was a challenging year to be in church leadership. Our Elders, Deacons, Ministry Teams, and Staff had to dig deep. They needed to be praying about and discussing their own reactions to these tumultuous times, and then begin the process anew with their church family. Our deliberations and preparations were often abnormally lengthy yet also rushed. Most of us were overwhelmed at one time or another, but many of us also found new inspiration and the flexibility to explore. God worked through our church's leadership to set a new course for ministry. Then, as the world continued to shift around us, this process repeated itself; we found a rhythm of thoughtful adaptation. The upshot of all this was a mission that was carried out with creativity and flexibility; two words that generally aren't used to describe churches.

One such creative approach that our Session selected, was the use of the task force. Instead of requiring our current structure to ineffectually deal with 2020's unprecedented shifts, the Session set up short-term ministry teams to address specific issues. Each task force was made up of at least two Elders and others from the congregation with expertise or experience in dealing with their team's issue. Our three most active task forces in 2020 dealt with our response to Covid-19, issues of Racial Justice and Reconciliation, and the search that linked us with Dr. Carolyn Grice (now Rev. Dr. Grice!). These teams were especially successful at digesting complex and changing situations in order to communicate to the congregation and make recommendations to Session. Our task forces deserve thanks for their patient, faithful efforts in a volatile time characterized by heightened emotional sensitivity.

God's faithfulness has indeed been on display in 2020. We also witnessed the faithfulness of our congregation in stewardship, worship, and caregiving. Our congregation's commitment to generosity assured that even in uncertain economic times, our finances remained steady.

We broke even in 2020, and the stewardship campaign for 2021 raised 98% of the previous year's total. Furthermore, our congregation engaged in worship in a variety of different adaptations, and by September our estimated average worship attendance was roughly equal to the previous year. Even though we were often required to deal with new or awkward means, we remained a faithful, and connected congregation. We met in gardens and Zoom rooms, in driveways and drive-through services. Care and connection happened on the small scale as well. Members took it upon themselves to make phone calls and house calls. One Sunday afternoon, while doing driveway visits, I literally had to wait in line because other members were already visiting.

An honest look back on 2020 will acknowledge that we all took some hits, and we still have challenges to work through. Yet we also leave 2020 with many lessons learned. We have new understanding about how our faith matters in extraordinary moments and in everyday life. We were forced to wrestle with questions about what is essential to Jesus and the ministry of His Church. We have new means of ministry that we can bring with us into our congregation's future. Certainly 2020 is not a year we'd like to repeat. We were battered around just like everyone in our society, but even in our wounds we saw the light of Christ shine through. The power of God's love in this world remains undiminished.

Building & Grounds

By Don Glasgow, Elder

MARCH	Installed new sink and sprayer for the kitchen
	Replaced a few motion sensors
APRIL	Building maintenance for COVID guidelines
	Corona Strike Force formed by contacting volunteers, purchased required supplies, created action plan
	Church disinfected in compliance with COVID guidelines.
	Replaced light bulbs and ballasts since live worship and programs no longer using building
	New light fixtures in children's gathering area at the bottom of west stairs
	Energy use reduced by reducing thermostats and reprogramming lights
	Shampooed all carpets
(OUTSIDE)	Volunteers planted and maintained garden areas
	National Parking Lot Service completed patching and sealing the north lot and grouted and caulked the west steps railings
	Kitchen received fresh coat of paint and Fellowship Hall painted a new color
MAY	Re-routed and relayed drains in the prayer garden so water doesn't leak into the Fellowship Hall
	Building and Grounds committee discussed guidelines for reopening for in-person worship
JULY	Saved electrical operation cost by \$1700 last month by shutting off air conditioning in lower level
	Repairs to prayer garden bridge. Garden lights replaced with LED lanterns.
	New application on staff phones is working to control security system and sprinkler system
	Most building and grounds improvements this summer have been completed by the maintenance team and volunteers
AUGUST	Increased COX speed has improved computer communication.
SEPTEMBER	Our committee agreed to receive bids on replacing the 50 ton AC unit for the sanctuary since it will cost over half as much to repair it compared to installing a new unit
	Maintenance team almost finished painting downstairs walls
	North entry deteriorating wall replaced by maintenance team
	LED bulbs replacing any current bulbs when they stop working
DECEMBER	At this time the committee is asking specifics on two bids for Sanctuary AC unit

The Building and Grounds Committee included John Good, Al Jansen, Ed Leach, and Don Glasgow. The facility coordinator for 2020 was John Good. Part time maintenance help was Don Good and Ricardo Lopez. Building staff worked well together under the supervision of Mike Alfieri, Director of Church Administration. Thanks to the volunteers that helped with building and grounds maintenance with vacuuming and landscape planting and trimming.

In everything we do our focus is to be present, listen and be unconditionally Christ-centered. Caregiving Ministry is one of presence, a ministry of listening, a ministry that is unashamedly Christ-centered.

Our ministry area experienced a very difficult year in 2020. The Covid pandemic really hindered many of our ministry plans. It forced us to consider new ways of caring for the congregation. The Deacon meetings were held via Zoom for the majority of the year. What a blessing technology was in being able to carry out our work.

Caregiving Ambassadors: Led by Karen Lofgren-Anderson, Cheryl Havekost and Connie Huck, this group continued to care for our members during a very trying year. Caregiving Ambassadors, along with other volunteers, made extra contacts with families and individuals through phone calls, notes and emails to check on them during the isolation of the Covid quarantine. We felt that some extra caring contact was necessary for the West Hills church family. It is the goal of each Caregiving Ambassador to have regular contact with their care receivers. The quiet work of the Caregiving Ambassadors makes such a difference in the lives of so many. Caregiving Ambassadors did not meet in person once the pandemic lockdown began. The three Caregiving Ambassador Deacons kept in contact with their respective lists of Ambassadors and with each other through the miracles of modern technology. Caregiving Ambassador Appreciation was not held during 2020.

Practical Needs: This ministry area was led by Ted Tromler, Mary Turner and Myrtle Heise. Normally, ministry volunteers work quietly behind the scenes to meet the various needs of homebound communion, hospital calls, baby ministry, casserole ministry and transportation team. Due to the Covid pandemic we were not able to fulfill the ministry of homebound

communion, in person hospital calls, baby ministry visits, group casserole preparation and there were no rides provided to and from church. It was heartbreaking to have these ministry areas halted by the Covid pandemic. Creative ways were utilized to fulfill some ministry areas such as phone calls and cards to the hospitalized and Meal Train for an alternative to the casserole ministry.

