

Pieter Willems

Senior Pastor

Mustard Seed Church; Lawrence, KS

Interview by Emily Stratton in Pieter's office at Mustard Seed Church; Lawrence, KS

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Transcribed by Emily Stratton

Abstract: Mustard Seed Church is a non-denominational, spirit-filled (charismatic) church in Lawrence, Kansas with a vibrant historical narrative. This interview features Pieter Willems, Mustard Seed's Senior Pastor, and key figure in the church's history. Most of the interview focuses upon the history and development of Mustard Seed Church—it's wild and spontaneous Jesus Movement origins in downtown Lawrence to growing into the church that it is today, now based in West Lawrence. Later questions discuss how the church functions today at both a logistical level as well as a programmatic level, and describes Pieter's vision and heart for the church.

Note: Questions and comments by Emily are written in **bold** type while Pieter's responses are in regular type.

Um, So to start with Pieter, could I have you tell me a little bit about where you're from? I know we talked a little bit about that earlier; you mentioned that you had gone to KU and done some business... but just a little bit about your background, just so we can get to know you.

Okay, my... to give you just a little bit of framework, my parents are Dutch immigrants. They actually immigrated after WWII to South Africa, which is where I was born. So we immigrated here when I was at the age of seven. So at seven, was when my world changed from what I had known. And when my parents came here, we were, we would say Dutch Reformed in our church history. So we began attending the Presbyterian church here in Lawrence, Kansas. My dad got a job at the university, and so the university's been a part of my life since I was a kid. And that's where I went and got my bachelor's, as well as my master's, both from the University of Kansas. And it was also during the years at KU that my life began to change in many ways, just from what I've known as far as my, what people probably call your "religion." Like I said, we were Presbyterian for the first six years that we were here in Lawrence, Kansas and then my parents changed to a Lutheran church for another three years, and then they became involved both in what is known as the Jesus Movement and the Charismatic Movement in the late 60s. And that radically changed my parents' life. And I observed a lot of those changes, and those really impacted my life. It really made a big difference in what I thought about God... up until that time I pretty much thought, you know, I believed in God, but it seemed just more like a set of religious values. And when I saw my parents begin to change—things that were pretty remarkable, that I observed—that really made me begin to search what had happened in their lives. And so that culminated in my summer after my junior year in high school, that I realized God love me personally, that he wanted to have a personal relationship with me, which was a completely new concept to me—that was, like I thought you just went to church, you know, and you just sat through a sermon and hopefully got something out of it and weren't too bored and you just tried to be a good person... you just tried to live a good life and be nice to people.

So that, that I had an encounter that summer with God that I realized I wanted to know him personally. I wanted to have a personal relationship with him. And there was a man that was very instrumental, that got me to understand what that was all about. And he really disciplined me in my very first year or so being, what I would say, that's when I really became a Christian. Up until then, I was just, just kind of a church-goer. I'd say at that point, I genuinely became a Christian in my life. And so things changed pretty dramatically for me after that. I would say that after going through college, and continuing to pursue that, I got involved with the church that I'm now pastoring, which is the Mustard Seed Church. And those things continue to make the big the big difference in my life—an ongoing difference. Is there anything else you wanted me to share with you, or does that kind of give you a thumbnail?

No! That's, that's perfect.

Okay.

So picking up from where you ended off, in getting involved with Mustard Seed Church, um, how did you first get involved with it? What led you to be a part of the congregation?

Well, actually, that was through meeting my wife-to-be. She was involved in the church before I was. You know, it had only been in existence for about probably six months when she first got involved. And I met her shortly after that. I started going, little by little, to some of the meetings, which had very similar beliefs and practices that I had at that point in my life. So it wasn't a conflict there, it was more of getting acquainted with the people. And my parents also, very soon after that, got involved with the church in 1974. And then my dad became an elder in the church in 1974, which you need to understand this was almost all college students, so my dad was probably the only true elder there. Everyone else was either in their late teens or early twenties, so "elder" was kind of a bit of a tongue and cheek term to the guys that were there. But my dad got involved, as my mom did, and so they, they brought—I think—a much needed sense of wisdom and experience to the church, to help them lead it through its early, early years.

So I really got involved because I met my, met my wife up at KU, and that's, that's kind of what began to get me more involved in the church.

Awesome. So I've heard that the church originally just started out as a meeting of college students—

Yeah—

So tell me a little bit more about how that started up, if you know, and how it grew.

