SLOWING THE SPREAD OF HOMELESSNESS
To our wonderful supporters:

In a traditional year, our annual report would measure how well Guiding Light did on our key performance indicators. We would share success stories from the men in our Recovery and Back to Work programs, spotlighting those living in Iron House, our sober-living community. We would highlight the employment wins from The Job Post, our social enterprise that supports our work of re-engagement. And we would demonstrate how we have put the dollars you have entrusted to us to good use throughout our programs.

But fiscal 2020 has been anything but a traditional year—and has required a very nontraditional response from Guiding Light.

In March of last year, cases of COVID-19 began spiking in Kent County, and West Michigan reported the first deaths from this novel coronavirus. Our governor made the decision to lock down our state in an effort to halt the spread. Guiding Light, fearing the devastating impact the virus could have on those experiencing homelessness in the Heartside community, made the decision to loan our facility at 255 Division to the Kent County Health Department.

The choice was really a simple one. We recognized an urgent need and, because Guiding Light had the resources, we responded.

So did our community. The public health experts quickly converted our facility into a temporary isolation center. The other nonprofits who support Heartside came together to ensure those experiencing homelessness knew about the transformation. And our wonderful donors responded generously, enabling us to transition our clients and programming safely off-site without missing a beat.

Throughout our more than 90-year history, Guiding Light has pivoted our programming and services to respond to emerging needs. When we first opened our doors in 1929, we were a combination street church and thrift store. Over the subsequent years, we offered Bible classes, youth programs, church planting and gospel services. We served meals to the hungry and provided overnight shelter for those in need.
As we move further into fiscal 2021, Guiding Light continues to partner with other nonprofits serving Heartside to identify and address the immediate needs of our community. That has meant increased food assistance. It has also meant more donations of the basics: warm coats, gloves and hats, clean underwear and pajamas, toothbrushes, shampoo and deodorant.

And it has meant collaborating with public and private agencies to rent, equip and staff another downtown location to provide safe overnight stays and a daily warming shelter so that no one in our community who wants a warm bed for the night will be turned away.

No one.

There was no playbook for responding to a global pandemic, so we have created one that has been guided by our love of Christ, our commitment to Heartside and its residents, and to our founding principles. This is so clear in Matthew 25:40, which says “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ ”

As I said at the beginning of this letter, this has been anything but a traditional year. I’m fairly certain the same will be true of the year ahead. I am guided by my faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, by the uplifting redemption stories of those we serve and by the tremendous need in our community. I am so grateful for the support of our Board of Directors, who have rallied behind each of our pivots. I deeply value the work of our incredible team, who have found new and creative ways to keep going—and to keep our clients going—despite these difficult times. And I very much appreciate all the donors who have given so generously to support Guiding Light in this most unusual of years.

Blessings to each of you,

Stuart Ray, Executive Director

As you know, for the past decade, Guiding Light moved away from being a traditional mission. Instead, we have focused our efforts on rescue, recovery and re-engagement programs that give men living on the margins of society a hand up rather than a handout. We established rigorous standards for our Recovery and Back to Work programs, demanding a lot of those who come to us, but equally equipping them with the tools they need to bring real and lasting change. Life skills courses. Debt repayment and budgeting support. Resumé building and job hunting assistance. Tangible things like bus passes, work boots, tools and uniforms. Invaluable things like spiritual coaches, support groups and the chance to build—or rebuild—a relationship with Jesus Christ.

We carried this laser focus into the pandemic—and then, like so many organizations, we pivoted. We watched as nearly 1.1 million Michiganders lost their jobs at the beginning of the pandemic as hundreds of businesses closed their doors—and failed to reopen. We worried over the statistics—Michigan alcohol sales increased more than 40% during the pandemic. Marijuana sales more than doubled. Mental health experts in Kent County predict suicides will increase 25% in the coming year. Housing experts predict a tsunami of evictions once the federal moratorium ends.

We watched as a tent city grew in Heartside Park—and grew and grew during fall 2020. We shivered at the predictions of a shortage of more than 100 beds for those seeking overnight shelter during the winter ahead.

And we decided, as we have done throughout our history, to help those who need it most. We continue to offer and support our four program pillars: Recovery, Back to Work, Iron House and The Job Post. We believe our core programs will be more relevant than ever when the pandemic is over.

