

Annual Report

2023



**First Evangelical
Free Church**

2696 HAZELWOOD STREET
MAPLEWOOD, MN 55109
WWW.FIRSTEFC.ORG

WE EXIST TO GLORIFY GOD BY MAKING AND MATURING DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST
TO MINISTER TO THE WORLD WITH THE GOSPEL BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Elder Board

Kevin Brown

So many special events occurred during the past year here at First Free Maplewood: Hymn Sings, Elevate Worship Night, All-Church Game Nights, Fourth of July Festival, rich guest speakers and so many more. One incredibly significant happening was the hiring of four highly qualified men to fill open positions and add to our current staff. In his report, Pastor Todd shares more about Andy, Brent, Koby and Luke. All four have brought biblical knowledge, engaging personalities and a passion to share God's Word through their various talents and assigned ministries. We are truly blessed to have these leaders in place to teach and shepherd our body. We want to thank all the members at large who provided feedback and/or participated in the evaluation and hiring process.

Our average **weekly church attendance was 575**, mirroring numbers we had prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic. This does not include the people who watch our services live on the internet. (We will begin incorporating this number into our attendance reports in 2024.) We added **44 new members** to our body in 2023. What a blessing it is to have so many find a permanent and welcoming home here! Unfortunately, we also lost many saints. The church **hosted 22 funerals**, often having multiple services in one week. We are so grateful to the many staff and volunteers who work tirelessly in support of this ministry with event planning, creative design, organization, food service and family care.

Speaking of volunteers, did you know that we had over 160 people supporting our Children's Ministry? Over **300 kids checked in** on Sunday morning, Wednesday night and for Vacation Bible School and special event childcare. That is just one ministry! There are hundreds of other volunteers serving our many ministries from young to old in teaching, welcoming, organizing and servicing the many needs of a growing church. A huge "Thank You!" to all the talented individuals willing to share their God-given gifts in meaningful ways.

The Elder Board and Pastors read and discussed a book on shepherding which we had started back in 2022. We also completed another book, *Church Elders*. Both books provided great insight and learning into how we are to be present and active within the body. The Elder Board continues to pray for the church and all members by name on a regular basis. We have **integrated prayer** into more aspects of our worship services and are trying to be more present on the Sunday morning platform. We hope all who attend feel our leadership is approachable, sensitive to their needs. and united in our mission as a church. We also appreciate your thoughts and value your prayers in return. Please keep communicating with us. We are excited to see what our Lord has in store for First Free in 2024!

ROMANS 15:13

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

Humbly submitted by Kevin Brown on behalf of the 2023 Elder Board:

Mike Anderson, John Bronson, Kevin Brown, John Choe, Marty Dennison, Harv Hendrickson, Jake Higgins, Jim Kirkpatrick, Tim Lindquist and Pastor Todd Olson

Senior Pastor

Dr. Todd Olson

Our Lord Jesus Christ faithfully carried us through a year of life and ministry together. This was a big year of transition. Pastor Kenny and Kirsten King left to serve at Capital City Church in Saint Paul. We are grateful for their many, many years of service and intentional shepherding of our youth and their families. Pastor Frank Lanier was called to be the Director of Leadership Development for the EFCA's North Central District. We are proud to have had him on staff and thankful the position is local, keeping the Lanier Family at First Free! Amy Brown resigned as our Faith Community Nurse. Amy served our church family so well during the Covid-19 pandemic and in many other ways. **Bittersweet goodbyes to all four!**

The Lord remains faithful to His church and provided new staff. The Elder Board hired Luke Olson as our Interim Director of Worship and then confirmed him as our Director of Worship. We welcomed Brent Fischer as Senior High Youth Pastor and Koby Radcliffe as Junior High Youth Pastor, also overseeing Children's Ministries. We also welcomed Andy O'Rourke as Adult Ministries Pastor. We are grateful to the Lord for carrying us through **a year of staff change**. We give thanks to the following men who faithfully served on our Elder Board: Mike Anderson (6 years), Jim Kirkpatrick (1 year), and John Bronson (1 year).

I want to express my gratitude to Pastors Bruce and Nathan for their **faithful leadership** and service to our church body. Aside from our Pastoral Staff, we are blessed with an excellent Support Staff who serve us in so many ways. Special thanks go to Chris, Tara, Bill, Croix and Grace for overseeing communications, the office and our facility. Our custodial team faithfully keeps our spaces tidy. First Free is also blessed with a great Children's Ministries Team under the leadership of Stephen and Kari Gravley, Abby Beard, Tonya Dahl and Annabelle Flener. In Fall 2023, Kendra Madison began performing all of the church's accounting duties. Special gratitude is deserved to Kari Berglund for her role as our accountant for many, many years at First Free. Her leadership is missed, but we are proud that she is now serving at our National Office and serving the broader EFCA movement.

Our 2023 preaching ministry included expositional messages through Daniel and the beginning chapters of Romans. During Summer 2023, preaching focused on some of the parables of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Our annual year-end Advent series was titled *The Women of Christmas*. Pastor Frank Lanier, Dr. Greg Strand, Norm Hubbard, Pastor David Rhone, Pastor Jim Kirkpatrick, Michael Francis, Nick Paine, Joe Pine and Pastor Andy O'Rourke all shared God's Word with our church body during Sunday worship services.

