

# Annual Report

## 2024



### **First Evangelical Free Church**

2696 HAZELWOOD STREET  
MAPLEWOOD, MN 55109  
[WWW.FIRSTEFC.ORG](http://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

MARTY DENNISON

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As we look back on 2024, there are a number of blessings that God provided for which we can only praise Him. Specific blessings include continued growth in our church attendance, ministry and giving. The Elder Board focused on strategic initiatives in 2024 that would direct our work. These initiatives included:

- **EXECUTE** the renovation of our Children's Wing and start a capital campaign to raise funds for it
- **DEVELOP** a security plan that would work with the new renovations
- **IMPLEMENT** leadership development
- **MAKE** evangelism more central to who we are as people and a church
- **EXPAND** the number of deacon roles
- **SHEPHERD** the flock through prayer

Much progress was made in all areas! Renovation plans took shape, and we hired Solid Rock Construction. Initial work started in Fall 2024 with the bulk of the renovation planned to be finished by May 2025. Jason Piehl formed and has chaired a Capital Campaign Committee. At the time of writing, God has blessed SEEDS 22:6, the name of our campaign, with over \$500,000 of the needed \$1,000,000 to complete the project. Joe Beard also formed our new Security Team with Terry Stahl leading our Medical Team. We are thankful for those who have volunteered on these teams. A safer building for our children and families will result!

A leadership training effort has been led by Pastor Andy O'Rourke. Our hope is that ongoing training of potential leaders will make us stronger as a body and will help bring new leadership into vital ministries of the church as they are needed. As an outgrowth of our desire to promote leadership development, the Elders developed a plan to help fund seminary training for those going into full-time ministry. This plan will debut at the Congregational Meeting on Feb. 16, 2025. The Elders have also expanded our list of deacons. Deacons now serve our body in many ways including Visitation, Widow & Widower Ministry, Hospitality, Harvest and Giving Gardens, GriefShare, and Meals for Moms.

As we focused on the above areas, God blessed our church with growth. Our annual average attendance rose from 575 to 643. We added 34 new members. Children's Ministries saw average attendance for Sundays at 117 and Wednesdays at 74 with nearly 300 volunteers serving!

*"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood,  
a holy nation, a people for his own possession,  
that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who  
called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."*

1 Peter 2:9

Looking ahead to 2025, we pray our focus will be on our Lord and on why He has us here as a body of believers. It was a privilege to serve on the following Elder Board in 2024:

Mo Anderson, Kevin Brown, John Choe, Marty Dennison, Isaac Fones, Harv Hendrickson, Jake Higgins, Tim Lindquist, Matt Wellendorf and Pastor Todd Olson

# Senior Pastor

DR. TODD OLSON

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We give thanks to the Lord for His goodness in 2024. We saw many people get baptized (Matthew 28:18-20), many babies born and dedicated (Luke 2:22), many couples get married (Genesis 2:24) and many saints called home into glory (Psalm 116:15).

This past year was one with **no staff change here** at First Free. For a church our size, that is a bit uncommon – and certainly in the future, change is inevitable. Nonetheless, we experienced the stability of little disruption in programming as a result of having no staff changes. I praise the Lord for the ways in which the team He has assembled here at First Free strives to work together for the good of the church family.

I want to recognize and give thanks to the following Elders for their service to the Lord and our church family in 2024: Kevin Brown (6 years) and John Choe (3 years). Special thanks to them for helping shepherd and lead our flock.

One big accomplishment in 2024 was the final decision to renovate the Children’s Wing. This is an area primarily used for children’s ministry, but it also includes our multi-purpose Family Center. A special thanks to the Elders and Staff for navigating the decision-making process. I want to also thank Jason Piehl and the SEEDS 22:6 Capital Campaign Committee for their efforts in praying, communicating and overseeing the raising of the funds for the renovation. **The Lord has been good to us**, and His people here at First Free have been generous. Our church family’s giving reminds me of David’s prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:14 after receiving generous offerings for the building of the Temple: *“But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.”*

The preaching ministry at First Free in 2024 was focused primarily in the Book of Romans with four additional series: Gospel-Shaped Relationships, Spiritual Disciplines from the Psalms, Generosity and our annual Advent Series. We were blessed to have a number of men in the church preach throughout the year.