Stephen Ministry: Led by Gloria Zinn, Bill Spiecker and Cathy Voshell, this quiet confidential ministry touches lives behind the scenes. Stephen Ministers are trained lay people who listen and walk beside others providing one-on-one Christian care during difficult life circumstances. We had two active linkings for portions of 2020. We had hoped the ministry would be utilized more during the Covid pandemic. Since in-person church services were not held for six months and services were broadcast on Zoom, our joys and concerns ministry took on a different look. We utilized an email prayer chain to address joys and concerns of the congregation. Stephen Ministers coordinate the home partner ministry where a caregiving person is paired with a homebound person for companionship and prayer. This ministry area was more aggressive during 2020 to address the isolation of quarantine that many of our homebound partners experienced. An Alzheimers seminar planned for 2020 had to be canceled.

Groups Ministry: Small groups or covenant groups have been a part of West Hills for many years. Deacons Leann Schaffer, Candy Glasgow and Mary Jirak spent 2020 researching what groups are still meeting and what the future of small groups will look like at West Hills.

Grief Ministry: We minister to families who have lost a loved one during the year. A series of books are sent out at certain intervals throughout the first year of the loved one's death under the direction of the Stephen Ministers.

Caregiving Ministry, continued

During the Christmas season when losses are especially difficult a grief gift is distributed. A bag is delivered to each person who has lost an immediate family member. It contains a special ornament, a personal note and a pamphlet on getting through the holidays. During 2020 the gifts were delivered by intergenerational teams practicing proper social distancing.

Caregiving Ministry faced unprecedented challenges during 2020 and was very successful in doing so. Through creative care methods we were able to convey the love of Jesus despite the isolation of the pandemic.



Chili and Caroling: Due to the Covid pandemic, the annual December chili and caroling event was not able to be held. The Covid pandemic would not keep us from bringing joy to the homebound! This activity, which involves the entire congregation in caregiving, took on a new look for 2020. Intergenerational teams divided up and completed safe contactless delivery of 25 Christmas stockings that were made, decorated and donated by Linda Springsted. The stockings were filled with small gifts donated by Caregiving Ambassadors, Deacons and congregation members. Caregiving Ambassador Deacon Cheryl Havekost coordinated the Christmas stocking event

Last January, we were excitedly looking ahead to a new year with what we thought was 20/20 vision. The Family Ministries Leadership Team had prayed and planned, and we were focused on three areas in Children's Ministry: **intergenerational mission and ministry, relational discipleship, and equipping and partnering with parents.** Within three months, it became clear that although the vision was right, we were going to need to work on these through the lens of innovation.

Our 2020 plans to help children and families connect with God, others, and the world included mission and caregiving collaboration, monthly intergenerational events, quarterly special events, a parenting community, and ongoing relational discipleship opportunities at Sunday morning Crosswalk and Wednesday evening Kids Connect.



In January we were excited to open our updated lower-level welcome center including a photo slideshow display allowing a glimpse of what had happened in the classrooms each week as parents and kids arrived and departed. We began a parenting community for parents and grandparents to connect over simple conversations. We hosted our first Nerf Night, welcoming people in for an evening of epic fun.

In February we marked Family Ministry Month, celebrating our families, volunteers, and this congregation that takes seriously Jesus' words to love and nurture kids, teens, and families. We had an overwhelming response - members of our congregation took prayer rocks with a name

of one of our children, youth, or young adults written on their rock, committing to pray for their person by name. We briefly opened "The Waiting Room," a hands-on prayer experience based on Psalm 40 for the whole church to use during Lent.

Then on March 6, as over a hundred people of all ages were enjoying the second annual mini-golf Tee Party, the first Nebraska case of the novel coronavirus was identified. Within ten days, we found ourselves pivoting – keeping our eyes on the goals God had given us while adjusting our strategies for the new circumstances. We shifted Crosswalk to Zoom, asked our Crosswalk leaders to stay connected to kids and their families via phone, email, and mail, and began providing periodic resources to families via porch drops of materials to use at the change of seasons for discipleship and worship. We turned in-person events into take-home kits to be enjoyed and shared with family, friends, and neighbors. We offered an online parenting forum, boosted our West Hills Parents Facebook group, enjoyed fellowship through drive-up and socially distanced events. We celebrated milestones and holidays through a combination of deliveries, videos, and collaborative projects. And we stayed focused on equipping parents, pursuing relational discipleship, and engaging in intergenerational mission and ministry. In many ways, the pandemic conditions accelerated both the need for and the opportunity to do all three of these in unexpected ways, so we adapted our approach and pressed into the joy of loving one another in Jesus' name.

Highlights of the year included some traditional celebrations done slightly differently:

- Creating a [virtual palm parade](#) and [intergenerational Holy Week art gallery](#).
- Partnering with parents to give eight elementary children an NIV Adventure Bible chosen for them and imprinted with their name. The congregation got to [see their joy as they opened their own Bibles on a video](#) shown during Sunday worship.

Children's Ministry, continued

- Reminding over 40 families from West Hills and beyond that we can conquer challenges with God's mighty power through our Everest VBS Backyard Basecamp kits.
- Encouraging kids and parents that "God's Got This!" with a Back-to-School parking lot parade and prayer resources.
- Decorating pumpkins for Fall Fun with judging during our 406 Youth Spotlight. Stay tuned for the Chili Contest with the Golden Spoon Award to return as soon as possible, though!
- Helping people of all ages connect about God's goodness with Thanksgiving Fun and Advent Adventures take-home events.
- West Hills families telling the story of [Jesus' birth through pictures and music](#).
- Partnering with Caregiving to make Special Deliveries of Christmas stockings and ornaments.

We also tried some new things:

- Wednesday Night Kids Connect explored mission and worship arts in person until March. The final collaborative art project led by Rachel Ziegler culminated in a [Zoom-style dance video](#). This was a pivot from the original video dance party but it reminded the kids that they can do new or hard things with God's help.
- We offered materials to help parents and kids begin some discipleship practices together with hands-on activities for Holy Week, Advent, summer, and tools for blessing their kids anytime.
- At Thanksgiving, we made a video of [things the West Hills Church family is thankful for](#).
- Teams of all ages competed in a [photo scavenger hunt](#) with clues from the Bible.

