


December 11, 2020


«First_» «Last_»
«Street»
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Dear «First_»,

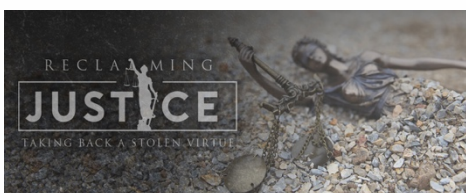


In early-mid March of this year, my wife and I celebrated our 20th anniversary from a hot air balloon. It is a beautiful place - to be in the early morning air, floating silently over the still farmlands of Delaware. We could all use a day there. It's far away from the breaking news of a spreading virus, travel disruptions, riots and panic. And although I haven't experienced tranquility quite like that at any other time this year, I have been blessed to see God *lift us* in some beautiful ways through 2020.

God has certainly helped our Watered Gardens team rise above fear. When we returned from that east coast trip in March, social distancing seemed less a recommendation of the CDC and more like an issue of immediate life or death. That affected Steven who was sitting on the steps at our Outreach Center on Kentucky Avenue. Tears came to his eyes as he shared, "I don't know if we'll ever be able to be near people again, to hug one another." I asked if I could sit with him, put my hand on his shoulder and pray. Closeness is vital for those who've been ostracized and rejected for much of their lives and although we've worked hard in many ways to increase social distance, more importantly, our team has boldly embraced people when it was called for. A weeping mom, a grieving aunt, and one woman who had a meltdown in the middle of our thrift store are a few I can recall who needed more than an elbow bump from behind a mask. **I'm incredibly proud to be working alongside a bold team of people who realize the weighty calling of Christians to sacrifice** and who have faithfully upheld our ministry's core values of Relationship, Redemption, Hope and Human Dignity through it all.



Early on, 46% of our more vulnerable volunteers took a wise hiatus leaving a majority to press on serving those in need. And although we have surfed the same waves of operational modification like every other nonprofit, I'm glad to report that we never stopped meeting the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter for those who were without. **In fact, we've met more needs this year than in any year past.** We even expanded our services in unique ways to include a temporary Covid-19 quarantine shelter, a meal delivery service through our Neighbor Connect program for the elderly quarantined at home and our Rescue Teams visited homeless people in camps praying for them but also providing supplies and education to stem the spread of disease.



We're stretching in other ways, too. Meals are split between outdoor and indoor to increase spacing. Chapel times are spaced with extra seating. Temps are checked at the door. Tarps went up between rows of beds. Early on, we even ordered cases of micron filters for our air systems at each campus to decrease the risk of transmission. These continue to be changed out weekly. We thank God that we've

only had four positive cases among our residents and students this year and they've all recovered.

It's been a blended year of both postponement and progress. Unfortunately, **our True Charity Summit, *Reclaiming Justice*, had to find a new date in 2021.** Please visit truecharity.us/summit and mark your calendars for May 18-19 at Missouri Southern State University for this important conference on restorative, biblical justice. Although we had to postpone this event, our True Charity Initiative has continued to progress reaching leaders in 32 states with our online education, we've scheduled True Charity Foundation Workshops in two of twenty-four targeted communities where we plan to launch community initiatives and we recently launched a True Charity Network that currently has twelve-member organizations. Through our education, trainings and consultation, **we're tying real compassion to real results.**

Also noteworthy in 2020, **we opened our respite unit in partnership with Mercy Hospital.** This distinct space in our Outreach Center is outfitted with six private hospital beds renovated to provide restful recovery for anyone who is homeless and discharging after a surgery or illness.



This new ministry serves both our hospital system and those who need a place to finish healing. **We also opened our shelter for moms and children in June of this year. The Washington Family Hope Center** has an indoor and outdoor playground, a daycare and learning center and six family rooms that currently provide shelter and much more for six moms and eighteen children. Both of these projects are incredible additions to our community, meeting needs previously unaddressed. Progress!

Although we didn't postpone our annual banquet, it underwent great revision. Rather than gather six-hundred people under one roof for our Evening of Hope gala, we televised it instead. With the help of our TV stations, we pre-recorded the event, affording us the opportunity to share virtual tours and multiple testimonies of lives being touched by the ministry of Watered Gardens. This event along with our annual report can be viewed from the comfort of your home today. Just go to wateredgardens.org/year-in-review and you'll find both the Evening of Hope presentation and the report. These will inform you of the great work happening at our Worth Shop, our Center for Virtue and Work, Forge and you'll learn more about the happenings at our Outreach Center and Washington Family Hope Center as well as our True Charity Initiative.

This year has had many challenges, but I am thankful to God for His provision and grace that has come in part, through your prayers and support. He has lifted us far above fear, confusion and division instead empowering us with **“all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” Rom 15:13.** Thank you for continuing to pray and support the mission. This difficult year is almost over and I'm confident that your continued prayers and support will carry us over the hurdles of 2021.

Please keep in mind ways to continue that support may be through signing up at wateredgardens.org/volunteer or making a year-end gift to the mission at wateredgardens.org/give. At that link, you'll also find information regarding **special tax deduction opportunities** for individuals and businesses afforded by the CARES Act. Please take advantage of that.



We celebrated our 20th ministry anniversary June 1st of 2020. Much has changed but the basics haven't. We continue, as we always have, serving the Church with all we've got with the great hope of realizing our vision - a Christian community boldly engaging the homeless and poor relationally, responsibly and compassionately. Thank you for embracing that vision with us. I pray the Lord bless the remainder of your year and the one to come.



James Whitford
Co-Founder and Executive Director

P.S. Often, people come by the Outreach Center on New Year's Eve to bring a year-end gift and get a tour. If you'd like to come by this year, I'll be at the Washington Family Hope Center and would love to show you around.