Okay. I do know. Um, I'm still in contact, have a good relationship with, back then, the young man who founded the church. He's actually from Kansas City. His name is Bob Mendhelson. He was a Jew, and a Jew that came to believe in Jesus, which is a very unusual event—especially back then. And so Bob felt, after a short time that he had come to faith in Christ, that he was to go to the KU campus and begin to share what had happened in his life. The Bible calls that sharing the good news. You share with someone else what God has done in your life. And he began to do that. He partnered, actually, with two other young men and they were able to purchase a house a couple of blocks from the campus, and they called it the Mustard Seed.

And that's how the ministry began. They just would share Jesus, and share what he had done for them, and they had regular meeting times that people would come together and they would worship together, or share what God had shown them in the Bible, and pray for each other. So it was very simple, but very profound. Peoples' lives were being changed. They were being alleviated from drugs, from alcohol. People were seeing God heal them from deep areas of rejection... and so there was really a lot of profound life-change that was happening. It was just people getting together to have a nice little meeting. We really got together because we really saw the need for God to change our lives. And that's what He did, you know, for many of us: healed our relationships, taught us to forgive people that we weren't so happy with in life, and, really changed my life.

So Bob was very instrumental in really being a pioneer to this church. And then when my parents came on board they teamed together until eventually, I think it was in 1976 or so, that Bob went to work for Jews for Jesus. And he still currently still works for that organization today.

So what else can I tell you? Does that answer some of that?

Oh! Absolutely, absolutely. Let's see... in those early day's you were talking about, people wanting to come to have their lives transformed, would you say that that was the main attracting factor to bring people in? Or what would you say attracted people to join this fellowship?

I think there was a tremendous amount of love that was shown. People, no matter who they were, when they walked in the door, were accepted. They were loved, they were shared the truth that God loved them, and that through faith in Jesus Christ, God was offering them a new life. The Bible talks about it in dramatic terms of being "born again" and "saved," and so we would share the good news that God loved people. And that he had a life for them that was far better than the life that they had before. So, we just shared a very simple message: God loves you. God is here to forgive your sins... areas in your lives—areas in all of our lives—that we would know we're not living in the way God wanted us to live. So it was a pretty simple message, a very loving atmosphere.

We had two, eventually we bought another house, and so there was a group of men—young college men—that lived together in one house and a group of girls that lived in another house. And my wife and I were actually the house parents for the girls house for a couple of years. We lived with the girls for two years, which was a tremendously challenging, but good experience. You know, it matured us in a lot of ways... very quickly.

So that's really what I'd say attracted people was just the love and the hope that their lives could be changed for the better through Jesus Christ.

Excellent. Well tell me a little bit about these, these houses—the men's house and the women's house—and maybe your experience as being a house parent.

Well, we ate together. Everybody ate together for dinner. So there was always a big, a little bit of a sense of community and communal living during the Jesus Movement—the hippie-movement—was a, a big thing. So, it was a strong community, and yet like anytime that you live with people there's conflict. So we had the opportunity to really live our faith: to overlook

each other's faults, to look through differences in a Christ-like way, and to, you know, encourage people to be patient with people, and for people to be patient with you, or yourself... so for us, I'd say it was a very good experience. Like I say, it wasn't always easy, because we usually had at least five to six girls living in the home that we just kind of provided a safety net for, and you have to have some kind of rules, you have to have some kind of guidelines, so that everybody works together. We took in people off the streets. We provided a place for them to stay. So those were often people that were, that had been homeless... and so they were people that really had some tremendous needs. And people that had just come out of jail. So we took some pretty big risks. Back then, we didn't think about it as a risk. We just thought of it as, you know, 'that's what Jesus would do' and that's what we're supposed to do—we're supposed to open our homes and open our hearts to people no matter who they are, and yet, at the same time, you know, be wise, and not be stupid. So it was a very challenging time, it was—we saw a lot of lives being changed—and we also saw things that we hoped people would change, and they didn't. So, it wasn't a perfect time, but it was a very good time in the house.

So then did, does Mustard Seed still have similar houses? Or did that continue or did it stop at a certain point?