The Lord has been faithful to First Free for **well over a century**, and we humbly recognize His goodness. Even so, He has more work to do in and through us as a church body. This means we can look back and give thanks to Him for His glory, and we can look ahead with great expectancy to His continued work.

EPHESIANS 3:20-21

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

To God alone be the glory,
Pastor Todd

Executive Pastor

Bruce Henry

What a year 2023 was for me to experience God's grace and mercy! Though the year began as many others had, it turned soon to something very challenging. After some weeks away in the early part of the year, my wife and I came back to Minnesota with knowledge that something was wrong with my health. After being checked by my family practice doctor, he sent me to specialists who did multiple biopsies. It was determined that I had cancer. Most of the year seemed to be full of scans, surgeries, radiation therapy, and trying to recover from them all. I still have a few lingering side effects, some of which may never go away.

I need to thank Pastor Todd and so many others as they were carrying my responsibilities throughout the year, hiring new pastors and our worship director, and serving the congregation with their own ministries. Because of the location of the cancer and the needed radiation therapy, my strength was often limited and my usefulness sorely lacking.

Tim Challies in *Seasons of Sorrow* writes eloquently of difficult moments. "While I can only speak for myself, it has been my experience that in my lowest moments I have feasted on Romans 8:28. I have run to it like a starving man runs to a meal and I have drunk from it like a parched man drinks from an oasis. I have needed Romans 8:28 and it has both comforted my soul and **directed my suffering.**"

The verse in Romans says, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Challies states that without Romans 8:28, we would not have confidence that our experiences in this world work for good. We would not have confidence that all things work for good, and we might not see the hand of God working in our suffering. Where things work together for good, there must be Someone who is working them, and we might neglect to meditate on the fact that our purpose in this world is to serve God's purpose.

But we do have Romans 8:28! God has given it to us as a gift of His grace. Those who love God and are loved by Him can have confidence that He is working through all of life's circumstances to bring good out of bad, light out of darkness, and joy out of suffering. As Challies states, "God's specialty is not bringing good from good, but good from bad and Romans 8:28 gently tells me that if I trust Him through my tears, He will give me reason to laugh; if I trust Him through my pain, He will teach me to praise Him; if I trust Him through my suffering, He will afterwards show me the good that came with it and through it." So, what can I report on? I have experienced the love and mercy of God. I have experienced the **grace and generosity** of Pastor Todd and the Elders of First Free. I have experienced the overwhelming compassion and prayers of the members and friends in our congregation and many others outside of our fellowship. Thank you for walking with me through this year!

Executive Pastoral Duties (continued)

New Member Process – *Led by Mike Anderson*

In 2023, we welcomed 44 new members and their children. This number includes three new pastors and their wives. At least eleven of our new members gave their testimonies at Congregational Meetings and during Sunday services throughout the year. (All candidates submit a written testimony prior to being affirmed as new members.) In addition to those who completed the membership process, twenty additional people attended membership classes at Pastor Todd and Sharon's home. Be on the lookout for these new faces and welcome them into our family!

Hospitality Ministry – *Led by Jon & Louise Addington and Jason & Kate Piehl*

This team grew to 87 people in 2023. Focused on Sunday morning services, the team included Greeters, Ushers, and Guest Services Hosts. Connect Cards were filled out by **106 family units** who were new to First Free. From those initial handshakes, 45 family units (71 individuals) attended a FIRST Connection meeting. Of those, ten individuals became First Free members. Many others have become regular attenders.

Six team members attended the AED/CPR training in February. The annual Hospitality Team Training was held in September. We celebrated over a shared meal in May, praising and thanking God for the joy of serving Christ and our church family.

Adult Ministries Pastor

Andy O'Rourke

I began my new role as Adult Ministries Pastor in August 2023. Since then, I've had the joy of getting to know many people within our church family including key leaders and ministry teams. My family and I have been **welcomed very warmly**, and we feel increasingly at home at First Free. The multi-generational aspect of our church is a great source of encouragement to us. This church has been blessed with great people, a solid history, and exciting potential in the future for even greater gospel impact both locally and globally!

Mini Congregations

The Bereans met on Sundays and also hosted social activities. Teaching was handled by Joe Pine and Bill Nettekoven. The Body Builders studied Revelation and began the Gospel Project curriculum while also gathering for fellowship outside of class. The @the.CORE group met regularly and studied Colossians, also gathering for various social events. Koinonia studied Thessalonians led by John Bronson, and their prayer time remains a vibrant part of class. A 2023-24 Sunday elective class, *Basics of Christian Theology*, was led by Dr. Daryl Aaron and received a great response.

Small Groups

We kicked off in Fall 2023 with **22 small groups**! In October, our small group leaders gathered for a time of training and encouragement. Whatever your season of life, we encourage everyone at First Free to join a small group to journey with others in the gospel rhythms of word, prayer, community and mission.

Adult Education & Fellowship

Besides what is listed above, there are various opportunities for men and women to study, pray and fellowship. Discovering the Bible (led by Jon Addington) led many in reading the whole Bible in one year. Our Senior Adult Bible Study (led by Gary Watts) served a faithful group on Wednesday mornings. The Fellowship group for young adults (led by Rich and Jodene Malmsten) met on Thursdays. The 40+ Singles Group and Widow / Widower Ministry provide vibrant fellowship opportunities within life seasons.

