



Willowdale
Chapel

*2016-17
Annual Report*

Dear Willowdale ...

In my household these days, we have both mature graduates and new initiates. Young adults with caps and gowns, and young children with skinned knees and the resultant frowns. They represent the bookends of education—at least the formal kind. But one thing they have in common: an irrepressible urge to learn and grow.

They get bored easily. They crave new information and experiences. And even if the learning requires pain, they willingly pay the price. The older ones sign up for challenging courses financed with painful student loans. The young ones stand on chairs, jump off stairs, and move toward scissors like moths to a flame.


I hope they grow wiser.

I also hope they never change. Because active learning is not only a core value of our church, but of life as God intended it to be lived.

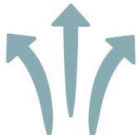
As a church family, we recently concluded The Year of Active Learning. We did two semesters of rigorous study on the Sermon on the Mount, a year-long practicum on Race Relations, and a short course in Latin (*Sola*). Some lessons were hard. Some moments were painful. And we didn't always get along with our classmates.

But we persevered and we grew. And God continued to pour out his blessing and favor. We may not have gotten straight As, but I'm sure we made the Deity's List. (Frankly, I think we're the Teacher's pet.) When it was all said and done, it was another banner year at Willowdale, to the glory of God. Take a look at the report card and celebrate your Spirit-empowered accomplishments!

For Your Progress and Joy in the Faith (Philippians 1:25),
Pastor Greg



Jesus to know you, then know you more



Upward: Loving God

Everything we do as a church ultimately points to God. Upward is the ultimate arrow; we love because he first loved us. Our love points up because His first pointed down!

But when we distinguish loving God from the other aspects of our mission, we tend to think of the Word, worship, and prayer—the very heartbeat of our church.

The Bible is always the primary text at Willowdale Chapel, and active learning boils down to metabolizing God's Word into faith and action. It's about learning the Bible in such a way that it shapes our lives.

This year, we dug into some of the Bible's most beautiful and challenging teachings, from the Beatitudes to the Lord's Prayer to what it means to "seek first the kingdom."

Other expressions of loving God include ...

• **STARTING POINT:** Talk about life-changing Bible study—numerous people took this course in the basics of the faith and several were baptized afterward. One person listened to the entire Bible on audio, prompted by this basic introduction to Christianity. And we won't soon forget Emma Yeager's story about her move from "quite anti-Jesus" to an enthusiastic student of God's Word. (She has four Bibles, and even writes in them. "You're allowed to do that!")

"I chose Starting Point to strengthen my faith. Yet it did more than that. Starting Point taught me the idea of being saved through faith alone; 31 years and never once had I heard this!" —Lauren

And we thank God continually because when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. —1 Thessalonians 2:13

• **BAPTISM:** We saw 45 people respond to the gospel and declare their love for God by being baptized this year.

“Walking into Willowdale ten weeks ago was nothing short of a blessing. I am on a new journey which involves allowing the Lord to guide me, as I trust in his path and live my life as he intends. I am letting go today of anger, past sins, despair, sadness, loneliness, selfishness, and hurtfulness, and opening up my body and soul to the Lord our God. Today is where I am meant to be, and I embrace this baptism and renewal of self. I am in your hands, Lord.”

—Stephanie

• **PRAYER:** We gathered on New Year’s Day with the theme of “Pray First.” We lifted up Willowdale’s prayer concerns and those of other local churches as well. We also exchanged personal requests and prayed for each other individually that day. Later in the spring, we convened eight local churches at Penn Township Park to intercede on the **National Day of Prayer**. Thanks, point leader Ilana Shipe, for initiating this event!

• **WE LIFT YOU UP:** Our worship team’s first full-length album was released on Ash Wednesday with great music for the Easter season.

• **SPANGLISH:** This year, we held our first bilingual song service, led by our Friday-night worship team.

• **CHRISTMAS:** We expanded to eight Christmas Eve services across both campuses, enabling us to accommodate the largest crowd in the church’s history. Our Tech and Communications team also enabled us to send video greetings to the congregation on Christmas Day.

• **HOLY WEEK:** We held our first Maundy Thursday service, done Tenebrae-style, commemorating the Last Supper. This was followed by a Good Friday experience at Jennersville, renewed and refreshed by some of the artists in our congregation. Then, on Easter Sunday, we shared the gospel of the resurrected Christ and saw 25 people baptized.



• **CELEBRATING GENEROSITY:** And here's a huge victory that properly belongs under Loving God: Because you love God enough to invest generously in his work, we have not only successfully funded all our ministries, but as of this month, Willowdale Chapel is now 100-percent debt free.