Yeah, we outgrew the houses. First of all, we used to have meetings in the houses and at that time we had a big living room in the boys' house, but the number of people grew and so we had to go and find different meeting places. That's how it started. And so we kind of became nomads... we traveled from one meeting place to another. As the church grew, we would outgrow bigger buildings. There were some wonderful people—some churches in town—that would let us use their facilities, because we didn't have any of our own and we, usually, we didn't meet Sunday mornings, so we often could be accommodated. So we are very grateful for the early, the people in our early years that shared their facilities. We also met in schools. And so we just kind of were a little bit vagabonds, just moving around as we grew, trying to find places that we could meet and finally purchased an old car dealership in 1977, and remodeled it, pretty much with all volunteer labor, into our first building. And that was a very exciting time. For some people, they thought, 'now that we have our own building--' there were a few people that thought we were becoming too organized. So they were worried that that was the wrong move for us. But that was—we progressed from the homes to the building. As the church grew we had more families, less college students. So the boys' and girls' house became less and less of the way that we did community here, and to do it more through small groups, and meeting in peoples' homes. So eventually, those homes were no longer used for that.

Okay. And then, when you were talking about buying this car dealership, and some of the people feeling as though this was getting too organized, did that cause any division in the group? Were there people that left the organization and kept doing the house-church scenario? Or was it a struggle that people worked through and stuck with? Could you tell me a little bit about those tensions?

Yeah, I would say in general, at that early stage, very few people—if any—left the church. I think some just wanted to see if it was going to—were afraid—it was going to change the heart of the church. And so that was their fear, but I think they stuck around—they had relationships, they had friendships they didn't want to abandon—and once they figured out that the building wasn't going to change who we were, they got over it and understood, 'okay, we're still the same.' At the heart of the matter we're still the same church: we still love God, we still love

people and anybody is welcome—anybody and come and they're going to be loved and they're going to be accepted, and we're going to share the good news of Jesus Christ with them. So it, with every change there's always, you know, some discomfort, and I would say, historically, we've seen that. There's always been some discomfort and once and a while there might be a person that decides to leave because of it, and that's okay. You know, we're okay with that. We still love people, and we don't look at them as not being Christians or something like that, but we realize that as we go through changes, for some people, the changes don't work.

We have some people that don't like churches that are that big. And so they just want it smaller. They want it where everybody knows everybody in the church and when you get past two hundred, two-three hundred, that's just not possible. And so for some people, that's just not what they feel comfortable with. And so we want to—we've always tried to be releasing, and not make them feel bad if they're looking for something different.

So tell me a little bit about the progression from the car dealership to the building that you're in now.

Okay! Well, we stayed in that building for three years. And one significant event that happened in that building was that we started a Sunday morning service. And that was a big deal. Because we all came out of—most of us came out of—a denominational background, which meant Sunday morning church, and depending on your denomination, sometimes a Wednesday evening mid-week service. And so we had a Sunday evening service and then we had a service that met during the week. Which that eventually also went away and we just had Sunday and then small groups that met throughout the week. So when we started the Sunday morning service, there was quite a bit of opposition. There were probably—oh, I'd say—two hundred people that met on Sunday nights, and the early Sunday morning services, we had about forty people. So that can tell you a little bit of—it wasn't a transition that was fully embraced by everybody in the church. But it was a transition that the leadership felt needed to be made, so we made that transition. And over time, it proved to be a good decision. So we stayed in that church for three years. We outgrew it. We had a lot of young families, and we just didn't have enough space to accommodate for the children very well. And so we had another building: someone donated some land, and we built another building, which is quite a lot bigger, had a lot more facilities for our children. And we stayed in that building from 1981 to 1990. In 1990, we had a building built where we are currently today.

So each time it's usually been, we've had to acquire a new facility because of growth. We tried our best, in our second building, to try to purchase land on both sides of us so that we could just expand, but that isn't what happened. And so we saw, for some reason, God wasn't wanting us to stay there, and we were able to purchase the land we have now, before it was Wakarusa drive and there was just a country road out here. And so we were very, very fortunate to have the land that we do, and able to build on it. Obviously the community's really grown in this whole area, and we feel very fortunate to be here.

Definitely. Um, at what point would you say that the participants began to change from just being college students to branching out to having families and a mutli-generational congregation? Was that something kind of in the car-dealership days? Or how did that come to change?

It, it started towards just before the car dealership, which was probably once my parents got involved. And it was, there were another two families that came on board that had children, young children, and so that was a brand new thing for everybody to have to deal with. What do we do with these kids?? During those early years it was not unusual for a meeting to last two to three hours. Well, with little kids, they aren't going to sit there for two to three hours. Now that's... you're going to have all kinds of problems with that! And so, that was part of what drove us to realize we need something for kids and so people actually started developing somewhat of a Sunday school in those early years, where the kids could be taken care of. Not babysat, but be able to see them taught the things of God on their level. So it actually started before we bought our first building that we realized more families were coming in, and that created a whole new challenge for us as a church. From college students only to having families—that was a big deal, another change. So really, you know, with growth... growth is great, but it always brings change. And change is something that the whole congregation kind of has to accept and begin to move forward. So I'd say all those changes are good, they're just not always easy.

