

National WMU announces voluntary retirement plan

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BIRMINGHAM—In response to a decline in sales due to COVID-19, national Woman's Missionary Union announced Aug. 5 it is offering staff a voluntary retirement plan.

"We have worked incredibly hard over the past several years to 'right size' our organization based on revenue projections," said Sandy Wisdom-Martin, executive director of national WMU. "With two difficult back-to-back downsizings and budget cuts, our goal has been to simplify and put limited resources where they can make the most impact for the kingdom."

Over the past four years, WMU has cut 34 percent from its budget, which will be \$5.2 million beginning in October for 2020-21. Sales of curriculum for missions groups is WMU's main source of revenue.

COVID-19 hit ministry with devastating force

However, with so much uncertainty related to the pandemic, many churches are not ordering these resources, WMU officials said.

"This year we were strategically poised for growth, and then COVID-19 hit our vibrant ministry with a force unequal to anything we've seen in recent decades," Wisdom-Martin said.

When churches suspended in-person services and many across the country were sheltering-at-home at the onset of the pandemic, WMU quickly responded by moving Girls in Action and Royal Ambassador lessons for

April and May online.

WMU also created free missions resources for families during the summer, providing free Bible studies and resources for pastors, and launched a new podcast with inspiring interviews.

While those efforts helped meet needs, they don't replace income lost from decreased sales as churches grapple with not knowing how to plan for needed resources, WMU officials acknowledged.

Diminished revenue, uncertain recovery

With diminished revenue and uncertainty of when it may rebound, the missions organization found it necessary to contain costs and present a balanced budget for 2020-21.

"We value all of our employees," Wisdom-Martin said. "Each and every one makes meaningful contributions, and we are seeking to be as gracious and generous as possible. After the consideration period for those eligible for the voluntary retirement offer closes on Sept. 21, we will determine how much of a deficit in the budget remains and how to proceed from there."

With vision and proper perspective, a crisis can bring opportunity, she added. Although the pandemic has significantly impacted WMU's ministry model and so many other realities, COVID-19 didn't catch God by surprise, she observed.

"Even in the midst of these difficult days, we confess God as our sustainer and provider," Wisdom-Martin said. "I believe he has a hope and a future for WMU. This crisis has negatively affected our bottom line, but it has positively amplified our mission."

“Changes in our culture and church community bring opportunities for us to explore missions engagement in new and different ways. People are open to gospel conversations like never before; this is not the time to shrink back, but to boldly proclaim Christ.”