This represents the successful completion of our **Shine Like Stars** campaign launched in the spring of 2013. At that time we envisioned building our second-floor children's space and expanding our worship center, starting a new nonprofit—**The Constellation Network**—establishing a second church site, and paying off our mortgage.

But what we did not know at the time is that our second site would actually be the adoption of **Living Faith Community Church** in Jennersville and the assumption of their \$1.8-million debt. So instead of paying off \$2.4 million in existing Kennett debt, we added Jennersville and went to \$4.2 million in total debt. Yet four years later we are completely debt free in both locations. By God's grace we've done all we set out to do.

This is the only race worth running. I've run hard right to the finish, believed all the way. All that's left now is the shouting—God's applause! Depend on it, he's an honest judge. He'll do right not only by me, but by everyone eager for his coming.

—2 Timothy 4:6-8, *The Message*



Inward: Loving Each Other

Willowdale has a wonderful reputation for being a loving church family. Just a couple of weeks ago a newcomer expressed how special it was just to be noticed here. They had tried other churches, but came and went with no real contact. But here they experienced friendly greetings, wi-five, and a follow-up phone call. Here they sensed that people actually cared. (They were right!)

In fact, Connections is an area of ministry to which we've given renewed attention this year. We not only want people to be noticed, but also known and needed. So we rebuilt our process for guiding people "from parking lot to personal connection," trying to be as personal and purposeful as we can until people have friends in a small group or ministry team.

We also added food in the lobby about once a month, just to give people more of a reason to mingle and meet each other.

But that's just the beginning of this church family's love ...

• **NEXT GEN TEAM:** When we think of the love of a family, most of our minds go immediately to our children. And this church has a quiver full of them! Did you know that we minister to over 600 children and youth each week? That's a lot of lives to invest in!

• **STICKY FAITH** is a book, concept, and philosophy of ministry championed by the Fuller Youth Institute that melds biblical insights with the latest research on what makes faith stick in the younger generation. Our Next Gen Team is taking part in a Sticky Faith cohort, a year-long training program that is refining our approach to children's and

The word has gotten around. Your lives are echoing the Master's Word, not only in the provinces but all over the place. The news of your faith in God is out. We don't even have to say anything anymore—you're the message!

People come up and tell us how you received us with open arms, how you deserted the dead idols of your old life so you could embrace and serve God, the true God. They marvel at how expectantly you await the arrival of his Son, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescued us from certain doom.

—1 Thessalonians 1:8-10, *The Message*

youth ministry. We're confident that this approach, combined with our team of leaders, will be a game-changer for church and community.

• **CARE MINISTRIES** at Willowdale are undergoing tremendous development. Besides the stellar work of our deacons, who serve so many individuals, we have flagship ministries like **Celebrate Recovery**, **Re|engage** and **Special Needs**, which bring love to people in and outside the church.

Every week these ministries make a difference in individuals, marriages, and families. And each of these ministries at Willowdale has gained quite a reputation regionally and even nationally. The headquarters of CR, Re|engage, and Joni & Friends know Willowdale and consider us a leader and model for other churches. As the national leaders of Re|engage recently expressed, "For us, you are *the* church in the Northeast."

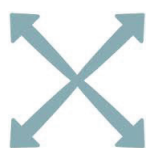
Care Fund Update

Our deacon team provided \$88,874 worth of tangible benevolence care to individuals and families over the last year, including 600 hours of individual and family counseling. We love being able to love in this way.

Additionally this year ...

- **RESCUE ACADEMY**, an online training program for leaders and volunteers has been piloted, and will be brought to a much larger audience in the months ahead.
- **RE|COMPREMETERSE**, the Spanish-language version of Re|engage was launched, along with Re|charge, a group for people who've already been through Re|engage and want a refresher.
- New support groups were added at **CELEBRATE RECOVERY** and in our church's group ministry in general, including one for parents of LGBT children.
- **RUN FOR RECOVERY**, our first-ever 5K race, was held last fall to spread the word about CR.
- **SPECIAL NEEDS**, in addition to its regular ministry activities, hosted a production of *Seussical*—starring people with special needs—directed by Karalyn Joseph. And more behind the scenes, our ministry partnered with local agencies to host training events and financial seminars for families navigating the complexities of their situation.
- **LISTENING AND LEARNING:** And let's not forget another aspect of loving one another that we practiced intentionally this year: listening and learning. Few things communicate love better. Over 100 people took part in **Conversations About Race**, a four-session discussion held in various homes. Another group took a bus tour called **The African American Experience**. And over three months' time, we heard testimonies from our members who have Latino, African and Asian heritage.





Outward: Loving the World

The love of God, poured into our hearts, finds its practical end as it flows to others. God has made us agents of reconciliation and restoration, and we love to find new ways to fulfill our calling.