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise!*

*Give thanks to him; bless his name!*

*For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever,  
and his faithfulness to all generations.*

Psalm 100:4-5

With a grateful heart and all glory to God,

Pastor Todd

# Executive Pastor

BRUCE HENRY

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I had the honor as a part-time pastor of continuing to assist Pastor Todd and serve First Free in several ways in 2024. These responsibilities brought fulfillment to me as I sought to serve Jesus Christ here within this church family.

Primarily, I was asked to supervise some of the pastors and leaders, connect with people at church and throughout the week, shepherd individuals and families where needed, research ways to strengthen our church, and meet with leaders for vision casting, strategic planning, and ministry programming. It is a joy to mentor pastors, care for people, and find efficient ways of helping to accomplish our church's mission and vision under the direction of the Elder Board.

Ultimately, our pastors and directors work diligently to increase our church's impact, and I sought to come alongside them and encourage them. Seeing ministries and leaders growing and thriving in their respective areas – Children's Ministries, Junior High, High School, Adult Ministries, Worship, Hospitality, Greeting, Ushering, Guest Services and beyond – it causes me to joyfully praise God.

In addition, I also had the opportunity to lead funerals, periodically preach, attend Elder Board meetings, conduct ministry evaluations, and many other duties when asked. **I am so grateful to be able to serve** this body of believers alongside so many other gifted pastors, leaders, and volunteers.

Let me close with these verses from Ephesians 1:15-23:

*(15) For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, (16) I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, (17) that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, (18) having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, (19) and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might (20) that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, (21) far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (22) And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, (23) which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

# Administrative Pastor

NATHAN GREENWALT

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I am so thankful for our Support Staff. We meet as a team every week to discuss programs, facility needs, and how we support various ministry leaders; but we experience a sweet comradery and share a heart for serving the Lord and First Free. I can't express enough how incredible this staff is and how their servant-hearted commitment to our church family guides their daily work. Please thank the Lord with me for our Administrative Assistants Chris Keller, Croix Menzel, and Grace Wellendorf as well as our Facility Scheduler and Librarian, Tara Larsen. I am very proud of this team!

## **FACILITY TEAM – Led by Facility Manager Bill Meyer**

Momentum which started in 2023 led to approving a project to update our Children's Ministries spaces starting in 2024. We have contracted Solid Rock Construction to help with designs and implementation of a reimagined facility designated to disciple students from birth through Grade 6. Our goal is to have more effective teaching and activity space in an area while offering a stronger sense of security for our young families. Thankfully, this project is also addressing the long-needed renovation of our plumbing in the north end of the building. The renovation project started in Fall 2024 with a completion goal before Summer 2025. Considering the timeframe, we have had to make a number of temporary facility usage alterations. Thank you to all our ministry leaders for being flexible during a season when day-to-day operations change to make room for construction.

## **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. The ministry of the First Free Library continues to serve people of all ages. In 2024, **seventy-four patrons** were added to our database. Our "regulars" visit 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 forty kids who participated in the Summer Reading Program and logged a total of 47,267 minutes! Prize Shop Sundays were busy and exciting. During the school year, preschool and elementary Sunday School classes have an assigned week each month to visit the Library. One of my favorite weekly tasks has been reading for the Mom's Day Away program's story time. Selecting books to coincide with their curriculum theme is a joy.

Stocking the Shelves occurred on Oct. 27 and is always our largest time of acquisition. Ninety-one items were purchased for our collection through this annual event. We are thankful for those who gave generously toward those new titles and I am still working on processing them. We currently have **10,608 items available** for checkout with more to be added. 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, Kris Johnson, Marsha Kastman, Jodie Maki, Michelle Pratt, Stacy Schaefer, Nan Schutz, Mary Vangen, 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 and growing this ministry resource.

# Adult Ministries Pastor

ANDY O'ROURKE

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The year of 2024 was the first full year I served in my role as Adult Ministries Pastor. As I have become more familiar with the annual flow of the ministry year, it has been exciting to see the ways God is blessing and growing our different ministries. We had record high participation at many of our men's and women's events! Our ministry programs would not be possible without the many gifted, servant leaders we have been blessed with as a church family. I was able to help various leaders and leadership teams grow in collaboration, strategic planning and also become better equipped in their specific ministry areas.