And we learned there are some new things we may want to continue even after the pandemic ends:

- [Faith @ Home resources](#) help all ages keep thinking about the sermon through the week
- Family Ministry Moments during worship

- Three Words to listen for during worship
- Collaborative effort on the advent devotional to reach all ages of the church family
- Kids Connect Small Groups study scripture, how it applies to life, and pray together weekly

In all of this, we discovered that God's vision for 2020 was 20/20, and we had only to follow Him one step at a time, pivoting to stay on His path as it twisted and turned through trials, grief, and surprise spots of beauty. In His steadfast love, he showed us that continuity in relationships is important for people of all ages, that limitations on circumstances bring out our creativity, that relying on Him in the journey is the most important part of the journey, and that we can share His light wherever we are – whether that is in relationships at home, on a Zoom call, through a card or drawing, a porch visit or a Facebook group. The Family Ministries Team – staff and volunteers who serve babies through young adults and their families – pulled together with innovation, creativity, and tenacity. With their eyes fixed on their hope in Christ, they worked through ever-changing circumstances to find new ways to help kids and families connect with the timeless truth of God's love. And as this team worked together in this way, God led, reminding us that no matter where the journey takes us, we can always continue Growing on the journey: *Knowing Jesus. Loving Jesus. Serving Jesus. Sharing Jesus.*



West Hills Membership Ministry has been working to serve the congregation during 2020 in the following ways:

- The ministry provided greeters and fellowship coffee time in Geneva Lounge until the church was closed due to the pandemic.
- New Member classes scheduled for 2020 were postponed due to the pandemic.
- In conjunction with the Deacons, we conducted all member calling campaigns in April and in June to check on member's well-being and needs and offer assistance during the pandemic.
- The West Hills Tech Team provided input and guidance for the purchase and implementation of technology to allow livestreaming of worship services, events, and meetings which has allowed everyone to be able to worship together either online or in-person.
- The annual membership review process was handled slightly different this year due to the COVID-19 circumstances and the fact that we had no way to accurately know who had been attending West Hills online worship services. When calls were made to folks, we asked whether they had worshipped online; if they felt connected to West Hills; and how we could help them connect to West Hills.

The Membership Ministry Team looks forward to the full opening of the church building again hopefully sometime during 2021 and strives to continually serve the West Hills congregation in creative and meaningful ways.

How do you talk about a year that everyone just wanted to end? I even heard people say that the only reason they stayed up until midnight on New Year's Eve, was to make sure that 2020 did indeed come to an end!

The Mission Ministry at West Hills is all about reaching out, creating and nurturing relationships with people and organizations. This allows the people of West Hills to share in and participate in God's mission. Jesus says in John 20:21 "As the father sent me, so I send you." But, all this seemed like a pretty tall order in a year that saw community lockdowns, the discouragement of travel, quarantines and the promotion of social distancing.

In years past, the Mission Team organized two special events that brought our mission partners into the church – Local Mission Sunday, and World Communion Sunday.

In May we traditionally celebrate our **local mission partners** with booths set up in the Geneva Lounge and one of our partners bringing a message to the congregation from the pulpit. With West Hills itself worshipping remotely, many of our local partners prepared videos to be part of the worship service. Through the videos, we learned how **Young Life** continued to reach the youth of Omaha through Zoom meetings. We learned how the **Good News Bears** continued to mentor youths by providing them with access to computers so they would not fall behind in school. With financial support from West Hills, **Abide** was able to provide thousands of meals to families experiencing economic hardship. **Heartland Hope** was able to provide food and household items to more families than ever, in part because of your generous support. In September we helped out with the annual **Skinner East block party**. Trink Traudt actually mowed an elderly woman's lawn after the picnic! Peg Shirley and I were able to meet several times with Emad Tawadrous from the Arabic Speaking Fellowship/International Friendship Center. And Kevin Gibson provided the music for one of their worship services last fall. We were also able to maintain our support to the **Westgate Elementary School** by providing meals to the

staff during their Parent/Teacher Conferences, and providing school supplies for the students.

Again, in October on **World Communion Sunday**, we shared videos from some of our **international partners**. Dorothy Tanwani from the **Christian Women of Vision in Cameroon** shared of the many hardships they tackled this year as they sought to help orphans and street children and widows. And with our help, they were able to get supplies and conduct training on how to stop the spread of the corona virus. We learned how the **Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo** was able to expand their on-line classes so that their students could continue with their studies. Julie and I connected with **The Outreach Foundation** and The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL) via several Zoom meetings where we learned of the needs and successes of their ministries in the Middle East. Julie Burgess connected with some recent graduates of the Near East School of Theology and shared their stories in The Outreach Foundation's monthly publication. And of course, we at West Hills sent money (via the Spirit Fund) to help with the relief efforts after the catastrophic explosion in the Beirut harbor/dock area on August 4.

While we couldn't be with our partners in person this year, we were with them in spirit. With God's help and the generous people of West Hills, I think that relationships with our partners actually grew stronger. They grew stronger because we saw the need to support and pray for one another. Together we witnessed God's glory and grace in new ways. Together we found new ways to build up the church for God's mission in the world. We experienced even more deeply that we are a part of the Body of Christ – with gifts to share and gifts that we need to receive!

All the members of the Mission Team (Linda Springsted, Joanne Topolski, Chris Neil, Peg Shirley, Trink Traudt and Michael Backer) worked extra hard to ensure that we stayed connected to our partners. West Hills is truly blessed to have such a great team, who in turn, have the support of a faithful congregation!

The year started well, with a full calendar of events scheduled by the ministry areas under this umbrella-Women's, Men's, Celebrations (Seniors) and classes/Bible studies. We had Sunday morning classes scheduled at both worship hours through June, with a new team in place to select curriculum and recruit facilitators. Women had silent retreats and a Fall Retreat with a guest speaker on the books, as well as Wednesday morning and evening Bible studies, as well as the Thursday morning study. Men had completed Game Day and the Fish Fry (Ash Wednesday), and were looking forward to adding a Wednesday evening version of the Men's Tuesday Morning Bible study. Celebrations had dates for each of their quarterly birthday celebrations and were contemplating other events and outings.

The March COVID shutdown put most of those events on hold. Several Bible studies and classes moved to an online format. Those that could not maintain contact with members by sending cards and making phone calls.