Men's Ministries

Men's Ministries Team – *Led by Matthew Wellendorf*

- We are thankful to host fellowship and teaching events for men at First Free and community guests. We continue to pray for God to raise up boys and men in our church to become leaders in their families and communities.
- Three quarterly breakfasts provided topical teaching and a casual, relational meal. Guest speakers included Pastors Kenny King, David Rhone and Darrius Hubbard. Our Annual Steak Out in August saw **115+ registrants** who enjoyed axe throwing, delicious food and the testimony of former professional tennis player David Wheaton.
- Our team included Kevin Watters, Andrew Panek, Ron Virnala, Tad Kastman, Dave Gall, Charles Garcia, Pastor Andy O'Rourke, and Matthew Wellendorf.

The Forge – *Led by Mike Anderson*

- Our purity group celebrated its fourth anniversary having touched the lives of **100+ men**. We recognize the impure nature of today's culture and seek to equip men to live pure lives, turning away from society's norm of sexual "freedom" and finding true freedom in Christ.

Adult Ministries (continued)

Men's Ministries (continued)

Men's Mentoring Ministry (2T22) – *Led by Mike Anderson*

- "2T22" stands for 2 Timothy 2:2. This ministry debuted in Spring 2023 to help men become well-rounded disciples who grow in regular, ongoing connection with older, godly men. Each pair commits to meeting at least twelve times annually. Most pairs have gone above and beyond the twelve-meeting minimum. We have ten mentors and twelve mentees, always seeking more of both!

Additional Men's Ministries

- Basketball – *Led by Peter Thompson*
- Bible Study & Fellowship – *Led by Jim Kirkpatrick and Marty Dennison*
- Thursday Morning Prayer – *Led by Mike Anderson*
- Men at Work Study – *Led by Pastor Frank Lanier*
- Saturday Morning Study – *Led by Brian Finley and Dave Gustafson*

Women's Ministries

Women's Ministries Team – *Led by Paige Garcia*

- The heart of our team is to see God's glory on display by making and maturing disciples, providing opportunities to know His character and work, developing relationships with other women, and building up women in the church body. Over **200 women** from First Free and other churches attended classes. Our study leaders – Nini Bronson, Patti Gregerson, Diane Johnson and Jan Nelson – have a deep desire for women to grow in His Word and support one another in prayer.
- Over 100 women gathered for our Fall Kickoff and enjoyed worship, brunch and teaching from Dottie Lanier. We also hosted a marriage conference in partnership with the Men's Ministries Team. Connection events like Ladies Night and our Summer BBQ saw **185+ attendees!**
- The Titus 2 Mentoring Ministry, led by Jeannine Brown, is an encouragement to younger and older women who seek to grow alongside one another. The Encouragement Ministry sent cards and emails each month to ladies in the midst of difficult times.
- Our dedicated team included Karen Choe, Paige Garcia, Mary Osterlund, Mandy Peterson and Grace Wellendorf.

Northwoods Moms – *Led by Amanda Rosso and Marie Warkentin*

- This ministry provides many fellowship opportunities and friendship connections for moms and their young children. Special events included a children's clothing / equipment swap and a panel discussion with wisdom provided by older women in our church.

Prodigal Prayer Ministry – *Led by Lori Felton*

- This prayer ministry provides support and encouragement to women walking through difficult situations with family members who don't know Christ.

Administrative Pastor

Nathan Greenwalt

First Free is blessed to have such skilled Support Staff working alongside our ministry staff ensuring communication, event planning, and all the details get attended to well! More so, our Support Staff has such an incredible heart for the roles they get to serve in, commitment to the church family they are part of and deep love for the Lord. So much of the quality programming and services we experience is because of how hard they work. Please, thank God with me for our Administrative Assistants (Chris Keller, Croix Menzel and Grace Wellendorf) and our Facility Scheduler and Librarian, Tara Larsen.

For many years, Kari Berglund served on our Accounting Staff. In 2023, a new opportunity arose for her to join the Evangelical Free Church of America's national staff in a full-time accounting position. She has been such an asset to First Free over the years and is **greatly missed**. I want to thank her for serving this church and for training and equipping Kendra Madison to continue as our primary accountant.

Facility Team – Led by Facility Manager Bill Meyer

In 2023, we determined to assess ministry needs as they affect some unrenovated areas of the building. Genuine effort has translated to plans that will provide needed updates to our Children's Ministry rooms and the Lower Level. I'm thankful for the leadership that Jake Higgins is bringing to this initiative. Though a clear timeline cannot be stated today, I am confident that **meaningful updates are on the horizon**.

Keeping up with repairs and maintenance can be challenging. We had a few critical plumbing events this past year that required swift attention. A new, modern lighting system was installed in the Worship Center, and our Parking Lot received bright, new LED lighting.

Both of these updates provide reliability in operation and savings in power consumption compared to the old fixtures. Thank you, church family, for giving generously so these projects could be completed!

