

gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

january/february/march 2021

Building Bridges

A pastoral couple in Detroit, MI participate in the ministry of reconciliation.

By: Anna Board, editor

Detroit has the largest police chaplain corps in the country. Approximately 115 women and men care for the spiritual needs of the police and their families. Police chaplains complete a three-month training course before assuming their duties. In addition to their pastoral roles at Community Christian Fellowship Ministries, Bishop Sam Wilson and Jackey Wilson are police chaplains for the 9th precinct in Detroit, MI.

Sam and Jackey both felt called by the Holy Spirit to serve the police officers and the community in this way. Jackey was the first of the two of them to enter the chaplaincy in 2017 followed by Sam in February of 2018.

Serving as police chaplains has opened new opportunities to minister to the community. The Wilsons work with the police and an organization called Ceasefire to reach out to youth and young adults who committed crimes with firearms. The purpose of Ceasefire is to partner with these young people to stop them from committing further crimes. Sam and Jackey told of one event when the mayor, the attorney general of Detroit, a member of the FBI, and other agencies gathered to speak with 75 young men.

In addition to the community leaders, these teenagers also heard from the relatives (moms, siblings, etc.) of those whom they have shot and/or killed. Sam explains, "it's a real, in your face type of thing to get them to understand the pain and the agony of that type of crime against their own community."

Jackey and Sam are building bridges between the police and the community. This is hard work especially when there is distrust on both sides. Jackey and her son have both been racially profiled by police. They understand the tension. Jackey says, "We try to bridge the gap because a lot of the 9th precinct are Caucasian officers... we pray for unity and peace for our community as well as our members and those in the surrounding area." She explains that Community Christian Fellowship Ministries have also included chaplains and the police department in their prayer vigil.



Jackey and Sam Wilson are police chaplains for the 9th precinct.

Participants pray for the community, the youth, the churches, and for the work of Black Lives Matter.

In addition to prayer, they create other opportunities to connect members of the police department and of their congregation. This summer, Community Christian Fellowship Ministries organized a gas give-away. The congregation was able to provide 100 cars with \$30 worth of gas to members of the community. Several police officers helped direct traffic and maintain order. Jackey shared how at this event, members of the community were able to take pictures with some of the officers and the officers got to know some of the church members. Everyone was able to let their guard down.

There have been other events, like this one that bring the police and community together. Sometimes they are organized by the church, sometimes the police initiate. What is developing is a partnership. Sam says, "We're able to blend our efforts and to bear one another's burdens so to speak. The police's job is a burdensome thing, which we didn't understand for a long time."

Building bridges between the police and the community are an incredible biproduct of their work as chaplains, but what drew both Sam and Jackey to the chaplaincy was the opportunity to care for the police of the 9th precinct and their families. They visit the

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Building bridges

precinct regularly to check-in on the officers. When someone is struggling, the chaplains reach out to them with texts and visits. They call the officer's spouse and pray for them as well. Sam explains, "[The officers] go home with burdens and some of them are suicidal because of the daily pressures from their job, and their families have to bear the brunt of that as well. The prayer that we do is a big thing that the officers really appreciate."

Incredibly, the relationship between the officers and the chaplains is a reciprocal one. Jackey and Sam have received cards and visits when facing health challenges. They've been invited to weddings. When they haven't stopped by the precinct in a while, officers text the Wilsons saying that they miss them.

"the bulk of the work of pastoring is outside of the 4 walls of the church and the most impactful work many times you do in homes, outside, in businesses, and other areas in the community...Those are the things that people remember." -Bishop Wilson

God is using police chaplains, like Jackey and Sam, to change hearts. Jackey describes being a chaplain as offering the ministry of presence. As Christians, our presence should be transformative. Sam and Jackey are there to offer Jesus and his love to the officers.

Through this work, the Wilsons have also been transformed by the Holy Spirit. For Jackey, God has exposed her tendency towards being judgmental, especially regarding police officers.



Jackey and Bishop Wilson assist the gang squad officer and two other officers at an event.



Some Chaplains honored, including Jackey and Bishop Wilson, for their service at 9th Precinct by officers And commissioner

Past experiences with police had a negative impact on the way she viewed the police. Through her time as a police chaplain, Jackey is able to see them in a different light. She's learned to "give them a chance, give them an opportunity. Not everyone is bad or mean hearted...the Lord has me there to offer Christ to someone."

Sam is learning the importance of vulnerability. Only when we are vulnerable with others, can we care for them. This is difficult and risky work. Sam says, "we have to continue to be vulnerable and that comes from the power of the Holy Spirit and the peace of God that we have in our hearts." This vulnerability is what connects people from all walks of life.

Through their ministries as pastors to the community and police chaplains to the 9th precinct, Sam and Jackey are bridge builders. Christ has called them out of their church building and into the world to serve people from all walks of life. Reflecting on all that God has done through their work, Sam had this to say, "I can say that having the opportunity to serve on the chaplain core gives me the opportunity to see that the bulk of the work of pastoring is outside of the 4 walls of the church and the most impactful work many times you do in homes, outside, in businesses, and other areas in the community. Those are the things that last. Those are the things that people remember."

To learn more about organizations like Ceasefire, you can visit this website: <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/preventing-youth-violence/forum-communities/detroit>.

Sharing Stories

Three Snapshots of Ministry in the Time of COVID19

By: Anna Board, editor

God is at work. Always. Even in a pandemic! Listen in as a few pastors and leaders on their churches and God's activity.

How has the life of your congregation changed since the Spring?