In the summer, the Session created several task forces. Steve Burgess, elder for Mission, and I were named to the **Racial Justice and Reconciliation Task Force**. As the pandemic made meeting in person problematic, we devised a series of events to address this topic as a major part of Spiritual Formation and Discipleship and Mission.

Our new Temporary Associate Pastor, Carolyn Grice, has agreed to teach a Sunday morning Bible study starting in mid-January. The staff have been extremely helpful in facilitating the technological needs of each class and event we have facilitated. They are working now with Carolyn to discern how to offer a Sunday morning class, with the possibility of some folks being "in person" and the rest participating through ZOOM.

Early in 2021, Rick Mason will step into the role of elder for Spiritual Formation and Discipleship. With the growing availability

of vaccines, we hope to be able to return to the vibrant schedule of events each ministry enjoys. As I turn over the leadership of this ministry area, I wish to thank all who participated in the discipleship opportunities of this year, and those who facilitated them. Those contributing their gifts were Julie Burgess, Jeff Smith, Jim Isaac, Judy Nelson, Theresa Hamer, Will Schoepner, Anita Evans, Ron Wells, Hal Capps, Leann Schaffer, Gloria Zinn, Bob Drake, Jane Loeck, Rick Mason and Heather Hipp. Several of those mentioned here also have a team working with them to create opportunities for spiritual formation. I am grateful to them all.

The book of Ecclesiastes teaches that *"...to everything there is a season..."; including "...a time to tear down, and a time to build up..."*. With all the challenges and heartache 2020 wrought it would be easy to see the year as a season of tearing down. But often we do not see as God sees, and without His grace amid the dust and chaos it can be difficult, if not impossible, to discern whether the cause is demolition or construction. In these times we hold high the lamp of the Spirit to illuminate and help us discern our situation.

Encompassing a wide scope of financial, technology, personnel, communication, facility and grounds responsibilities; 2020 was a year in which Support ministries laid many foundations. Foundations to enable us to adapt to the restrictions of the COVID-19 virus, and foundations for the future with greater capability to complete the missions God has set for us.

Early in the year we **upgraded our phone and internet service**. There were many challenges as the hardware and setup of these systems had been in place for many years. But we set the stage to also implement this year more robust cloud based financial systems for accounting and online giving. The upgrades to our internet connection were crucial to our ability to provide online and live-streaming worship services, allow for the myriad of meetings completed using the Zoom application, and maximize our use of the cloud based systems to enhance congregation engagement through virtual events and electronic communications such as the "Thursday Thoughts". These technology upgrades even allowed for enhancements to our building security systems. And, we reaped a cost savings by combining phone and internet with a single vendor.

No recollection of 2020 would be complete without noting the hours and hours spent by all support ministry staff in responding the almost daily challenges of the COVID-19 virus.

This included developing and implementing numerous iterations of response plans to safeguard the health of our congregation, staff, and visitors to the very best of our ability. We started off with putting in place the necessary procedures, equipment, and supplies needed for disinfecting the church and protecting individuals. As we moved to reinstituting in-person worship, we developed plans to allow us to meet national, state, and local guidance by establishing procedures for attendance, seating, facility disinfecting before and after, and limiting building access. We are already reviewing our procedures to safeguard everyone as we look to the future, and our return to "normalcy" with more groups and events happening at the church.

Early in the summer we were blessed to be approved for **\$100,000 from the Small Business Administrations Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)**. These funds came at a very uncertain time in the pandemic, and provided the financial support to ensure all staff could be retained and to maintain salaries.

With limited access and events taking place, many foundations were laid in repairs and upgrades to building and grounds for everyone's return. The Fellowship Hall and lower level has been painted. Carpets all shampooed. The downstairs children's reception area continued its facelift to be more welcoming and bright with new lighting and furniture. Our prayer garden received several needed upgrades over the summer to provide a serene space for everyone, including: changes to the drainage to avoid leaking along foundation in Fellowship Hall, new LED lighting, repair and replace the benches, and landscaping improvements. The recycling dumpster was moved to the corral on the east side of the building. While this may sound like "small potatoes", it allowed for the removal of the eyesore corral in our west parking lot which was turned into added green space, and improved the overall appearance of the grounds.

Support Ministries, continued

Finally, a note about **community**. The most difficult part of 2020 was our isolation. Every Monday afternoon we missed the smiles and banter of Bill and Barb Spiecker, or Paul and Linda Springsted, at the church to count and deposit the Sunday collections. The cheerfulness of Anita Evans on Friday mornings to update contributions, attendance information, or anything else with which we might need help. We missed the hustle and bustle of human connection with morning Bible study groups, Celebrations events, Wednesday night dinners, and so very, very much more. Our gratitude to Peggy Shirley, Greg Schuchmann, and Ginny Lakin, who helped with covering the front desk in spite of all our COVID-19 safety protocols.

Outside the building, even with no one coming to see the fruits of their labor, our volunteers continued to faithfully come and tend the church gardens. Thank you to Daryl & Cathy Gregor, Kelly and Tim Briggs, to Jack & Pam Culek, and to Deb O'Reilly!! Your work is beautiful! We pray that we will ALL soon be in community to share it together, and fill once again the rooms on the foundations we have laid with the sounds of thanksgiving, praise, and rejoicing!!!

Pre-pandemic.

On Sunday evening, February 9, for the first time we hosted a **Crossroads Connection** worship service and meal with 75 in attendance. After a spirited worship service, there was a sweet time of fellowship as we gathered for the meal.

On Sunday morning, March 1, we introduced the Lenten season with a service entitled, **Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus**. This service combined music, scripture, prayer, readings, visual art, dance, and the celebration of Communion. Our guest artist, Richard Harrison, painted live in the sanctuary during both services.

Hello pandemic.

On Saturday, March 14, an email blast sent at 6:27 pm informed the congregation that we were cancelling all activities the following day due to the Coronavirus outbreak. On Tuesday, March 17, we uploaded, on our new Vimeo account, our first video of Kathy Leach playing a piano solo arrangement of the hymn, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." With 425 views, it has been the most-watched video on our account. On Friday, March 20, Heather Hipp and I recorded and uploaded our first video to Facebook. In this 86-second video, we provided information about the totally online pre-recorded worship available on March 22.