But we have expanded our focus because the pandemic is still with us. Because the needs of our community are far different—and far greater—than what our current programming could deliver. Because our Heartside neighbors are in peril.
INTRODUCTION & LEADERSHIP

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Dawn Buursma, Director, Homestead Realty
Rev. Tim Wilson, Director, South Harbor Church
Kyle Hinton, Director, New Visions Counseling
Eric Williams, Director, United Methodist Community House

In all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28 NIV
After decades of severe alcoholism and drug addiction left him feeling hopeless, Jimmy came to Guiding Light seeking an end to his active addiction, but ended up achieving so much more.

The 43-year-old was born in Flint in a typical two-parent, American middle-class home. Even at a young age, he recalls warning signs that his relationship with alcohol was far from normal.

“I remember when I was really young, I would take water, or iced tea, and fill up my dad’s empty beer cans, and my friends and I would play and pretend like we were drinking,” Jimmy recalled. “So even at this super young age I had this impression that drinking was cool.

“The first time I remember being drunk was on my 12th birthday. I remember drinking a pint of Southern Comfort and getting sick as a dog—and I remember thinking ‘I am absolutely going to do this again.’”

Jimmy’s infatuation with alcohol led to experimentation with other drugs. He was introduced to cocaine at 16 and started smoking marijuana every day. His relationship with drugs and alcohol began to take a more ominous shift when he turned 21.

“I could start going out to the bars, I would only drink on the weekends, but it slowly turned into, you know, ‘thirsty Thursdays and Wednesdays,’” he said. “I slowly started calling into work here and there, and then I lost my first job.”
Through his 20s, Jimmy's life became more unmanageable. He would lose several more jobs and received two DUIs in quick succession at age 23. Although he didn't see it yet, the signs that he had the makings of a serious problem on his hands were becoming ever more apparent.

“In hindsight, it’s easy to look back and see that progression of my alcoholism but at the time I didn’t have a clue,” he explained. “I remember I would tell myself things like ‘I’m not going to drink this weekend’ or ‘I’m only going to have two beers,’ and I would just blow that right out of the water, time and time and time again. Thinking back on it, I had no self-control.”

During this time, Jimmy began what would become a 14-year relationship, marriage and eventual divorce that he would describe, in retrospect, as incredibly toxic.

“As my alcoholism was growing through that whole process, it got worse and worse,” he said. “That whole relationship took up the majority of my 20s and 30s – and it was all bad.” Although his recollection of this period is largely “a blur,” Jimmy does remember a few times through either marriage counseling or court-ordered substance abuse therapy when he began to come to terms with the reality he might have an issue with addiction. Before coming to Guiding Light, he recalled a few genuine attempts at getting sober, but he said they all went terribly because he never truly wanted it for himself.

“Every time I tried to quit drinking it wasn’t because I wanted to,” he explained. “It was because I wanted someone else to be happy.”

“I was an alcoholic, there was no doubt about it. Everything that I did in my life revolved around alcohol at that point. I wouldn’t go to dinner if they didn’t serve alcohol, and even if they did, I would have six or eight drinks before we left and then have the two ‘normal’ drinks there. That started to catch up to me and people started to realize I had a problem.”

Jimmy described his late 30s as the “beginning of the end” of his life as an active alcoholic. He started to notice serious health problems related to his drinking and couldn’t go a day without experiencing physical pain and withdrawal symptoms. After a 14-day vodka-fueled bender, fearing he would lose his job, Jimmy decided to try to quit drinking by himself, alone in his apartment.

That’s when he had a heart attack.

“I tried to detox myself, knowing that I had to quit drinking,” he explained. “And I went into shock or something. I spent a little time in the hospital, and that didn’t stop me either. When I came out of the hospital, four days later, I was drinking and doing cocaine again.” It just goes to illustrate how dangerous late-stage alcoholism can be. Even a heart attack wasn’t the wake-up call Jimmy needed.

He lost his job and, in 2017, checked himself into his first substance-abuse program for 14 days. But within hours of leaving, he found himself at the liquor store again purchasing a bottle of vodka. This pattern would repeat itself for another two years, with Jimmy convincing himself he could somehow live as a “functioning” alcoholic – until his house was in foreclosure and he was physically incapable of putting the booze down.

On July 3, 2019, Jimmy decided he had enough and found himself at the doors of 255 Division Avenue South in downtown Grand Rapids, asking for admittance into the Guiding Light Recovery program.

