



THE

Stelzing  
FAMILY

MISSIONARIES IN LAWRENCE, MA



Praying Friends,

The last year of ministry has been one of the busiest and most rewarding of our lives. We have watched the Lord answer prayer, watched our people step up in ministry, seen people come to Christ, and had the privilege of starting evangelistic Bible studies with many. Lindsey and I are each meeting with multiple groups throughout the week for Bible study, discipleship, and counseling. The Lord has also opened doors in our community through our quarterly neighborhood meetings and through the volunteer chaplaincy with our local police department. We are thankful for the traction the Lord is giving us for the gospel in Lawrence.

I begin there because I do not want the heart of this letter to be misunderstood. We love our church. We love the people of Lawrence. There is nowhere else in the world we would rather be. Lawrence is home to us. It is our privilege to preach the gospel here, disciple believers, and labor to see Community Baptist Church become an autonomous church that will continue this work long after we are gone.

At the same time, I want to speak plainly about some of the realities of ministry here so that you can better understand how to pray for us. Ministry in Lawrence is not simply the same work in a different zip code. Years ago, a Boston Magazine article called Lawrence the “City of the Damned.” The article was written from a pessimistic outsider’s perspective without the hope of Christ. We wouldn’t characterize Lawrence this way, but the article pointed to deep needs and real brokenness in Lawrence. The gospel is the greatest need, but there are also real cultural and financial pressures here that affect the pace of discipleship and church planting.

The median household income in Lawrence is about \$60,000. That is \$53,000 less than most similar neighboring city of Methuen, at \$113,000, and nearly \$100,000 less than the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as a whole, while the cost of living in Lawrence is practically the same. We have also learned that 41 to 63% of Lawrencians, depending on zip code, receive SNAP benefits. A large part of the nearly 100,000 people in this city is living under real financial pressure.

That impacts ministry in very practical ways. In some places, teaching stewardship is mostly about helping believers grow in generosity. Here, it often starts much further back. We often minister to people dealing with debt, government dependence, unstable work, broken family structures, and very little margin. That does not make them less valuable. It does mean that discipleship in areas like stewardship, consistency, and long-term faithfulness is necessary, slower, and more complex.

There are also spiritual realities that shape the work. Our region is consistently listed by Barna as one of the least-churched areas in the country. Evangelism often starts with very basic questions: Who is God? What is the Bible? Was Jesus really God? Can the Scriptures be trusted? Even after salvation, believers are still learning what it means to bring their lives under the authority of Christ. We are not simply calling people to attend church. We are often helping them rebuild areas of life that have been shaped by years of chaos.

That is part of why, six years into this work, autonomy is not just around the corner. Some may assume that after this many years a church plant should be near full independence. We wish that were the case. But in a place like Lawrence, that is not realistic. When many of the people you are discipling are living under ongoing financial strain and are only beginning to build basic Christian habits, the road to maturity and stability is long. That does not mean the work is failing. It means the work is real.

I am very proud of our church. Over the last six years, Community Baptist Church has worked to cover its own operating expenses without relying on outside support to do so. That is a real encouragement to us. Our goal now is for the church to be able to support its own pastor, but we are not there yet.

At the same time, our family's financial need has grown. When we began raising support, we had one infant. By the end of deputation, we had two children. In 2019, we adjusted our needed support level to reflect our growing family, but we never reached 100% of that amount. We now have four children, three of them school-aged, and we are currently at about 75% of our needed support. Over the last year alone, we have lost \$1,000 per month in support. Because the church has been able to take on its own expenses, we have avoided raising our support target again, but our present support is not enough to meet our family's needs.

We have prayerfully considered part-time work, but at this point it would take too much from our family and from the ministry to be a wise choice. The demands of the work are greater than they have ever been, and bivocational ministry is not a realistic option for us right now.

So I am writing candidly to ask for patience and prayer. Please be patient with the pace of this work. Autonomy remains the goal, and by God's grace we are still pressing toward it. But this work is taking longer than many might expect because of the real spiritual and financial challenges of the field. Please also pray that the Lord would meet our family's financial needs as we continue to labor here. I am beginning to reach out to area churches to bolster our support. If your church would be interested in having us come to present or update, I would be grateful for the opportunity. Most of all, please pray that the Lord would continue to build His church in Lawrence, as He has so faithfully done these past six years.

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