Great. And then a little bit earlier, you were talking about, again, going from some of those houses into the more established dealership and then moving on into church buildings, and preserving this idea of the heart of the church... so today now that you have the largest building you've had yet, and probably the most in your congregation that you've had over history, how do you preserve that heart of the church? What are some of the ways that you see that playing out in the current structure of Mustard Seed?

That's a good question. I think that the larger you become, the more difficult it becomes to really continue to have a—with each person that comes in here to have the opportunity to somehow make a meaningful personal contact, and to help them in a real and personal way in their relationship with God, or to discover that relationship. So, I think that's an ongoing challenge. It's never one that I feel like we've conquered—we have got it down. So one of the ways that we do that is through having multiple small groups. Right now we have about twenty five small groups in our church. Most of them tend to run on a twelve to thirteen week basis, and then there's a break, and then they run again, usually running twice a year. But there are some groups that run continuously throughout the year, that people can connect to at any time, at any point. Most of our groups, if someone wants to come in, in the middle of them—there's a few that you can't because the information is built, like for instance, we have a small group that focuses on helping people with their finances, and so if you miss the beginning classes, you really can't come in in the middle and catch on to what's going on. So small groups is a huge way that we feel we can give people still that closeness, still that feeling like church is personal, not just this big meeting, and I'm just somewhere in the sea of people here. So, we try to encourage people that are members of the church to reach out to new people that come into the church, and new people that aren't in the church and bring them in. To take responsibility when you bring someone to the church, that you help them find a place that will help them develop relationships and connect to people in the church. Sunday morning is just not going to give people a close, personal connection with other Christians, and help them share their lives. So small groups is probably a huge part of that.

Another part is when I teach on Sunday mornings, I try to be very open with my life. I try to be very real with people, that I don't have it all together. I share my defeats, I share my victories, I try to be pretty transparent. I feel like that helps people feel like they can be vulnerable. They can be real about what's going on in their lives. And I encourage our leadership to do that. And I think they're very much that way. We try to not be fake, we don't... we try not to be "Sunday

Christians,” we preach and teach that there’s no such thing as compartmentalization: you’re a Christian from sun-up to sun-down, and in every area of life you should be representing your faith in whatever it is—work, when you’re having fun, when you’re on vacation—that your Christianity should be intertwined with every area of life. It should really be who you are.

So those are some of the ways... we try to have events to try to bring the congregation together, help them meet new people. Once a year we do a Thanksgiving dinner at our church, a church Thanksgiving dinner, and we just... our fellowship hall isn’t big enough, so we just have people through the lobby, and everywhere... three to four hundred people that come and eat Thanksgiving dinner, maybe more than that, I don’t really know, but there’s a lot. So we try to do event’s like that in our church, events where we can all come together that are informal and more relaxed. And those are some of the ways that we try to encourage still there being a closeness, a sense of community within the church even though it’s pretty big set of people and by itself, it wouldn’t be easy to feel in.

Yeah, well tell me a little bit more about the small groups. You said that some of them have these progressive lessons... are they all education-based? Are some of them fellowship-based? Or Bible-study-based? Do they meet in peoples’ homes or here at the church? Just anything, anything more to say about the small groups.

Yeah... okay. All of the above! There’s quite a few that meet here in the church, there’s quite a few that meet in peoples’ homes, there’s some that meet in public places—like restaurants or work lunch hours—that they get together. And they really go from instructional, kind of educational, the financial course that we have, and all the way to groups that study particular groups together, or just a Bible study group... they really go from A to Z: men’s groups, women’s groups, mixed groups, youth groups, college groups... So, it really... seniors’ groups, I mean, we really try to offer groups that will meet the needs that people have within what we have, we can offer. Nine times out of ten, how those groups start is... again, one of those things we strongly encourage here is for people to find out what God wants them to do in the context of “church.” That each of them has something that they can do, and so a lot of times people approach me and say, ‘you know, I feel like God has been speaking to me or laying this on my heart to do, um, what do you think?’ and I usually think, ‘that’s great!’ if it’s within the realm of reasonable, and then what we try to do is enable them to be successful in what God’s calling them to do, and often times that’s some type of a small-group setting, or it may be more of a general ministry-type thing to the body of believers and not as much of a small group. Or maybe they’re helping on the worship team, or helping with the media ministry, maybe they help with greeting, ushering, um, those kinds of things. So we want to see people in some way be able to realize that God wants them to be able to help other people, to be a blessing to others, to use what God’s given them in a way to help others in their walk with God. So we, we encourage that. So that’s how a lot of our groups have developed. People just come to us, ‘this is what I think God’s laying on my heart and what can I do with it?’ and we try to, as pastoral staff, we try to find the best way for them to put that to use.