“Here I am, I’m losing everything in my life, and I still couldn’t stop drinking. I was contemplating suicide. It was the absolute worst place I had ever been in my life.”
"I can remember feeling so destitute, so resigned and so hopeless," Jimmy recalled. "Really, I just remember being so afraid of being sober. I didn’t know anybody who was sober. I didn’t really want to know anyone that was sober. I was alone, and that’s really the best word to describe how I felt when I came in, very alone."

Jimmy still remembers the first conversation he had with Program Director Brian Elve. "I remember crying, I remember saying things like ‘I’m a good person’ and Brian snapping back at me asking ‘but are you?’ Just flat out like that, and that was the first time I ever had to question that," he recalled. "And I couldn’t say yes."

Coming to Guiding Light was one of the first times Jimmy had truly been challenged to take personal responsibility and come to terms with himself as he really was. One of the aspects that differentiates Guiding Light’s Recovery program from others is the fundamentally different way staff scrutinizes and treats issues of addiction. Guiding Light’s philosophy surrounding a man’s compulsion to abuse drugs and alcohol is that it is not just a physical and mental sickness, but a spiritual malady as well. We believe men struggling with addiction need time to heal in all aspects of their lives, in their mind, body and spirit.

“This is the third treatment program I’ve been in, and I think what sets it apart is that everything here is driven by you,” he said. “You’re not just being herded from one room into another, the responsibility to make a new life for yourself is placed on you.”

Today, Jimmy has been sober for more than a year and a half. He has been working at a great-paying job for more than a year and has yet to miss a single day of work. He has his own apartment at Iron House, Guiding Light’s sober living community in Kentwood, where he lives with the brothers who went through the Recovery program with him.

Like countless others whose lives have been saved by this program, Jimmy is living a life he never once thought was possible. He has a renewed relationship with God, a life of stability, tranquility and hope.

“Who would think that I could have this life today?” he said.
SOURCES OF REVENUE

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<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
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ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

- Corporations: 23%
- Foundations: 5%
- Earned Income: 26%
- Individuals: 45%
Guiding Light faced the critical challenges of 2020 head-on.

It was a difficult year for all of us at Guiding Light, as it was for people around the world. The pandemic and the resulting economic downturn hit our community hard.

The dangerous health issues raised by the coronavirus forced us to completely re-think our approach to the way we serve our clients. The financial downturn and intense emotional and mental toll of the pandemic made these challenges even more difficult.

Even as COVID-19 spread, tent cities appeared not far from our facility. When the health and financial calamities worsened and deepened, our management team realized it would require extraordinary work to meet the unprecedented situation. We had to devise and implement ways to manage the immediate demand for safety, shelter, and other basic human services without negatively impacting any of our existing programs or services.
We started with those who had the greatest need.

We took several steps to help our most-vulnerable communities. In particular, we worked with other local organizations and governmental units to protect and help at-risk residents of the Heartside neighborhood of Grand Rapids.

Beginning March 28, we loaned our facility at 255 S. Division Ave. to Kent County for use as a COVID-19 isolation center. With two dozen private rooms, a bunk area and large chapel, the facility can accommodate up to 60 people. Supplied with medical equipment and staffed by healthcare personnel, it helped us serve those who contracted the virus while experiencing homelessness—many of whom struggle with mental health issues, poor sanitation, and a lack of social distancing and other protections.

By late summer, we were re-focusing on the essentials—food and shelter—to meet the pressing, immediate demand in our community, outside of our standard intensive and long-term programming.

As West Michigan prepared for winter, we addressed the tent cities by leading a coalition of community, nonprofit and business leaders to provide safe emergency shelter for those experiencing homelessness in Heartside.

In alliance with Mel Trotter Ministries, we worked with the City of Grand Rapids and Kris Elliott of Evergreen Companies to lease space at 250 Ionia Ave. SW. It served as a warming center and overnight accommodations for up to 100 adults.

How we stayed on the right path.

Like everyone, we were forced by the pandemic to face tough realities, alter plans, and change traditions. But our leadership stayed focused on the rescue, recovery and re-engagement programs that are the heart of our mission.

We implemented and strictly followed health protocols and made a number of other critical decisions to ensure safety.