Here are a few notable statistics that I gathered. In 2023, our custodial team and big church family used:

- 52 gallons of floor cleaner
- 250 bottles of all-purpose cleaner
- 624 bottles of toilet bowl cleaner
- **2,080 rolls of toilet paper**
- 10,000+ paper towel sheets

Administration (continued)

Library – Led by Tara Larsen

The purpose of our Church Library is stated in the Library's mission statement: To support the mission of First Evangelical Free Church by assisting in the labor of spreading the Gospel for the salvation of souls and for the edification and growth of believers.

This ministry continues to serve people of all ages. In 2023, we added **85 new patrons** to our database. We see many "regulars" each Sunday, and I personally love the friend groups that choose the space to meet up in between services.

Children enjoy the ministry of the Library throughout the year. We had over 40 kids who participated in the Summer Reading Program and logged a total of **54,848 minutes!** Prize Shop Sundays were busy and exciting. One of my favorite weekly tasks has been reading for the Mom's Day Away Story Time. Selecting books to coincide with their daily theme is a joy. It's so fun to see what the preschoolers choose to check out! Each Sunday School class has an assigned week each month to visit the Library, too.

It was humbling and exciting to be interviewed and have pictures taken for the Sep. 13, 2023 blog posted by the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA). First Free's Library was featured as one of three special church libraries in the EFCA that are invested in fighting for biblical literacy and sharing the gospel.

Stocking the Shelves occurred on Oct. 29 and is always our largest time of acquisition. One hundred fifteen items were purchased for our collection through this annual event. We are thankful for those who gave generously toward those new titles.

We currently have **10,546 items** available for checkout with more to be processed. As our founding librarian once stated: "The Church Library is not for the sake of a collection or for full shelves, but rather that the books might be read and be of help in illuminating the Scriptures, enabling Christians to apply God's truths in their lives."

I am so grateful for the faithful volunteers the Lord has provided: Nancy Beich, Marsha Kastman, Jodie Maki, Michelle Pratt, Stacy Schaefer, Nan Schutz, and Rose Wald. I realize it is rare for a church to have a library like ours. It's given me a wonderful opportunity to get to know so many in our church body. Thank you for utilizing this ministry resource.

Worship Director

Luke Olson

Transitioning into the Director of Worship role has been both exciting and challenging. I began in February as the interim leader and officially as First Free's Director of Worship in Aug. 2023. It's very exciting to use my background in music, including my college degrees of music education and trumpet performance, as well as my experience leading in the past, to bless our church family. It's also been challenging to adjust our family's work/life balance and time away in the evenings for rehearsals. Fortunately, my wonderful wife is very supportive of this new career in ministry and has stepped up to the plate in serving our family despite me being away from home more often. I appreciate her so much!

This past year, we were able to improve our worship experience in a few key ways, most of which were already put in place by previous directors. Our **new theatrical lighting system** was installed which provides improved visibility, stage ambiance and livestream quality. We also upgraded our sound booth computer systems and media presentation software, both of which are more reliable than our previous setup.

Hardware and software upgrades are nice, but I'm most proud of our people. I've really enjoyed learning about the incredible talent represented in our church body. I've added new singers and instrumentalists to our teams. All of them are passionate about worship music, and it's a privilege to serve alongside them. We've also recruited several new volunteers for our Livestream and Media Teams which is really encouraging to see.

Christmas, in particular, was an exceptionally exciting time. Our Worship Choir and Orchestra participation was the **largest it has ever been** during my time working with those ensembles. I'm so proud of everyone involved in our concerts.

Kari Gravley has done a tremendous job with the Kids' Choir, and I really enjoy collaborating with her. It's fun to see my two older children now in her choir. (My daughter, who is too young, cannot wait to join...)

I eagerly look forward to 2024 as we set a new vision while maintaining the core values of corporate worship, keeping Christ at the center of our worship.

Youth & Children's Ministries

Pastor Brent Fischer – Senior High

Pastor Koby Radcliffe – Junior High & Children

Senior High Sunday School

This year we studied the Book of James with an emphasis on the key traits of a “living faith”. We also conducted a mini-series on *Setting Yourself Up for Spiritual Growth in 2024*, emphasizing the dangers of social media and the need to be intentional in forming habits that will help us “be transformed by the renewal of our minds” in Christ rather than be conformed to worldly patterns (Rom. 12:1-2).

Senior High Youth Group (Wednesday Nights)

Our mid-week gatherings this year focused on the theme of “faith”, drawing from on Hebrews 11. Our times rotated between large group and small group discussion. In particular, we looked at how faith is not merely an intellectual belief, but a lifestyle of trust and allegiance; how faith is not really blind (since it trusts in God’s character and faithfulness); what it means to have “full-court faith” vs. a “lay-up faith”; and how the cliché “faith > fear” is only half true. The students also got to hear from many of their youth leaders and a bit of their testimonies. In addition, we had a blast bringing 49 students to the **biggest Fall Fling ever** at Camp Shamineau. Our students also assembled Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes, did various service projects in December, had a couple fun game nights in our small groups and geared up for Challenge 2024!

Junior High Sunday School

In 2023, we journeyed through the Bible Instruction Course and studied the basics of Christian doctrine and the Bible. Thank you to all our youth leaders who have stepped up and been willing to teach in the Junior High Sunday School class. We transitioned to The Thread curriculum toward the end of 2023. This curriculum takes the Gospel and threads it throughout all of the biblical text.