## MINI CONGREGATIONS

The Bereans met on Sundays and also hosted social activities. Teachers included Boyd Seevers and Joe Pine. The Body Builders continued in their study through the Gospel Project curriculum, while also gathering for fellowship outside of class. The @the.CORE group met regularly and studied Colossians and 1 Timothy, also gathering for various social events. Koinonia studied King David and the Gospel of Mark, and their prayer time remains a vibrant part of class. Crossroads worked through Philippians and Daniel. A 2023-24 Sunday elective class, *Basics of Christian Theology*, was led by Daryl Aaron and concluded in May.

## SMALL GROUPS

A new Small Group was launched in September bringing our total to **23 groups!** We increased the frequency of Small Group Leader Gatherings, meeting three times during the year 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 living out the values of gospel, 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 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*

- Our goal as a team is to raise up boys and men in our church and community to become leaders in their families, at work, and in their communities by hosting events where men can grow and learn.
- Three quarterly breakfasts provided topical teaching and a casual, relational meal. Guest speakers included Gib Coleman and Pastors Andy O'Rourke and David Rhone. Our Annual Steak Out in August saw **149 registrants** who enjoyed axe throwing, delicious food and teaching on the prodigal son presented by Pastor Steve Treichler.
- Our team included Kevin Watters, Andrew Panek, Ron Virnala, Tad Kastman, Dave Gall, Josh Storlie, Kevin Johnson, Rich Malmsten, Pastor Andy O'Rourke, and Matthew Wellendorf.

## **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.

Additional Men's Ministries

- Basketball – *Led by Peter Thompson and Andy Waller*
- Bible Study & Fellowship – *Led by Marty Dennison and Larry Jaehnert*
- 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 Ali Keller*

- 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 ladies in the church body. Over 200 women from First Free and other churches attended classes. Our study leaders – Nini Bronson, Sandy Dennison, Sue Granlund, Jeannine Brown, Patti Gregerson, Diane Johnson, Jan Nelson, Heather Greenwalt and Sara O'Rourke – have a deep desire for women to grow in His Word and support one another in prayer.
- Over 130 women gathered for our Fall Kickoff and enjoyed worship, brunch and teaching from Kristy Hubbard on taking courage in Christ. This was a **20% increase in attendance** from this event last year! Connection events like Ladies Night, our Summer BBQ and Ice Cream Picnic saw 220+ attendees! We are thrilled and thankful to see women binding together as sisters and building each other up.
- The Titus 2 Mentoring Ministry is an encouragement to younger and older women who seek to grow alongside one another. Jeannine Brown has led faithfully for several years, and Mandy Peterson has now joined as a co-leader.
- The Encouragement Ministry sent 50+ cards and emails each month to ladies who are grieving, physically recovering from illness or experiencing a bereavement anniversary.
- Our team starting in Fall 2024 included Ali Keller, Karen Choe, Mary Osterlund, Mandy Peterson and Grace Wellendorf. We want to express gratitude to Paige Garcia for her years of faithful service on our team, both as a member and as leader of the Women's Ministries Team. Her Christ-centered dedication to the role is a model for female leaders at First Free.

Mom Connection (Formerly 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 chili cookoff for young families in Fall 2024.

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.

# Youth & Children's Ministries

PASTOR BRENT FISCHER (High School)

PASTOR KOBY RADCLIFFE (Junior High & Children)

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## HIGH SCHOOL (SUN. MORNINGS)

This year we renamed the Sunday School hour, *Sound Doctrine Sundays*, with a focus on helping the students more deeply embrace Christ by knowing what they believe and why. Toward this end, we began working through an *Evangelical Catechism*. We unpacked the first questions of the Heidelberg and Westminster Catechisms, discussed what theology is and how we ought to study it, and then moved to the doctrine of revelation. We also introduced *Service Sundays* where once each quarter instead of going to Sunday School, students sign up to serve in various ministries of the church. Finally, we had a seven-week series on *Theological Triage* where we walked through how to discern which are "the hills worth dying on" and which are not.

## HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH GROUP (WED. NIGHTS)

We rebranded the name of the Youth Center space to *The White Rabbit Inn* with the vision of cultivating a **place of rest for all youth** where they can unplug and recharge. Our mission is to *invite youth to discover being fully human by embracing, embodying, and extending Jesus Christ*. In particular, we have been focusing on the "human-ing habits" of Jesus and exploring how we can integrate those into our daily lives as image-bearers of God. In addition to an EPIC Fall Fling, we added Student Leadership Teams, a Fall Feast, Worship Nights, and a Winter Lock-In Retreat. In Summer 2025, we are looking forward to a Senior Hiking Trip up in the BWCA as a capstone event. Prayers appreciated!