We moved all of the men in the Recovery program to Iron House, our sober-living apartments. And we offered men in the Back to Work program who lacked alternate accommodations the option of being temporarily housed elsewhere.
We relied on technology, too, using video conferencing for critical group meetings and for one-on-one support. This enabled men to stay connected to vital resources while maintaining safe physical distancing.

While we continued our vital one-on-one case management, we kept programming and classes going via limited staff and through virtual events and meetings. We also held virtual Spiritual Engagement Sessions. We even delivered Easter meals to everyone in the program.

We met the challenge, together.

Thanks to our exceptional leadership, staff, and the support of people like you, we took the critical steps needed to keep our existing clients safe from COVID-19 even as we met an escalating need for our resources and support.

In fact, by implementing and following strict protocols, we were able to maintain a high level—76%—of sobriety for men with one year in our programming. There were no relapses at Iron House. And no clients or staff members became ill with COVID-19.

Together, we worked to meet the needs of the men we serve while making 2020 a little brighter for all concerned. While this crisis is not over, we’re grateful and deeply moved by the community that rose to meet this challenge with us.
$14,449,510

ANNUALIZED ECONOMIC IMPACT

544

OBTAINED FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT

76%

OF MEN WHO MOVED TO IRON HOUSE ACHIEVED 1-YEAR SOBRIETY
A little over a year ago, Jeremy found himself at the doors of Guiding Light lost, hopeless, and desperately asking for help.

He had spent decades under the influence of a heavy addiction to drugs and alcohol, was increasingly estranged as a father, homeless, and had recently been fired from his job after stealing a company truck. He had nowhere else to go and decided he had finally had enough.

Today, things are completely different. Jeremy has over a year of sobriety and recently had a chance to come back to 255 Division Avenue to put his name on the wall at Guiding Light Recovery. Brian Elve, the Program Director for Guiding Light Recovery, remembers Jeremy’s early days in the program and his determination to get sober, despite an “excruciatingly painful” problem he had with his teeth.

“When Jeremy walked through the doors of Guiding Light, my first image is of him going around here for a couple of weeks just in utter pain and how it took him out of the programming of Guiding Light Recovery. I kept thinking to myself ‘this guy is either going to get through this or he’s not.’ He made it, and when I think of him, I think of dedication and endurance.”

Jeremy had a son at a young age, and throughout his addiction became less and less a part of his life. One of the big motivating factors for him to get sober was to become a part his son’s life again. The love Jeremy had for his son and his yearning to be there for him made an impression on the men around him as well as on Brian.
“As I got to know Jeremy, the thing that comes up for me was his desire to re-connect with his son. When he talked about all that happened between them, you knew he wanted to do something different than what he had done in the past. It was an inspiration to guys around the program. It was such an awesome thing to be around that and see this man start to change his life right in front of our eyes.”

There were few attendees outside of Guiding Light clients and staff that were able to be there for Jeremy’s ceremony in person. Fortunately, however, the celebration was also broadcast live via video-conference and Jeremy’s son had a chance to see his father nail his name onto the wall. There was a powerful moment when Jeremy looked up at the television monitor and spoke to the audience. “I want to say hi to my son, the fact that he’s here…I don’t know what to say, I love him so much…I’m so proud of my son.”

Jeremy describes the healed relationships with his family and the newfound hope that he has in his life as “a testament to where I’m at today with the help of Guiding Light, really working this program, getting real, and getting honest.

“When you’re sick and you’re dealing with this, you just don’t have the mindset to ask yourself ‘what’s important?’ It was hard for me to see what was important, and last year has really put that into perspective. It’s friendships, it’s family, and it’s holding your head up high with the integrity that you have earned.”

Jeremy came to the doors of 255 Division Avenue out of complete desperation and at the end of his rope. He had tried for years, in vain, to get sober and had checked himself in and out of countless substance-abuse treatment programs all over the country. He was driven, when he arrived at Guiding Light, by a burning desire to just get rid of the pain and end the cycle of addiction in his life. But what he found here was much more than just being able to get and stay sober. What he found was a fulfilling and hopeful life that was actually worth staying sober for.