The cancellation of in-person worship on March 15 began a whole new world for the worship arts ministry. We took a crash course on recording and editing video, which would evolve in the months ahead. We learned that processing video takes a lot of time. The worship video for Sunday, March 22, was uploaded to Vimeo and our church website at 1:15 am that day!

For **Holy Week**, we scrapped our worship plans for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and created a new format for a Good Friday service: a mixture of scripture, hymns and worship songs, instrumental music, and live painting with Richard Harrison. The instrumentation was piano, organ, cello and violin. This was the first

service using multiple cameras in the recording process. The chapel became our "recording studio" during the online worship season of the pandemic.

With all of the plans that were being scrapped, it was nice to offer another edition of the **Holy Week Devotional Guide**, eight devotionals written by our own folks, adding to the meaning of our Holy Week celebrations.

To prepare for our return to in-person worship, we installed a **camera system** allowing us to **live stream** to those not able to attend in-person worship. In the summer, two PTZ (pan-tilt-zoom) cameras were installed in the sanctuary. We did a "practice" live stream service on September 6. The following Sunday was our first Sunday back with in-person worship. It had been 25 weeks since we had last gathered for worship in the sanctuary. There were 67 in the sanctuary for this service with many others watching the live stream.

However, September 13 was not the customary worship service. Due to Covid and the risk of spreading the coronavirus, there was no congregational singing, no live singing or live music. The music was pre-recorded, along with other elements, such as the call to worship, worship reflection, and the family ministry moment. Preaching was live, as well as the pastoral prayer and blessing. We wore face coverings and practiced social distancing.

Early in the pandemic, it became apparent that we should look for new ways to connect with the congregation. Short **video updates**, often filled with humor, were created. Neither Heather Hipp nor I actually enjoy being on video, but this seemed like the right thing to do. Popular episodes were our Grilling 101 segment and Mad Gab game videos. We also did announcement segments for worship, which usually included a twist.

We also enjoyed creating several **fellowship events**. Some were online: bingo, talent show, and Jolly Jingle Jangle. We also created the in-

Worship Arts & Music, continued

person event, Picnic Praise and Popsicles in the Park.

In September, we had the opportunity to bring **Anna Hollingsworth** on board as our first-ever **worship resident**. She served in a variety of ways, including capturing and editing video, singing with the worship team, running audio, worship slides, and cameras. She also participated with the youth worship team, the *On Beauty and Faith* discussion group, and assisted with the Faith @ Home series. She wrote an Advent devotional for the West Hills guide, was involved in planning and leading worship, and took part in our weekly staff meetings.

Also in September, we began a 7-week Zoom discussion group based on the new book, ***On Beauty and Faith***. We averaged 15 participants per week; the core group was from West Hills, joined by attendees from Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. It was a new approach to have a small group study based on the arts and beauty, as they relate to our Christian faith. One participant made this comment: "Where has this book been all of my life!?"

The annual **Thanksgiving service** is a popular seasonal service at West Hills. With the Coronavirus still raging, we decided to pre-record this service and offer it online. The service included congregational songs, scripture readings, testimonies, prayer, and a video collage of folks sharing, in rapid fire, what they are thankful for this year.

For the **Advent/Christmas season**, there was some discussion about scaling back our decorations. But we thought it would lift our spirits to see the building decorated for Christmas. To capture the beauty of the decorations for those not able to attend in-person worship, we made a well-received video of Geneva Lounge and the sanctuary. Many thanks to Peggy Kelley for all of her time, energy, and expertise.

In this year of being socially disconnected,

the **Advent Devotional Guide** provided a way for the congregation to be connected through common readings written by our own members and attendees.

On the evening of November 29, we continued for the third year to offer the service of the **Hanging of the Green**. Like everything else, we had to be creative because of social distancing and limits on live music.

Our **Christmas Eve** worship service was made available in person and through streaming online. The music for this service was a mix of pre-recorded elements and a live vocalist, keyboards, and cello.

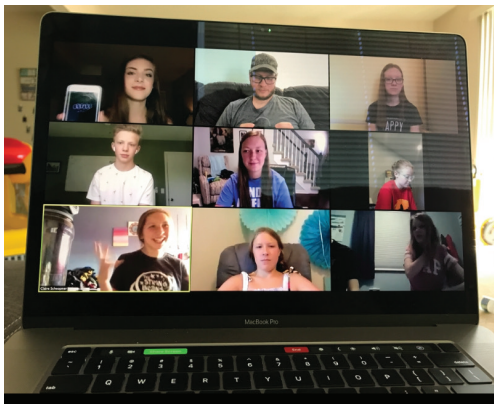
It became obvious as the year unfolded that drastic limitations only fueled our creativity, flexibility, and adaptability in providing meaningful worship opportunities for the congregation. While it would have been easy to become disheartened, those leading and assisting with the worship and music ministry forged ahead with grace-filled ministry. These are the individuals that come to mind who were a part of what was affectionately known as the Covid Crew: Al Anderson, Julie Burgess, Steve Dostal, Brian Eichhorn, Kathy Leach, Jane Loeck and Stan Parker. Many thanks to them for their dedicated service.

This has been one of the more rewarding years of ministry for me, and one that I will never forget. May we always remember the lessons we have learned this year and continue to be open to the new directions the Holy Spirit will blow in 2021.

To God alone be the Glory!

I doubt I will be the first one to write this, but 2020 was a very strange year filled with shifts in ministry and daily life on a scale we certainly didn't see coming. When 2020 first began, our youth ministry had plans that spanned the entire calendar year. We anticipated a youth mission trip to Alamosa Colorado, a family camp to Calvin Crest, a jam pack summer with Monday Funday outings each week, a confirmation retreat in cabins in the woods, and a plethora of new opportunities for youth to engage in the social life of West Hills Church. Little did we know that the COVID-19 pandemic would strike, and so radically disrupt our ministry plans and our daily lives alike.

I am pleased to report that ministry did not end. It certainly shifted, but it continued on with energy, passion, and ever-changing plans. With the advent of social distancing, the online video conferencing software "Zoom" became our new normal. Youth Group and Sunday School quickly shifted to accommodate the online platform. When the pandemic first struck, we actually saw an increase in attendance for Sunday School and Youth Group, however it didn't take long for zoom fatigue to set in.