Um, another topic that I have is missions. Whether local, national, or international, what kind of focus does Mustard Seed have, does it have one, or how do you go about the topic of missions?

Good question. We believe very strongly in missions. We believe it is part of what Christ has commissioned the church to do. So we believe locally, we believe that—we’re probably not as

good at this point—in terms of nationally, we do quite a bit internationally. We focus on supporting missionaries, and actually right now, the missionaries that we support overseas—support mission work in Solomon Islands, we have mission work in Honduras, mission work in Nepal, there's another couple that had a call to go to the mid-east, I can't tell you where, because its sensitive information, but that's where their call is, and... I think I'm missing one, I can't think of it. Mexico is another mission. And actually any one of those missionaries that we support right now are people that are members here at this church, and that we have seen, God has put missions on their heart, and so we have encouraged that. We have helped them get training, and then we've hooked them up—we're kind of their home church—but we hook them up with a missions organization which has lots of experience, that we don't have, and can be a real help to them and gets them plugged in. And they have a good support on the field, and a good support here at home, both financially and spiritually. So we believe, strongly, in missions.

Ten percent of every dime that comes into this church goes into missions work—that as far as what people give to the church, we take ten percent of that and put it back into missions. And then there are also monies that people give just directly to missions and missionaries in addition to that. So that goes to support mission work and missionaries.

We also support, um, mission work in like Katrina, in New Orleans, we've sent some teams down there. We sent a team to Haiti to help there. So we've done some of that... that's a kind of bit national, but that's not our strongest point always.

We do try to see our reason for being here in Lawrence, Kansas, is that God's put us on a mission here. And so that's, there's a mission here to share what we believe is the best news that we have to offer this world. And so we try to do that in a way that we demonstrate, by the way that we live, that it's not just our words. That it's, that we also demonstrate it by who we are.

We have a real strong ministry to international students at KU. And so we have quite a few international students attending our church. Our congregation is quite international in flavor. So if you come here, you're going to see people from a lot of different nationalities. And we like that because we think that's probably a little bit closer to reflecting heaven, where we're going to be with all kinds of different people... every, every nationality. So, we enjoy that and really encourage that.

So for those international students, how to they get to be a part of this? I can imagine coming from another country and being dropped into Kansas, how do they get connected?

Well, it's really because we take the initiative. We start that initiative by having people pick them up from the airport. They usually need someone to pick them up, they often times don't know anybody here, and so that is a great first contact. So we have a lot of people that go to pick them up. They will sometimes house them, for two or three days, until their dorm room is ready, and then they go to their dorms or sometimes they're in student married housing, but they usually live in some kind of KU student housing. And, so that's where it starts. Then we also have people in our church who sign up to be conversation partners with them, sign up to be host families. Conversation partners means they go talk with them once a week, help them learn their English, they help them get better at that. Host families means that you do something with them once a month. So it's not, not a high level of commitment, but what we find that happens, is that once you do that, you want to do more with them. They come to church, sometimes

more faithfully than Americans, even though they might not have the slightest inkling to, inclination to believe in Christ. They're very curious about our culture. They're very curious about Christianity because they often have not encountered it or heard about it. And so they're very, um, open if you show them that you care about them. And you're helping them make a huge adjustment for their lives. So for us to be there, and just to help them understand our culture, and give them some pointers here and there, and just care about their life, you know, and make the transition easier, makes it very easy to reach out to that. Very easy, they're very open.

We've had people come to this church for three or four years straight, and they'll come almost every Sunday, and they may never end up making the decision to give their lives to Christ. But, you know, they feel loved, they know they're welcome here, and that they're going to be treated just like we treat everyone else. So, a lot of them do end up giving their life to Christ. So we just find it to be a very exciting ministry that God has given us the opportunity to do.