• **MOPS:** Going into the ministry year we had 79 women registered for MOPs (Mothers of Preschoolers) which was held only at the Kennett Campus. We were so full—with limited space to invite new guests—that our team decided to plant a new program in Jennersville. The leadership team divided and conquered, creating a thriving new ministry that reached 40 additional women.

“I started attending MOPs because my neighbor invited me. I feel such gratitude to MOPs for helping me be a better wife, mom, and friend. Even more amazing, I became a Christian this year and now attend Willowdale on Sundays too.”

“I grew up in a church but had really stepped away from my faith as I she got older. But I was invited to MOPs and this year has been instrumental in my faith and that of my family. We’ve been coming to Willowdale for the last month and have experienced community and a sense of belonging here.”

“This was my second year of MOPS and I’m now in a Starting Point group. I feel like I’m on a journey back to God and making leaps forward in my faith.”

• **PROJECT 938:** Speaking of planting a new ministry, Marc Lucenius is following a calling he has felt for 20 years and is planting a new church in West Chester. He and a team of about 60 people are laying the groundwork for a grand opening in the coming year.

• **LINCOLN UNIVERSITY:** And speaking of groundwork, Larry Redmond joined our team and has been preparing the way for a campus ministry at Lincoln University. This year Willowdalers hosted a tailgating party at Homecoming; attended various cultural functions; and welcomed Rev. Frederick Faison to preach in our church on a Sunday morning.

• **SPANGLISH** also saw its beginning this year, as Gustavo Castaneda and his team welcomed 40-80 people each Friday evening for a meal and worship in both English and Spanish.

• **GIVE|SERVE|RESTORE**, sponsored by The Constellation Network, involved 21 churches this year in a Lenten season of service. Together we did countless hours of serving and raised over \$50,000 to help Casa Youth Advocates expand their work into Chester County, which will benefit where hundreds of foster children. will benefit.

• **CLUBHOUSE OUTREACH:** One of the unique features of our children's ministry is how it embodies our mission. From inviting their friends to working with global partners, Clubhouse is active in loving the world—and Jesus is working through them to restore lives.

This year Clubhouse challenged kids on certain weekends to invite their friends for a sleepover and then bring them to church for events like Pajamas and PopTarts. It was a big hit!

They also started a new relationship with **Urban Promise** in Wilmington, having onsite visits and skype calls to make new friends with people different from themselves.

And the **K-1 Class**, through their generous giving, raised enough money to free their 18th slave through IJM. (It costs about \$500 to free one person from human trafficking, so that's \$9,000—mostly in loose change—given by our kids over the years.)



Our Team

We can't end an annual report without thanking God for the team he has put together, the team that is Willowdale Chapel.

From our early-morning prayer warriors to our generous givers to our hundreds and hundreds of volunteers, we accomplish our Love Mission because we worship and serve together. God has been well-pleased to use the likes of us to advance his kingdom, and we are so grateful. We think of our church as a team of owner-operators, as a guild of artisans working together in the love business. We praise God and thank you for making Willowdale such a wonderful church.

We don't take for granted either that we have been well led by godly elders, by deacons who embody servanthood, and by a passionate staff who "strive side by side for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27).

"I have to send you a quick email about what I'm overhearing in the office. Can I just tell you how amazing it is to hear the WipeOut registration women sharing their stories? The culture of WipeOut epitomizes what it means to be the church—I love being a part of God's work!" —Heather Hood

When it comes to our staff, God did "exceeding abundantly beyond what we could ask or imagine" in building up our staff this last year. While we're always thankful for the long-term veterans on our team, we're especially grateful this year for so many newcomers in a season of change.

We have a dynamic new Next Gen Team featuring people like Jodi Byrne, Tori Hoff, Nick Hammons and Doug Walker. Ben Haines has added so much strength and value as our technical director. Larry Redmond is our first African American pastor, opening up new horizons for our church. And our new Executive Director, Kathy Williams, is already a difference-maker.

We believe we're stronger than ever, which means God must have amazing things in store for the years ahead. Let's keep in step with the Spirit and keep the momentum going!



Financials

FY 2017

projected through July 31

Ministry Fund: \$3,219,000

Building Fund: \$71,000

Care Fund: \$72,000

Total Giving: \$3,362,000

Total Givers: 613 (individuals and families)

Total Expenditures: \$3,140,000*

*Total expenditures minus the mortgage payoff, which was completed in June with approximately \$200,000 from reserves. We are now debt free!

FY 2018 BUDGET

\$3,290,000

This represents a flat budget compared to FY 2017. The new budget will be finalized and released to the congregation by July 11.

Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit!

No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!

—*Hebrews 12:1-3, The Message*

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