Even during these pandemic times, our mission in youth & young adult ministry remained steadfast: to foster a community of young people dedicated to growing deeper in their relationship with God, each other, their church and the world. We continued working toward this mission with seven major action steps: rebranding our youth ministry, hiring

a youth intern, offering church-wide worship opportunities, creating a youth leadership team, offering a take-home mission experience, speaking openly about current events, and keeping beloved youth programs going with excellency. I'd like to address each of these in succession.

Youth ministry leaders at West Hills began the discussion to **rebrand** ourselves to match the direction more accurately we want our youth and ministry to go. Under the suggestion of Greg

THE 406 YOUTH

Schuchmann, we decided to rebrand as "406 Youth" for two purposes: first, the youth chapel room number is 406, which is where youth group would meet every Wednesday evening. Secondly, and more importantly, 406 represents 2 Corinthians 4:6 – "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." This is the scripture that we want to be known for as the youth at West Hills Church!

This summer we were pleased to hire **Mia Sherlock as our 2020 youth intern**. Mia brought her many talents and passions to the youth and staff. She was exceptionally well organized, had a heart for God and youth, had an amazing ability to speak comfortably and freely with everyone, had dance and choreography skills, and had many wonderful ideas to help our youth ministry thrive. She had many accomplishments this summer, but her two most memorable accomplishments were her ideas for the at-home mission trip which she named "406 in the 402" and her work on the names and job descriptions for the 406 Leadership Team. Mia also led youth group, read the book "Growing Young" with our youth and family ministries staff, and led our youth dance team called the 406 Flock. Mia was a joy and a blessing to our

Youth and Young Adult, continued

ministry this summer.

In 2020, youth were able to showcase their musical and dancing talents to the congregation with a new worship opportunity called the **406 Spotlight**. 406 Spotlight featured the youth band and dance team for an evening of worship music, dance, scripture reading, and inspirational messages. In 2020, we held two in-person drive in 406 Spotlights and one prerecorded Christmas special edition 406 Spotlight. These 406 Spotlights allowed our congregation to see the youth front and center and also allowed the youth to take on leadership roles and point the spotlight on Jesus!

This fall we implemented a **Youth Leadership Team** that has been working hard behind the scenes serving in a variety of ways. During the summer, youth were invited to apply and interview for the opportunity to use their gifts in one of five unique leadership positions. We currently have five wonderful youth who have been nothing but exceptional in fulfilling their leadership roles. We have Kathleen Hamer as the Administrative Assistant who organizes and helps plan events. We have Ian Meyers as the Media Master who is in charge of youth technologies. We have Jonathan Scheopner as the music maestro who is in charge of music. We have Juliana Scheopner as the Social Media Manager who is in charge of our online Instagram presence. Last, but not least, we have Taylor Schommer as the Game Guru who is in charge of all things games and also helps plan events.

This summer, we anticipated attending a youth mission trip to Alamosa Colorado to help an impoverished rural community. However, the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to be creative and come up with a socially distant alternative. Mia Sherlock came up with the format for this **take-home mission trip**. Each registered youth received a “mission trip kit” which came equipped with all of the necessary materials for the five-day long mission experience. Our theme for this mission trip was “the ripple effect” so

each day of the mission trip was focused on a particular topic which grew wider in scope each day. During our five days we focused on family, community, city, country, world. For many youth, this was the highlight of their summer!

2020 was no stranger to tragic and controversial events. The 406 Youth ministry didn't shy away from having the big conversations that all Christians need to have. We have a wonderfully diverse youth group with many varying opinions, but through all of it we were able to discuss major events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health, social injustice, protests, and riots. We tried our best to foster an environment where our youth felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions free from judgement. We then did our best to take these current events and discuss a biblical world view around them. I believe this helped our youth feel closer to God and more hopeful in the midst of the chaos.

Lastly, we wanted to keep some sense of normalcy by continuing to offer the programs that youth love. We continued to offer **406 Youth Group** each Wednesday evening over Zoom, we reworked our Monday Fundays to accommodate Zoom, and even still held our youth Christmas Party, Youth vs. Young Adult night, and welcome to 406 Youth Party all on Zoom.

2020 certainly wasn't the year we all expected, but despite every challenge, the gospel was still preached, hearts were still transformed, and fun was still had!



Fund Asset Balances at December 31, 2020

(American National Bank)

Operating Fund:

Cash Balance	\$ 443,741	
PPP Funds - <i>not yet forgiven by SBA</i> *	(100,000)	
Spirit Fund	(24,617)	
Miscellaneous Payables Due	(40,954)	

Net Cash Available at 12/31/20	\$ 278,170
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Capital Fund:

Balance at 12/31/20	\$ 74,670
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Memorial Fund:

Balance at 12/31/20	\$ 22,819
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Congregational Emergency Fund:

Balance at 12/31/20	\$ 4,003
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Total All Funds:	\$ 379,663
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* "SBA" - Small Business Administration; government agency who administers/oversees PPP program.

WEST HILLS CHURCH
Operating Fund
Statement of Financial Activities
Years 2019-2021 Actual to Budget

	Budget 2021	Actual 2020	Budget 2020	Actual 2019
REVENUES				
Contributions Revenue				
Pledge	833,000	903,841	908,000	946,005
Plate	10,177	5,020	25,000	24,768
Total Contributions Revenue	843,177	908,861	933,000	970,773
Total Other Revenue	10,000	7,314	22,000	33,851
Ministry Specific Revenue*	37,110	27,278	37,550	43,128
TOTAL REVENUE	890,287	943,453	992,550	1,047,752
OPERATING EXPENSES				
Personnel				
Pastoral	123,420	122,045	123,420	142,373
Staff	523,559	469,355	480,580	457,708
Total Personnel	646,979	591,400	604,000	600,081
Program Ministries				
Church Leadership	8,350	1,429	11,000	10,536
Spiritual Formation	8,415	3,824	14,910	10,334
Caregiving	2,115	2,439	2,940	1,090
Youth	17,155	13,809	15,850	11,576
Children	14,770	18,260	17,950	17,571
Worship	14,500	25,324	17,000	14,328
Property	121,600	119,499	137,500	143,560
Mission Ministries	66,211	65,733	65,733	81,431
Administration	90,192	101,736	105,667	117,011
Total Program	343,308	352,053	388,550	407,437
TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES	990,287	943,453	992,550	1,007,518
NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) from Operations	(100,000)	-	-	40,234
Extraordinary Revenue **				
Release/forgiveness of reserve funds	100,000			
NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	-			

* Activity fees and designated gifts specific to ministry areas; for example: Youth Commitment Offering,

Silent Retreat registration fee, or mission trip participation fees.