That's, yeah, that's a really interesting ministry, and I haven't really heard of something like that before. How do you originally make that contact, and find out who is coming and how to make the airport arrangements?

Well, there's been some people that have been involved in this up at KU, not just our church, and a couple other individuals that are instrumental in that. They have a whole department, of international students up at KU, but you know, honestly, I'm not sure how they get connected. But I'm guessing that... I mean, they get them through some legitimate means, I know that there isn't, you know, they're names are given for some way, some how... I would guess that there's a real need for these kids to be picked up. I mean we're talking about two thousand of them coming in, and none of them have transportation. And so, it's a, I think it's just a general need. Yeah. So I don't know the logistics of that...

Yeah, no, I was just curious. It perked my interest!

Yeah, I have no idea! But now that you asked that, I'll probably go find out.

Well, awesome. Um, going back to some of these international missions, for those that you're sponsoring, and those that you have abroad, what kind of work are they doing? Is it church-planting? Relief efforts? A combination of things? Could you shed a little light on these?

I can try.

Okay.

Uh, we do, there's a variety of things. There's the work in Solomon Islands, it's primarily Bible translation. There's a young man that came here to KU in, I believe it was, the late 80s, and anyway, he was in Civil Engineering and met my father who was a Civil Engineering professor, and ended up coming to the church here and got baptized in the church. Gave up his engineering degree, he got a degree, top-notch guy, and went back to his people in the Solomon Islands, and because they did not have a Bible in their own language, and so he translated the Bible into their language, taught other people how to translate, and did such an excellent job that the missions organization Wycliff, is using his model as the model for the

whole Pacific Rim to take the Bible and translate it into dialects of the Pacific Rim inhabitants. So he's actually in a very key leadership position now in focusing on Bible translation. He goes around and speaks and he's just a wonderful, amazing man. Very humble, and yet full of lots of wisdom. So we support that work.

In Mexico, there's a young lady that we're supporting that actually is also involved in Bible translation to the area of Oaxaca. Lots of dialects that don't have the Bible in their own language.

There's the couple we're supporting in Nepal. That's primarily a church-planting effort. And so they are learning the language, and the culture, so that they can effectively plant a church, developing relationships and things like that. They're in the initial stages of that.

The people who are called to Asia, the middle-East, their hope is to be able to start a church there and reach out to a mainly Muslim population. Certainly a challenge.

Hmm... let me think... then Honduras. We support a young lady down there who is part of the mission work that we've gotten involved with almost six, seven years ago. And it's a very broad mission work with ministers—although primarily, youth and children—and they have a very effective ministry in reaching out to youth. They have been building a school from the ground up to teach young kids so that they can—they see all the young kids that they're teaching as the future leaders of Honduras. So she's involved with the, the school and with the mission work. So that's kind of more, trying to, trying to change, you know, the people's, the people's opportunities in Honduras. There is some church-planting that goes on through that ministry, there's all kinds of different outreach, lots of help for the poor, because there's lots of poor in Honduras. Lots of need. And so there's lots of opportunity.

So that, maybe gives you a little flavor, kind of... pretty different, different...

So then shifting gears a little bit, we had been talking, or, you had mentioned a little bit about having ten percent of the offerings going toward the missions work and then also having a separate offering. Let's see, in terms of, in terms of the money and the revenues gathered is everything a free-will offering, or are there tithes implemented, or how are finances for the Mustard Seed?

Okay. Sure. Um, we're actually fairly low-key about that. We do not have, you know, anybody... I remember when I was growing up as a kid, you made your yearly commitment. I remember that from my growing up years, which I don't know that that's wrong, I'm just saying that's not what we do. So we just actually, we don't uh, we just have offering buckets. People can just put their money into it, we also have a little mail slot in our lobby that people can put money into. We probably teach once a year on giving, financial giving, and what that means to the individual, why we should give, and where God wants us to give. So um, we don't like financial pressure. And we don't like things where we're trying to beat that drum, instead we just want to teach ultimately what God, you know, wants a person to do in their life.

So, God has always provided for us. So for us, it has never been a high-pressure, beat the drum kind of thing. We find that, you know, if you care about people, if you take care of the people, and that God takes care of the other stuff. You know, if you put the people first, and their needs, and help them grow in their relationship with God, help them work through their issues, their problems, genuinely care about them, that God will provide for the rest.

So I don't know what anyone gives. None of the staff knows. There's only one person in this church who knows what everyone gives, and that's the bookkeeper. And they're the only one. And I don't want to know what people give, because I don't want to see a dollar sign attached to them. And I, I want to be able to treat each person with the same importance and value that God treats me. And I know I'm fallible. So if I begin to know what people give, it's probably going to affect me. And I don't want that effect in my life.