Jeremy had a chance to give the men in the Recovery program words of encouragement as well. “It gets better guys, it definitely gets better. All I wanted when I got here was to get sober. I didn’t want to drink anymore. That’s it. But I didn’t know that I could have what I have today, I didn’t know that was going to come along with it.”
It is important for all the men at Guiding Light to see someone like Jeremy in front of them, and to see how far he has come in just a year. It is a powerful reminder that Jeremy was once in the exact same spot that they are all in today, and that there really is hope for the future. Jeremy’s message, that you can trust the process of Guiding Light Recovery and that things really do get better if you stick with it, is an important thing for a man in early sobriety to hear.

We are all so proud of Jeremy and the rest of our clients who took full advantage of the gift they were given by coming to Guiding Light. Their willingness to make a real, lasting change in their lives sets a powerful example to all of us. It’s not easy, but the rewards, which are so evident in the words of men like Jeremy, are so incredibly worth it.

“I’m not that person anymore. I know what it takes to be a friend, I know what it takes to have responsibility, and how hard it is to get that back...that trust. It’s easier to hold on to those things today because of the work that I’ve done here.”

It is so important to remember that the powerful social and personal change that happens at Guiding Light does not take place in a vacuum. With all the chaos in the world around us, being able to provide a refuge for men in our community is something that we absolutely could not do without you. To all of our donors, volunteers, and advocates, thank you so much for giving men like Jeremy a chance to change their lives, heal their wounds, and live up to their God-given potential.

Our Mission

Through the Guiding Light of God’s Spirit, Guiding Light partners with individuals to fulfill their God-given potential through rescue, recovery and re-engagement in the community.
144 SPIRITUAL ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS
AVG. 120 DAYS

6 SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS

$503,768
INDEPENDENT SECTOR VALUE OF VOLUNTEER TIME

19,810 VOLUNTEER HOURS

300,882 MEALS SERVED

76% PARTICIPATED IN FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

100% OF BACK-TO-WORK CLIENTS COMPLETED A BUDGET

$4,165 AVG. DEBT TACKLED DURING PROGRAM

$1,806 AVG. AMOUNT SAVED

BE JOYFUL IN HOPE, PATIENT IN AFFLICTIO, FAITHFUL IN PRAYER. ROMANS 12:12 KJV
It’s easy to make contributions to fulfill your personal philanthropic goals. Choose the way that works best for you. You can give weekly, monthly, quarterly or one time.

**CHECK OR CASH:**
Please make check payable to Guiding Light
Please mail to PO Box 1703, Grand Rapids, MI 49501

**ONLINE GIVING:**
Make secure contributions by credit or debit card online at [www.GuidingLightWorks.org/Give](http://www.GuidingLightWorks.org/Give)

**BREAD & LIFE SUSTAINING DONOR:**
One easy way to support Guiding Light is to set up an automatic deduction from your debit or credit card or directly from your bank account. Our accounting assistant would be happy to help you with this.
Contact Arla Dolislager at (616) 451-0236 ext. 22

**STOCK GIFTS & WIRE TRANSFERS:**
Did you know that you can contribute stock to Guiding Light, or give by wire transfer? It’s a straightforward process. For more information,
contact Arla Dolislager at (616) 451-0236 ext. 22

**WILL:**
You can always remember Guiding Light in your will or estate plan.
Contact Starla McDermott at (616) 451-0236 ext. 20

**QUESTIONS ABOUT ANYTHING?**
Contact Starla McDermott, Development Director at Guiding Light at Starla@GuidingLightWorks.org or (616) 451-0236 ext. 20
Prayer of Gratitude

Father, Scripture tells us that “every good gift comes from above.”

We are mindful of the abundance of gifts that we receive from the those who have chosen to support Guiding Light.

We give thanks for the countless blessings that we have received from our donors and benefactors.

We give thanks that in our usage of those gifts, our benefactors share in your changing men’s lives.

Through the generous gifts of our donors, we are able to fulfill our mission of providing programming to suffering men who come with little or no hope of a better life.

We know that “To whom much is given, much is expected.”

Dear Lord, our desire is to continue to use the gifts given to us in a manner which is consistent with your direction.

In thanksgiving, we lift our prayers to you for those who make this ministry possible.

We ask that you bless and keep them in good health during this time of pandemic. We ask that you hold them in your hands, protecting them.

Lord, we are so grateful and we thank you, in Jesus name. Amen.

Ed Postma, Guiding Light Board Chair
You are the light of the world.

Matthew 5:14 NIV

GUIDING LIGHT

255 Division Ave S
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

GuidingLightWorks.org