Junior High Youth Group

Our mid-week programming in 2023 was focused on the theme of “identity” and what it means to be in Christ. We studied through the Bible in various texts about identity and spent time in our small groups studying various biblical believers with identity changes and crises, such as Paul and Ruth. We went up to Camp Shamineau for Fall Fling 2023 at the beginning of November. We also made and packed boxes for Operation Christmas Child, did Christmas services projects and had a year-end Christmas party!

Youth Ministry Leaders

These studies and relationships happen because of our **fantastic team!**

- *Senior High Leaders* – Kari Berglund, Gwen Malcolm, Belle Flener, Liz Nelson, Marie Peters, Katie Lindquist, Tim Lindquist, Nick Paine, Andy Waller and Steve Kesner
- *Junior High Leaders* – Sharon Ericksen, Belle Flener, Jaden Hunt, Tawnya Marek, Michael Johnson, Joey Fasulo and Dwight Reynolds

Youth Prayer Calendar

Thank you for faithfully praying for the students, leaders and Youth Ministry in 2023. We saw the Lord answer your prayers in amazing ways and are honored to be part of a church that so highly values prayer.

Youth & Children's Ministries (continued)

A Refreshed Mission

The Children's Ministries Team formulated a new mission statement in 2023: "We exist to glorify God by discipling children to love and live for Jesus." We want to thank all of our Children's Ministry leaders. We have an amazing staff that uses their personal time and resources to share the Gospel with kids. We are grateful for this church's level of **service and commitment**. So many people volunteer, care and pray!

- Abby Beard – Director of Mid-Week Children's Discipleship
- Tonya Dahl – Director of Early Childhood Discipleship
- Annabelle "Belle" Flener – Children's Ministry Assistant
- Kari Gravley – Director of Kids' Choir
- Stephen Gravley – Director of Sunday Elementary Discipleship
- Croix Menzel – Administrative Assistant for Family Ministries

Sunday Morning Elementary Discipleship (Kids' Camp – Kindergarten thru 2nd Grade)

- Kids' Choir and Wake-up Worship – We had ~40 choir members and many more in our group time!
- Chapel – They used the *Gospel Project for Kids* to walk through the Bible in chronological order.
- Sunday School – They used biblically-deep curricula including *Truth78* and *Precept Ministries*.
- Volunteers – Over 50 people faithfully model **salvation joy** for our kids. They include helpers and coordinators for choir, craft, chapel, games, and snacks plus room parents, security and teachers!

Sunday Morning Early Childhood Discipleship (Northwoods – Age 0 thru 5)

- Room Changes – To accommodate a growing number of toddler-age kids, rooms were converted into the following breakdowns: 0 - 18 months, 19 - 24 months, 25 - 48 months and 4 - 5 years.
- Curriculum – We continue to use the *Gospel Project* curriculum. It is also used at Expedition (below). All our kids are experiencing the same Bible lesson each week geared for their individual ages!
- Volunteers – We have 70 volunteers serving monthly on Sundays with several serving multiple weeks per month. Numerous people substitute. We're so grateful for these amazing, faithful servants.

Children's Outreach

- We hosted our community during the Fourth of July Fireworks with snacks, food trucks, and popcorn. Over **200 church swag bags** were given to kids with activities and VBS invitations inside.
- Vacation Bible School 2023 was *Kingdom Keepers*! We transformed the building into a medieval castle while hosting 150 kids and 100 volunteers. We all learned about the armor of God and His Good Kingdom. Our church is so blessed by all those who serve this program year after year!
- Our Wednesday night programming (Expedition) really dives into teaching kids how to be the hands and feet of Jesus with an emphasis on hands-on learning. We have **~70 kids attending regularly** with 25 talented volunteers! This mid-week opportunity gathers us to learn more about God and His Word while having so much fun. We encourage kids to really know God's Word by memorizing verses and ensuring each child has a Bible for them to read at home.
- For Truck-or-Treat 2023, we invited a couple large vehicles and multiple cars with decorated trunks hosted by our church families. Many families attended, both from First Free and the community.

Global Impact Team (Missions)

Brett Rosso

First Free's Global Impact Team (GIT) works to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) by coordinating with sending organizations, our Global Partners and our congregation.

The 2023 GIT had the following members: Gib Coleman, Doug and Cheryl Conrad, Marty and Sandy Dennison, Charles and Maridee Farrow, Karen Gustafson, Josh and Lauren Maske, Chris Keller, Pastor Todd Olson and Brett Rosso. The Farrows stepped down from the team in July, and God called Charles home in Feb. 2024. Their hearts for reaching Muslims and Maridee's excellent note-taking skills are missed. Karen left the team in August before the Lord called her home in December. She championed missions and served the Lord dutifully.

Doug and Cheryl are the newest team members, joining in the second half of the year. Pastor Todd and Chris continue to represent the church staff and gladly take on the extra responsibilities this entails.

Events

Global Impact Sunday was held in late January and the main speaker was Dave Rofkahr from Via (formerly Center for Missions Mobilization). The title of his sermon was *A New Era of Missions - Mobilizing the Global Church to Reach the Unreached*. In the Youth Center, there were updates from new Global Partner Norm Hubbard as well as Paul and Roxanne Wilson. There was an evening event where Dave Rofkahr provided more details on the changing world of missions.