** Operating fund reserves available in 2021 due to receipt and expenditure of PPP program funds in 2020 for payroll and utility costs.

Pastor Salary and Benefits

	Budget 2021	Actual 2020	Budget 2020
Salary	67,600	67,600	67,600
Housing	12,400	12,400	12,400
403B	2,000	2,000	2,000
Effective Salary	82,000	82,000	82,000
Cont Ed	4,000	2,625	4,000
Cell Phone	960	960	960
Board of Pensions*	30,340	30,340	30,340
SECA Allowance	6,120	6,120	6,120
Total Pastoral Salary	123,420	122,045	123,420

* The Board of Pensions rate for 2021 is 37% of pastor's effective salary.

Paid annual leave:

4 weeks vacation

2 weeks study leave

1 week "service to the larger church"

Appendix A

2020 ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

AVERAGE WEEKLY SUNDAY WORSHIP ENGAGEMENT

Pre-Pandemic (Jan 1 - Mar 8)	273	in-person worship only
Early Pandemic (Mar 9 - Sep 5)*	221	online recorded worship only
Late Pandemic (Sep 6 - Dec 31)*	264	in-person, live-stream, & recorded worship

OVERALL WEEKLY AVERAGE SUNDAY WORSHIP ENGAGEMENT

245

** Online/Live-stream viewership based upon number of "unique" devices logged-in to watch online video via live-streaming, vimeo, or WHC website during initial week of worship service. (Sun-Sat)
Estimated viewers per household at 2.0 - 2.5.*

Clerk Of The Session Report

2020 Elders: Beth Anderson Jane Loeck Linda Schuchmann
 Dan O'Reilly Gary Anders Peggy Kelley
 Dan Travaille Julie Zimmerman Matt Huck
 Don Glasgow Kathy Padilla Steve Burgess

Greg Schuchmann was the Clerk of the Session. Mike Alfieri was Business Administrator.
 Dan Travaille was Treasurer. Peggy Kelley chaired the Nominating Committee.

Membership

Active members January 1, 2020

495

Gains:	Transferred from other churches	0	Losses:	Transferred to other churches	3
	Received by Profession of Faith	0		Deaths	8
	Reaffirmation, or Confirmation	3			
	Received by Baptism	0	Other:	Removed from rolls	78
	<u>Total Gains</u>	<u>3</u>		<u>Total Losses</u>	<u>89</u>

Active members January 1, 2021

409

Baptisms: Infant Baptisms 0
 Youth Baptisms 1

Active Friends of the Family

76

Weddings: 2

Baptisms

September 17, 2020

Zoe Dozier

Melissa Hingle

Weddings

August 8, 2020

Rick Mason & Tracey Kobjerowski

Pastor Andy Hamer

July 24, 2020

Trevor Weigert & Emma Neil

Pastor Andy Hamer

Deaths

Note: Deaths reported are of active members for reporting to presbytery, and correlate to the number in the report above. Deaths of former members and friends of the family are acknowledged in the weekly bulletin.

June Rogers

January 7, 2020

Cleo Wells

February 26, 2020

Nancy Anderson

April 30, 2020

Carole Burrows

May 26, 2020

Shirley Nelson

August 27, 2020

Linda Nodes

September 20, 2020

Nan Henry

October 8, 2020

Sue Balkovec

December 13, 2020

Annual Congregational Meeting, January 26, 2020

West Hills Church held its Annual Soup Super Supper and Congregation Meeting on January 26, 2020. The meeting was held in the church sanctuary following a potluck soup supper in Fellowship Hall.

Pastor and moderator Andy Hamer began by welcoming everyone, then called the meeting of the Congregation to order at 6:50 pm and opened with a prayer.

The congregation sang the hymn Come Thou Fount and the praise song Beautiful One lead by Kevin Gibson and Kathy Leech.

Andy introduced Marti Bloes and William Scheopner as the co-hosts of the First Annual West Hills Westys Awards show.

The first Westys award of the First Annual West Hills Awards show was presented by Kim Sedivy to the Front Desk Volunteers.

Clerk of Session, Greg Schuchmann (a little confused), announced a quorum was present. Then presented the minutes from congregation meetings held in 2019 found on pages 22-26.

A motion was made to accept the minutes of the Annual Congregational Meeting held on January 27, 2019. The motion was seconded. Corrections and questions were called for. No corrections were necessary. A vote was called for. **The motion passed.**

A motion was made to accept the minutes of the Congregational Meeting held on July 28, 2019 to vote on the Pastor Nominating Committee's nomination of Andy Hamer as Pastor to West Hills Church. The motion was seconded. Corrections and questions were called for. A correction was made to 'He graduated with a B.A. from Missoula University in Montana' to 'He graduated from the University of Montana in Missoula'. A vote was called for to accept the minutes as corrected. **The motion passed.**

A motion was made to accept the minutes of the Congregational Meeting held on November 17, 2019 to elect Deacons, Elders, and Nominating Committee. The motion was

seconded. Corrections and questions were called for. A vote was called for. **The motion passed.**

The number of members Removed from Rolls in The Clerk of Session Report (page 21) was updated to 27 bringing the Total Losses to 43 and the Active members January 1, 2020 to 495.

The second Westys award was the Eden Initiative Award presented by Kevin Gibson to The Gardening Group of West Hills Church.

The third Westys award was The Wait, Do You Live Here award presented by Heather Hipp to Peggy Kelley.

Andy presented the Committee Reports and Staff Recognition of John Good for 20 years of service to West Hills Church.

Mic Gag – Andy (from somewhere in the church) commented to someone that one should never pass up a bathroom.

The fourth Westys award was to the West Hills Kitchen Crew for the Culinary Achievement Award presented by John Good.

Dan Travaille presented the Finance Report commenting on pages 15 – 17 noting West Hills Church ended the year with a \$40,234 surplus. This amount is net of the 25 percent put in the Spirt Fund which increased the fund to \$22,981. Comments on the Spirit Fund indicated the name change made to Spirit Fund in 2012. Dan commented on the Capital Fund called for to repair the roof. All money for the campaign has been received, the campaign is complete, and was completed on budget. The budget for 2020 has not changed much from 2019. Dan noted that his job is made easy because of the faithfulness of the givers, the faithfulness of those who manage the funds, and the faithfulness of God. Dan was pleased no money was spent on the Westys.