So in terms of the facilities that you have, are all the revenues from the free-will offering?

Mmhmm, yes.

And then are there any other things that you own? I think I saw a van or a bus out there, are those church property as well?

Uh huh! Yep, yep, they are. We have a few vehicles. And those are primarily there for church group use. The youth group tends to use them the most. But those have all either been paid for by donation, or the vehicle itself is donated. Two of the vehicles out there were donated and the other one, you know, we mentioned the need and a person out of the congregation stepped up and just said, 'I want to, I want to provide the money. Go find what you want and this is how much I'm willing to give,' and so people just do that out of the blue. You know, God just moves on their heart. So that's always an amazing blessing.

But right now we're, we have a mortgage of \$135,000. And we're doing a very low key fund drive to pay that off. We just want to be debt free. And our goal, and our purpose, is in the future, to never go into debt. Period. So, we're excited about that. And even people in our congregation are excited about seeing that paid off.

Great, and then in terms of facilities care, whether it be lawn, or the building maintenance, is that something that people in the congregation volunteer to do? Or have rotations? Or is there a janitorial staff?

Um, there is a janitor staff. We just have one person who can take care of that. Takes care of that and gets paid. We have a part time maintenance person that takes care of the essentials and organizes work days and people come in and do a whole bunch of work, probably only three or four days a year. And then there's people who volunteer their services. Or come in and, this man will usually coordinate those kinds of things, but they will be happy to come in and give some of their time to do various sort of jobs and tasks that help keep the building in good, good condition.

So I was just checking the clock and we're wrapping up on an hour, but are there any, any other stories or anecdotes that you think should be said? Any remarkable stories that should be recorded or any highs or lows, successes or challenges?

Well there's always highs and lows. We've been through, oh, seven years ago, we had a—went through a difficult time when probably 25% of the congregation left or a different, particularly, I think there was one individual involved in that, but that kind of was the lightning rod for that, and that's a difficult thing to go through.

What, do you mind my asking, was, was the cause of this, or the source of the turmoil?

Well, I think people sometimes have a, I don't want to get specific, I really, all the people that left I, I have a good relationship with them. I don't feel like I have any kind of negative feelings or grudge towards them. Whenever I see them, I'm happy to see them, and I can talk freely with them. So, I can honestly say that I don't have any kind of negative feeling towards what happened, I mean, it happened.

I think sometimes people realize that they have a different vision that can develop over time. And that's not what you'd say, you know, one's right and one's wrong, I'd just say you have a different vision, and you can't have two visions. And so sometimes those partings happen. They're not easy to go through. We have friendships and relationships that experienced kind of a tearing, and it can be hurtful. But I feel like we learned a lot through that we, probably grew stronger as a church body through that instead of weaker.

So, that was probably one of the low points. That wasn't particularly fun. But I can say that God really did work everything for good. And I believe he's working good in those peoples' lives. And so, in some ways, that's probably what needed to happen. But it's just not always the easy thing.

So that's, that's probably one of the low points. I'd say, you know, the high points are, there are so many of them, it's hard to say because for me the high points are peoples' lives being changed by God. That's the high point. You know, like all my preaching and all my teaching and all the other things I do, really it boils down to seeing God change peoples' lives for the better. And that's... there's so many stories of that, you know, that I couldn't even begin to tell. There's so many stories of people that have come out of broken backgrounds and have been very embittered and very hurt and very angry. To see God heal their lives, and today they're very forgiving people, and they're very... they don't feel like victims anymore. People that have been in various addictions. Those kinds of things. To see peoples' lives changed. To see people who have come here with no hope, and feel like they're at the end. To see them get hope, to see their lives turn around, for me, that's, that's what makes it all worth it. That's why I do what I do. If God can't change peoples' lives then, I'm either missing it—which is most likely the case because God really can make dramatic changes in peoples' lives. So for me that's, that's the high point. Whenever I hear that story. Whenever somebody that I've prayed with, or someone else has prayed with, and they say 'this, I came in like this, and I left knowing God had changed my life.' Sometimes those changes are instant, you know, there's like an instant turnaround. Sometimes they're slow. They're over the process of years. But you see the change taking place. That, for me, is absolutely the most rewarding and exciting thing: seeing God love people into a new life. I just, I wouldn't do what I'm doing if this wasn't continuing to happen.