This past year saw the full **return of short-term trips**. The Conrads lead a team to Japan for children's programming and Vacation Bible School. Two families served at a marriage and parenting conference in Egypt with International Messengers. There was also one man who taught English in Tunisia with ELIC. In August, the short-term teams and three of our ELIC Global Partners reported to the congregation by telling stories from their trips and their ministries.

Global Partners

The GIT was able meet in-person or virtually with Global Partners on at least eight different occasions. As ministries have transitioned back to normal operation post-pandemic, the meetings allowed for discussions about physical and spiritual health and the changes in their ministry.

In February, Beth Thompson joined her husband, Jack, in retirement. They previously served with ReachGlobal in Budapest, Hungary. Both Jack and Beth continue to volunteer with ReachGlobal where possible. Please thank the Lord for his guidance and providence in their ministry.

Missions Project Fund

The fund has allowed the GIT to help financially support short term trips and provide monetary gifts to Global Partners for particular ministerial needs. The funds also supported young missionaries serving overseas and on college campus ministries with Cru.

Please continue to pray for our Global Partners!

Deacon Reports – Harvest Gardens Property

Jon Addington (Harvest Gardens)

Bill Freiling and John Chelstrom (The Giving Garden)

Harvest Gardens

Our community gardens provided a unique outreach opportunity for First Free for our **fourteenth season**. The Harvest Gardens ministry seeks to build a bridge to the community, welcome the immigrant, feed the hungry and demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ while sharing His story. Plots were provided to 700 gardeners and their families with tools, water and finished compost. Most gardeners continue to come from the Asian community, with many first-and-second-generation refugee immigrants. For the third year, we had a Bike Giveaway in which **100 refurbished bicycles** were provided to gardeners and their children. Two raised bed garden boxes were added for Harmony Gardens residents next door. God continues to bless the Harvest Garden Kids' Bible Club with a strong team of fifteen volunteers who ministered to children of gardeners on Tuesday evenings. The kids came eagerly to learn more about the Bible and enjoyed songs, recreation, crafts and Bible stories based on the Book of Mark.

Special thanks to:

- Rob and Mary Osterlund for leading Garden Kids Bible Club
- Doug and Cheryl Conrad for leading the Bike Giveaway
- Bill Freiling and John Chelstrom for leading the Giving Garden
- Dave Peterson, David Birkebak and Steve Verbeek for many hours caring for the gardens and gardeners through the season
- Jim Winberg, Kent Thompson, George Palke and Kevin Johnson for collecting garbage and moving plant waste for composting each Wednesday morning
- Maridee Farrow for assisting Harmony Gardens residents with raised bed gardens
- Andrew Panek as Chief Beekeeper and Kevin Johnson as Apprentice for keeping our pollinator colony happy and flowing with honey
- Grace Wellendorf for skillfully handling communications with gardeners as they call the Church Office
- All those who participated sacrificially to make this ministry a reality

One of the greatest blessings is the bond created when working side by side in service to the community. To God be the glory.

Giving Garden

The Giving Garden is a 30' x 30' garden plot at Harvest Gardens on County Road C. All of the produce grown on the plot is delivered to our local Salvation Army in Maplewood. All ages and abilities are welcome to join! This past year was a bumper year with **900.2 pounds of fresh produce**. A record! It was a challenging season due to a very dry and hot summer requiring almost daily watering. We are grateful for God's blessing to our community in reaching families in need with fresh vegetables. The church received a letter from Salvation Army expressing great appreciation for our donations to their food shelf. We're also thankful for the great team we had last year and their dedication to preparing, planting, weeding, watering, harvesting, and delivering. We are looking forward to 2024 as we assemble another team to dig into the ground.

Deacon Report – Visitation Ministry

Louise Addington and Debbie Anderson

We come alongside others in our church to deepen relational bonds through listening, encouragement, friendship and spiritual care. Hospitals, transitional care facilities and homes are common places for our visits. Phone calls, email/text conversations and cards are a vital part of connecting. We have helped with transportation, food, and practical resources. This past year, our team made **151 in-person visits, 65 phone visits, sent 121 cards and had over 200 electronic conversations.**

In 2023, the Homebound Ministry merged with the Visitation Ministry. We spent a few months praying and brainstorming, launching Care Friends (CF) at the end of the year. CF matches those in our church who would love to have a consistent one-on-one visit with a Care Friend. The enthusiastic response has been a blessing. We have matched seventeen people with more in the works and a training session planned for Spring 2024. Jackie Pickar graciously led the Homebound Ministry for many years and has shifted to tenderly writing bereavement cards for us. They are sent with the closing signature *First Free Care Ministries*, representing the Visitation Ministry.

The Caregivers Ministry continued to expand. As Amy Brown (Faith Community Nurse) transitioned to Capitol City Church, Katie Nice joined Louise Addington in leading the monthly Caregiver Support Group. Mary Schultz and Dave and Diana Knutsen continued to lead the Receiver Group. We had fifteen people involved in the Caregiver Group, and five people in the Receiver Group. These groups provide Christian fellowship, fun activities, spiritual care and prayer during this season of life, helping people to thrive amidst the many challenges that caregiving brings. What a wonderful blessing for these **dear saints** to support one another! Louise and Amy teach a Zoom (virtual) class called *Powerful Tools for Caregivers*. Our fall class had twelve registered attenders. This six-week class provides basic tools and practical tips so caregivers can maintain their own health and well-being while caregiving.