"It seems like congregational life has changed in about every way possible...[we] are back to virtual only, which of course seems very strange during this Advent/Christmas season...It is so isolating and lonely for many people, especially those who are retired and no



Randy Detweiler, Holdeman Mennonite Church, Wakarusa, IN

longer connecting to others in a work setting... We have slowly adjusted to virtual meetings and are beginning to connect with some mission partners again, but it has been really hard." -Randy Detweiler, Holdeman MC

What are you learning about God during this time?

"I can confidently say we're learning God is faithful to us even during circumstances we

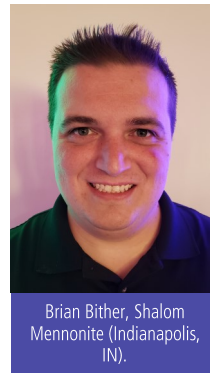
had little time to prepare for. People have stepped up to offer the ideas and skills he gave them to bless each other — a blessing from God for sure." -Stan Kauffman, Maple River Mennonite Church, Brutus, MI

What has been most difficult for you during the last eight months? As pastors? As a congregation?

Detweiler: *"I think the most difficult thing is the loss of connection and physical presence and physical touch. As pastors, it is so hard to do pastoral care over the phone or to not be able to connect with people who are in the hospital or other care facilities. As a congregation, it is hard to stay connected with people that you no longer see on a regular basis. There are some people that I have not seen in-person for many months—we have never done church this way before!"*

Where are you seeing glimpses of God's hand at work in your congregation and in your community?

"I have noticed a deep yearning to spend time in prayer together, which has brought this important Christian discipline into the



Brian Bither, Shalom Mennonite (Indianapolis, IN).

spotlight as the center of our community life...In addition to this, many individuals have stepped up in "caring" roles — serving as deacons or caregivers or even friends — and have gone out of their way to text, call, send mail, or make their support known to those who are struggling... Altogether, it seems that God has been stirring many hearts to find hope in God and one another in a difficult time like this." - Brian Bither, Shalom Mennonite Church, Indianapolis, IN.

Going into 2021, what prayers do you have for your congregation?

Kauffman: *"We are praying that we will be able to safely resume community dinners and VBS by June and that until then God will give us opportunities to continue serving one another and new ideas to serve our neighbors."*

Detweiler: *"We are going through a pastoral transition in the midst of a pandemic, and we know that this will mean big changes, and more opportunities for people to take leadership roles... I pray too that the end of the pandemic will come sooner, rather than later, and that as we move back toward congregational life there will be renewed energy and enthusiasm for the ways we can connect with our community again. I pray that 'absence will make our hearts grow fonder,' not start new habits or patterns that continue to isolate and separate us for the years to come."*

God is present. God continues to beckon Christ-followers to draw near to God and to their neighbors. Pray for these congregations and for all of us that we can join God in God's work. Always .



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14TH

CONFERENCE SUNDAY

INFO AT IM.MENNONITE.NET

THE SECOND ANNUAL
CONFERENCE SUNDAY IS
HAPPENING FEB. 14th.
Info and Resources are on
the conference website.

journeying with our pastors



Dan Miller, IMMC pastor, reflects on the importance of spiritual practices.

I want to express appreciation for the ways you have adapted during this time of COVID-19. It's a privilege to be aware of and celebrate the many efforts that are taking place in IMMC congregations.

I know it's been difficult and it's not going to get any easier right away in 2021; although there are hopes that the vaccines will help to lessen the severity of cases and then decrease the numbers of cases.

We are all stretched. We are stressed and not functioning at our best. We don't need anything more to think about. And yet, this is a situation we have not faced before and so what we just normally do is not going to be adequate. So I wonder if it is possible to claim just a little space to think outside the box. To open, again, to the Spirit's inspiration. I'm not saying every church should get busy with their own effort.

First, remain grounded in the grace and gifts of God. Do not be overwhelmed by the things going on around you. But explore. I encourage conversations with those in your community. Are there ways to work together? Are there ways that connect with those that are already doing something, to strengthen their efforts? Are there ways we can strengthen agencies working to address the inequities? Recovery, even after the pandemic, will continue for some time. Families who have lost wage-earners will be dealing with this for years.

I trust the spirit of God is at work in and through you, as individuals and as a congregation. The spirit will continue to guide you through these challenging coming months. I look forward to hearing more about how the spirit is inspiring and transforming you.

ministry transitions

Beginnings & Endings

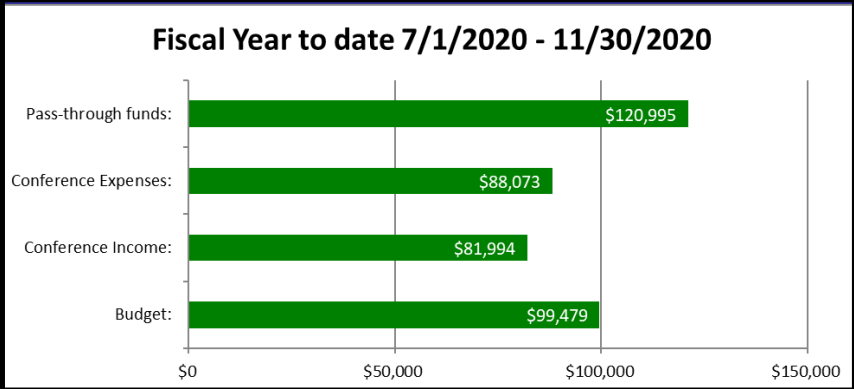


Velma Swartz above, began as interim Pastor of Senior Ministries at Waterford Mennonite, December 3, 2020.September 13th.



Mark Stahl, above, concluded his ministry at Parkview Mennonite, Kokomo, IN, December 31, 2020.

financial report



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im.mennonite.net/gospel-evangel



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