The meeting and awards show was interrupted by a news cast of the First Annual West Hills Church Westys Awards Show showing overflow rooms.

Annual Congregational Meeting - continued

The fifth Westys award The Anonymous Contaminated-Neutralizing Noisemaking Contingent Award was presented by Jessica Scheopner to the West Hills Vacuum Volunteers.

The sixth and final Westys Award was the Acronym Award presented by Erika Hanna to the PNC.

Comments from Andy on the State of the Church
Sense of where church is and going.

Thank you for welcoming him and his family.

Theme – when do we do the next thing? Glad that's over. Waiting for the other shoe to drop. Running on status quo. Want things back the way things were. Wanting to do the next thing.

West Hills is a unique church/congregation. There is a deep connection in Omaha to West Hills. West Hills has a solid identity – Christ, Prayer. West Hills experiences Jesus together. Has a commitment to mission – to Omaha and the world.

West Hills is: Incarnational, Relational, and Missional. We can define these and describe as a church. We have amazing folks/congregation.

Andy commented that he does not want his honeymoon to end.

What God has for West Hills to He will share with the members and it will come from through the members. It is time to start dreaming because of what we have is in place.

Timeline – we need to continue to talk. Tell Andy how we really feel. Where God is calling us. What is going well. What needs work. What needs to be celebrated and let go. The next step forward should be 'OUR NEXT STEP' forward

The Deacons and Elders discussed our identity in the annual Deacons and Elders meeting held January 18, 2020.

In February/March Andy will hold meetings with the congregation. What is our identity? What is our future? Ministry areas we have only

dabbled in.

Spring – have Session look at information. Determine things to be working on.

If there are things to be talked about, let's get it out. Try to get a Sense of Where God is calling.

This is a wonderful congregation with a purpose.

Things happened during time of transition (see Andy's report) New activities were added including intergeneration activities.

We must remember that the pastor is not the church – people are the church. There are incredible people at West Hills. People have stepped in and taken ownership. Among those are elders like Peg Shirley, Kathy Padilla, and Jane Loeck (and Patti Gatzke before she and Ron moved to Oregon. Staff was streamlined to better fit the mission of West Hills, they kept thing running while trying to figure out how to run things. Rosa Norman was added to help with the front desk and support staff. Kathy Leech celebrated 20 years last year and John Good celebrates 20 years this year.

As a last order of business Andy directed those in attendance to the Pastoral Staff compensation package on page 18. There will not be any changes to the package that was agreed upon when West Hills hired Andy Hamer in August or 2019. Since there are not any changes, a vote by the congregation was not necessary. However, if there was a desire to have a discussion or questions about Andy's compensation package, Andy said he would step out of the room. There was not any indication further discussion was needed.

A motion was made to adjourn. The motion was seconded. The motion carried.

Andy closed the meeting with a prayer and benediction to which those in attendance responded with "Alleluia. Amen."

Respectfully submitted.

Greg Schuchmann

Clerk of Session

Congregational Meeting November 15, 2020

Announcements of a meeting of the congregation were made in Thursday Thoughts, on media screens and verbally during the services. The names of those being nominated were listed in a letter to the congregation. The meeting was held on November 15, 2020 following the 10:00 am service. This was a hybrid meeting with some members of the congregation attending in-person in the sanctuary and others attending remotely via ZOOM. Over 40 attend in-person and over 60 attended on-line.

Pastor and Moderator Andy Hamer called the meeting to order and stated the meeting is called for the purpose of electing Deacons, Elders, and members of the Nominating Committee and to approve the minutes from the Annual Congregation Meeting held on January 15, 2020.

Andy opened the meeting with a prayer.

A quorum was present.

Pastor Hamer reviewed the process for participants attending this hybrid meeting explaining those in person should raise their hand or speak up while those attending remotely should waive a hand or hands, be sure to un-mute themselves, and speak up.

A motion was made to accept the minutes from the Annual Congregation Meeting held on January 15, 2020. The motion was seconded. Corrections were asked for with none being offered. The minutes were approved as written by common consent.

The congregation applauded to show appreciation for the work completed by the Nominating Committee.

Pastor Hamer asked if there would be any objection to approving the entire slate of nominations. No objections were made.

Nominated to serve as Elders: Rick Mason for Spiritual Formation, Karen Lofgren-Anderson for Caregiving, Mike Overby for Finance/Support, and Paul Bates for Youth

Nominated to serve as Deacons: Debbie Johnson for Practical Needs, Laura Meyers for Stephen Ministry, Sheryl Overby for Groups, and Ginny Jansen for Caregiving Ambassadors.

Nominated to serve as Nominating Committee at Large: Chris Neil for a One-Year Term, and Trink Traudt and Ed Leach for Two Year Terms. The nominations for Deacons, Elders, and Nominating committee were submitted from committee, so a second to the motion was not necessary. Nominations from the floor were called for. There were none. The vote was called for with members being asked if they had any objections to any or all of the slate of nominations. ***There were no objections. The nominations were approved by common consent.***

A motion was made to adjourn. The motion was seconded and carried.

Andy closed the meeting with a prayer.

Respectfully submitted,

Greg Schuchmann

Clerk of Session

Staff Listing

Accompanist	Kathy Leach
Assistant to Pastor/Communications	Heather Hipp
Communications Assistant	Aleyna Baggott
Custodian	Ricardo Lopez
Facility Coordinator	John Good
Director of Church Administration	Mike Alfieri
Director of Family Ministries	Jessica Scheopner
Director of Worship & Music	Kevin Gibson
Front Desk Assistant	Rosa Norman
Maintenance	Don Good
Nursery Coordinator	Erika Hanna
Pastor	Andy Hamer
Temporary Associate Pastor	Carolyn Grice
Youth & Young Adult Coordinator	Luke Burns

Elders Holding A Position in 2020

Building & Grounds	Don Glasgow
Caregiving	Jane Loeck
Finance	Dan Travaille
Membership	Linda Schuchmann
Mission	Steve Burgess
Music & Worship	Dan O'Reilly
Children's	Beth Anderson
Youth	Julie Zimmerman
Nominating	Peggy Kelley
Personnel	Gary Anders
Spiritual Formation	Kathy Padilla
Stewardship	Matt Huck