Many thanks to Barb Fontana, Katie Nice, Jackie Pickar, current and future Care Friends, our ministry leaders and our church family. You live out “loving one another” so well. We love as He has loved us, all for the purpose of building up the body of Christ and the glory of God.

Deacon Report – Widow & Widower Ministry

Karen Choe

This ministry answers God's call for believers to meet the needs of the widows/widowers in our midst according to Deut. 10:18. At the end of 2023, there were **83 widows and widowers** listed at First Free. In 2023, nine brothers and sisters in our group passed away, and five relocated. Eight people lost their spouses this past year, so their names were added to our list.

- **Service Activities** – We assembled and delivered Easter baskets to homebound individuals, hosted a movie matinee, packed boxes for Operation Christmas Child and assembled Christmas gift bags for Harmony Gardens residents.
- **Social Activities** – We attended a production of *The Church Basement Ladies*, hosted the Glad Tidings Concert at church, organized a progressive dinner and enjoyed a Saints baseball game.
- **Meals Together** – We had lunches together on Valentine's Day and by the lake on a summer day. We also hosted a picnic at the Choe Home and a pastor/staff appreciation lunch at church.
- **Physical Needs** – We meet the tangible needs of individuals in the group as requests are made. Some of the help given this year included replacement of a GFCI outlet, repairing a typewriter and installing a toilet seat.
- **Communication** – We let our group know about our ministry via the *First Look* quarterly newsletter, Weekly News and personal emails, Sunday bulletin and Christmas and birthday cards.

The core group who plans these activities includes John and Karen Choe, Rose Wald, Janine Frans, Janice Johnson, Don Fackler and Keith Krause, with additional support from Pastor Todd and Sharon Olson and Pastor Andy O'Rourke. We express gratitude to God for His guidance, appreciate the openness of church leaders to the leading of the Spirit in fulfilling His directives and acknowledge the individuals within the group who stepped forward to help. Our prayers are centered on the physical and mental well-being of the widows and widowers with a heartfelt desire that they experience God's sustaining love (Isaiah 46:4).

Care & Outreach Ministries

Car Care – Led by Pastor Nathan Greenwalt and Rick Hathaway

The Church Office received **150+ calls** for Car Care in 2023. Our volunteers are knowledgeable car mechanics, but they are even more committed to sharing the love of Christ by making vehicles safe and reliable. The most important part of this monthly outreach ministry is when Sherry Mosner and Kathy Junker share the truth of the gospel with our guests in the waiting room. Each month, about ten community members hear scripture and share personal prayer requests in a safe environment!

GriefShare – Led by Jan Pitman, Carolyn Schultz and Diane Johnson

This video and discussion course features scripture-based help for those who are grieving. We facilitated two thirteen-week series in 2023 with 20+ people attending per semester. **More than half of the participants are not from our church.** Several individuals have started attending First Free after receiving spiritual encouragement and emotional healing at GriefShare!

Harmony Gardens Partnership – Led by Jon Addington

Adjacent to Harvest Gardens, Cassia's Harmony Gardens Senior Living (HGSL) opened in Dec. 2022 on County Road C. Our vision for several years has been to partner with them in providing care – practical, relational, and spiritual – for our own congregants and their residents, all while sharing the gospel. First Free member Doug Conrad is the HGSL Chaplain and Volunteer Coordinator. In 2023, eleven First Free household units resided at HGSL, and two HGSL family units chose to make First Free their church home. We provided 28 volunteers who logged **~1,100 hours** transporting residents within the building and assisting with games, knitting, birthday parties and raised bed gardening. Spiritual care included visiting, leading studies, and Sunday afternoon chapel services and hymn sings. Five congregants serve on a chapel speaker rotation, two youth did summer internships onsite and two Small Groups meet at HGSL. We praise God for the expanding opportunity to care for our own and be the hands and feet of Jesus in Maplewood.

Meals for Moms – Led by Bev Wentworth and Amanda Rosso

This ministry provides food for families adjusting to life with a new child. This past year, **13 families were brought 100+ meals.** We are thankful for a congregation that observes tangible needs and seeks to meet them with the hands of Christ. It's a joy to journey together and support one another along the way.

Operation Christmas Child

In 2023, our church packed **1,700 shoeboxes** with gifts for kids around the world. Each one contained the message of Jesus and an invitation to attend local discipleship classes. Our leadership team is large and truly cherishes this ministry. Thank you all for sewing, knitting, shopping for supplies, packing, praying and more!

Additional Care & Outreach

Several other ministries host special events and provide care to our congregation. These groups include:

- GRACE Group – They provide an encouraging space for women on cancer journeys to fellowship.
- Medical Professionals – Scheduled volunteers watch for medical emergencies on Sunday mornings.
- Pro-Life Ministry – They invite us to prayerfully participate in the spiritual battle against abortion.
- Sunday Prayer Team – They offer to pray with people after church services as needed.

