

Children's Winter Garden with White Wing School - Annual Report

Board Members: Katie Osborn (Co-Chair), Jim Bonvouloir (Treasurer), David Hudson, Kim Desmarais (Secretary), Gillian Hinkle (Co-Chair), Barbara Halevi, Marcie Shoneman, Donna Dye, Chris Clanin (Director), Allison Palm (UUCN, Executive Director/Minister)

Overview: 2016-2017 brought significant changes to the White Wing School. In June 2016, the school merged with the Children's Winter Garden, bringing together two of the cities longest running preschools. The goal of all involved was to combine the best of each school. Chris Clanin, former director of the Children's Winter Garden was installed as the new director of the combined school. Gillian Hinkle, who had past experience on the White Wing School board, and Katie Osborne, who served as prior Children's Winter Garden board member, were installed as board co-chairs to ensure a balanced leadership.

The new combined board met bi-weekly from June through August. Often meetings would go past 10pm; members from both schools were determined and dedicated to the idea that success would be found for everyone. Details that needed to be addressed included: moving equipment; combining faculty; reviewing and combining curriculum, handbooks, and policies; and enrolling students.

The school faced significant hurdles in the beginning as there were staff and families who struggled with the change. We lost three long time White Wing School teachers, and a few families from each school. In the fall, the school struggled to meet the minimal enrollment required to run successfully. Once the school year began it was clear why those who remained were so dedicated to the success of the school. The board members, staff, and families present in the 2016-2017 school year brought with them an energy and positivity that has allowed us to be incredibly successful.

The teachers and office staff have truly bonded. It is not unusual to arrive at the preschool in afternoon or evening and find that teachers preparing their classrooms with special art work or activity centers. Many of these teachers had not experienced a situation where a community recognizes education, and those who teach, as valuable. Previously they had been thought of as tenants, not part of a community. They are buoyed by the support they feel from this church. As a result their commitment, dedication and love they feel for this community has grown.

Happiness has become a contagion at the Children's Winter Garden with White Wing School. The school is growing, business process and sustainability are being addressed successfully, and enrollment is up. Last September we struggled to meet a minimal enrollment of 60 students. This year we already have 65 students enrolled and expect enrollment to continue to grow through the summer.

We are incredibly fortunate to have had a very dedicated board of directors this year. Three church members will be stepping down in June who have been instrumental in this successful transition; Dave Hudson, Donna Dye, and Jim Bonvouloir. They should be recognized for the extraordinary amount of time and energy they dedicated this past year.

In 2017-2018 workload will be significantly less but continued work towards refining best practices is a must. The board and staff have worked together to make many changes that ensure the progress which has been made will continue. These changes will need to be reviewed for efficacy and codified into sustainable action plans in 2017-2018.