So I hope that helps. I'd mention one other thing that I think is a high point for me being a part of this church. And that is that we have a, a real heart of worship in this church. And so when you come here Sunday mornings, I think that there's an opportunity to experience worship that really, we would say, brings us closer to God. Brings us into really being able to experience God's presence. That's a little bit of Christian-ese, for some people, they'd be like, 'what do you, what do you mean by *God's presence*?' Um, but for us, that means that God is personal, and he wants to reveal himself to us as we worship together as a church, as a body of Christ. There's an intangible thing that happens in that process, when you come to worship, and that is

that we experience God in a very personal way. And during those times of worship, people report really feeling God's love for them, experience God speaking things to their heart, that just greatly encourage them to come in here very discouraged, and during a time of worship, and suddenly it seems that God speaks to their heart and lifts their discouragement off. So, I really feel like God's given us a gift to be able to have this worship that brings us more into God's presence, and helps us encounter him personally in a way that is very meaningful. So we value that. And we try to, I think, keep that fresh, not just same-old, same-old. But that's a characteristic of our church that is a big high point for me, and I think for many people that will come here.

Yeah, um, so going off of that, by having this emphasis on worship and personal encounters with God, does that take tangible form in having elongated sets of music, during worship times is it also a time where people will go into prayer on their own and just go as the spirit moves them, or is there any dancing involved, or arts? How would you say it visibly plays out?

Well we've had different things at different times. I don't know, our music, we would probably have what you'd call a music "set," a worship set, which usually last about 25 minutes. We also end our service with a worship song. And that kind of pulls everyone together to focus after they've heard the message. Um, there has been dancing, I'd say it needs to be complimentary to help people worship, not a distraction. So when we do have dancing, it's something that we want to be careful doesn't become a show. What we really teach to our worship team is that their job is, it's not a show, it's not a concert, it is 'you are there first and foremost as a worship team to worship, yourselves. To be an example of worship, to encourage others to worship with you.' So it's not, it's not a show. It's not a concert. It's to be there to serve the congregation. And help them enter into worship and into God's presence.

So that's, um, they really work hard at that. I just love our worship team. They're just genuine, people who genuinely want to serve, you know. That just is really, really important to me. So we have some dancing, people raise their hands—not all, not everybody does—sometimes people will kneel. Again, with three, three hundred and fifty people coming in, you can't have everybody doing their own thing. But sometimes people may have a corporate prayer, we usually ask them to seek approval for that—usually one of the pastors—so that, you know, we don't have a free for all, and yet we don't want to, um, how do I say, we don't want to crush those things from happening. We want those kinds of things to be possible. Um, so every once and a while someone may come up to the front and pray and kneel, but most of the time if people feel led to do that they'll do that in their seats. So our goal is not to attract attention to the individual, but to attract the individual's attention to God. That's really our goal in worship.

Does that help?

Absolutely.

Okay.

Thanks. Well let's see... any, anything else you want to add in?

Um.... No, I don't think so. I mean, there's a lot to know about the church, but I don't know that they're all pertinent details.....

No. I'd just say we think like many churches. We have a strong children's ministry, we believe children are, you know, our future, so we try to do a good job of helping our kids grow up and understand who God is at a new level, and hopefully give their lives to Christ as they grow up and are able to walk that out and stick with them in doing that.

I don't know if there's anything else that you would need to know, that would interest you particularly.

No, I think you've given a good foundation. Let's see, is there anyone else that you would recommend me contacting, or that would have some stories as well, that you think would want to contribute from Mustard Seed or?

Well, if you're talking about the very early days, you could probably contact Bob Mendhelsson. He's in Australia, but I'm sure he'd be willing to converse with you. He would be, I think, a very interesting person to talk to about the very early formation of the church. Both of my parents are no longer alive, so they're not a resource, which is why the book is a tremendous help for us, as a church to have. They went through the trouble to write that.

Outside of my wife, I've been here the longest, so I'm probably as good a resource as anybody. She probably would not want to be part of an interview. She's, that's not her thing.

So no, I don't think... I mean, there were a lot of people that were a part of that early Mustard Seed, lots of people have been part of it through the years. But I don't think anyone in particular...

Okay. That works.

Maybe once you read the book, and you think, 'can I talk to this person?' I'd certainly be willing to try to help you get in contact with them.

Great. Great, I might do that. Just pop you a line every now and then!

Okay, okay.

Well, I suppose I can turn this off now.