Congregational Statistics

Current Church Membership

461

Weddings (3)

Silas Brood & Maddie Dahl (4.30.23)

Adam Johnson & Brianna Squiers (6.3.23)

Timmy Lindquist & Audrey Sexson (12.30.23)

Child Dedications (14)

Annabelle, David and Luke Stinger (Nathan & Kayla)

Caspian Pratt (Elijah & Michelle)

Charles Paulson (Isaac & Sara)

Cosette and Theodore Crim (Josh & Laura)

Elias Halberg (Aharon & Becky)

Ellarie Honl (Kevin & Emily)

Isaiah Storlie (Josh & Vanessa)

Lydia Olsen (Caleb & Alaina)

Miles Waller (Andy & Alyssa)

Spencer Ritenour (Thomas & Vanessa)

Wesley Suek (Tom & Nicole)

Baptisms (11)

Camille Greene

David Howard

Jacob Keller

Jess Radcliffe

Jimmy Lipps

Jimmy Youtsey

Judah Olson

Kai Olson

Ken Richardson

Libby Gravley

Sam Mertens

New Members (44)

Al & Judy Schneider

Andrew & Amanda Redmann

Brenda Kappel

Caleb & Julia Olson

Chris Reece

Dan & Terry Stahl

Daryl & Marilyn Aaron

Gracie Chermak

New Members (continued)

Heidi Duch

Janet Jordan

Janine Frans

Jimmy & Megan Lipps

Jon & Penny Hanson

Jorrdan & Amy Dolney

Josh & Vanessa Storlie

Joshua & Jaden Hunt

Joy Muchlinski

Keith Krause

Kevin & Beth Salmon

Larry & Vicky Smith

Liz Nelson

Mim Olson

Pastor Andy & Sara O'Rourke

Pastor Brent & Anna Fischer

Pastor Koby Radcliffe

Rolf & Jan Arnquist

Thomas & Susan Okoneski

Violet Strike

Deaths (22)

Eileen (1.29.23) and Dale (5.12.23) Williams

Gary Jordan (2.11.23)

Roger Swanson (3.4.23)

Audie Nice (3.18.23)

Curt Oakes (3.30.23)

Brad Keller (4.8.23)

Don (4.11.23) and Lu (7.27.23) Halverson

Irene Bracke (5.7.23)

Bob Stewart (5.16.23)

Dorothy "Skip" Kummel (6.5.23)

Lauren Hubbard (6.25.23)

Evie Fackler (7.5.23)

Héctor García (8.29.23)

Daniel Peabody (9.23.23)

Jeannie Kirkpatrick (10.13.23)

Gladys Swengel (10.20.23)

Ruth Nelson (10.25.23)

Dave Wentworth (10.29.23)

Sam Boe (11.24.23)

Karen Gustafson (12.23.23)

First Evangelical Free Church
Financial Report as of June 30, 2023

	General Fund	HCD* Fund	Care Fund	Missions Project Fund	Memorials	Harvest Gardens	Capital Projects	Other Restricted	Total
Balance as of 7/1/22	\$ 505,526	\$ 1,946,409	\$ 15,467	\$ 62,708	\$ 251,137	\$ 261	\$ 103,836	239,149	\$ 3,124,493
Year-to-date Receipts & Transfers	2,137,710	22,748	24,447	73,424	8,860	17,883	6,275	88,514	2,379,861
Year-to-date Expenditures & Transfers	2,082,629	-	29,209	67,001	66,100	12,678	110,109	85,461	2,453,187
Net Change	55,081	22,748	(4,762)	6,423	(57,240)	5,205	(103,834)	3,053	(73,326)
Balance as of 6/30/23	<u>\$ 560,607</u>	<u>\$ 1,969,157 **</u>	<u>\$ 10,705</u>	<u>\$ 69,131</u>	<u>\$ 193,897</u>	<u>\$ 5,466</u>	<u>\$ 2</u>	<u>\$ 242,202</u>	<u>\$ 3,051,167</u>

**FIRST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH
GENERAL FUND BUDGET VS. ACTUAL
YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2023**

Actual	Budget	Over / (Under) Budget	
\$1,295,712	\$1,439,581	(\$143,869)	COMPENSATION/BENEFITS
\$66,866	\$85,500	(\$18,634)	LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
\$322,378	\$338,000	(\$15,622)	MISSIONS & OUTREACH
\$1,593	\$8,250	(\$6,657)	COMMUNITY OUTREACH
\$20,842	\$17,000	\$3,842	WORSHIP & MUSIC
\$25,767	\$29,300	(\$3,533)	COMMUNITY LIFE
\$1,645	\$3,200	(\$1,555)	DISCIPLESHIP & TRAINING
\$2,129	\$1,600	\$529	LIBRARY
\$290	\$1,500	(\$1,210)	YOUNG ADULT
\$62,335	\$51,550	\$10,785	YOUTH & FAMILY
\$50,181	\$61,400	(\$11,219)	OFFICE & COMMUNICATION RESOURCES
\$232,891	\$190,000	\$42,891	PROPERTY & FACILITIES
\$2,082,629	\$2,226,881	(\$144,252)	TOTAL GENERAL FUND EXPENSES