## JUNIOR HIGH (SUN. MORNINGS)

In 2024, we continued to use the Thread curriculum. This study through the Biblical narrative while then flipping through the Gospel and seeing how the Bible points to Jesus in all of Scripture has been phenomenal. We extend a huge thank you; it's a blessing to have Junior High Youth Leaders who are so passionate and volunteer to teach on Sunday mornings. Those leaders include Sharon Ericksen, Belle Flener, Josh and Jaden Hunt, Jenny Banta, Michael Johnson, Joey Fasulo and Dwight Reynolds.

## JUNIOR HIGH (WED. NIGHTS)

Wednesday Nights in 2024 were spent deep diving into the book of Philippians. It was a fantastic journey through this letter from Paul, and we are excited to continue this study in 2025! Our big 2024 events included District Blitz in the Spring and Shamineau in the Fall. We also spent many times in fellowship with one another in various events throughout the year: pool parties, small group fun nights, service nights, the OCC Packing Party, etc. It is a blessing to see these students continue to grow in their faith and hunger for the Word.

## YOUTH PRAYER CALENDAR

Thank you for faithfully praying for the students, leaders and Youth Ministry in 2024. We saw the Lord answer your prayers in amazing ways and are honored to be part of a church that so highly values prayer.



## A REVITALIZED SPACE

The Children's Ministries Team is so excited for the beginning of renovation of the north end of our facility. We thank the Lord for His faithfulness to First Free, and we want to thank all of the generous donors, prayer warriors, and all those involved in the decision making of this project. The construction is underway, walls are being torn down and rebuilt, and the rooms are taking shape. Thank you to our contractors, Solid Rock, for all their hard work. **We can't wait** to welcome our kids into the new spaces in 2025!

- *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

## EARLY CHILDHOOD DISCIPLESHIP (NORTHWOODS – AGE 0 THRU 5)

- *Curriculum* – We continue to use the Gospel Project curriculum. It is also used at Expedition. All our kids are experiencing the same Bible lesson each week geared for their individual ages!
- *Growth* – There have been a few new families in attendance and multiple babies added to existing families throughout this year!
- *Volunteers* – We have **119 volunteers** serving monthly on Sundays with a few serving multiple weeks. Twenty-five of those volunteers are youth! We have a great number of people who are able to substitute as well. We're so grateful for these amazing, faithful servants.

## SUNDAY ELEMENTARY DISCIPLESHIP (KIDS' CAMP – KINDERGARTEN THRU 6<sup>TH</sup> 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!
- *Special Needs Ministry* – Launched a team to support children with special needs on Sundays.

## CHILDREN'S OUTREACH

- Vacation Bible School was moved to June this past year and it was a huge success! The church was turned into a jungle for our Jungle Journey VBS! We had around **150 kids and over 100 volunteers** excited to show God's love as we learned about His story in the Bible! Our church is so blessed by all those who serve and support 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 ~90 kids attending regularly with 36 talented volunteers! This mid-week opportunity brings us together 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. It has been a great place for fostering friendships, family connections and amazing volunteers using their many gifts!
- Truck-or-Treat 2024 was an amazing success! We invited large vehicles who have come before and had a few new additions thanks to our Maplewood community! We had around 20 cars with decorated trunks hosted by our church families. It was highly attended by our church family and many from our community! It was so fun to be able to host this special event

# SEEDS 22:6 (Capital Campaign to Renovate the Children's Wing)

COMMITTEE CHAIR JASON PIEHL

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In Summer 2024, the Elders approved plans for and informed the congregation of the renovation of the Children's Ministries spaces which have been in dire need of attention for many years. Construction began outside in early Oct. 2024 with window wells being dug out to provide better light for Lower Level classrooms. Indoor construction began in Jan. 2025 to expand and refresh classroom space, reconfigure ministry support spaces, refresh and add restrooms, and update old plumbing. While the construction began later than anticipated, it is still expected that the project will be completed by early Summer 2025. The Campaign Committee began meeting in Sep. 2024 to seek the Lord concerning a campaign name and plans to engage the entire congregation. The committee was drawn to Proverbs 22:6 which says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." To read a full campaign overview, you may **click here if reading digitally**, visit [www.firstefc.org/seeds](http://www.firstefc.org/seeds) or call the Office for a printed copy.

## SEEDS 22:6 LAUNCH & STATUS

We launched on Oct. 27, 2024 with church services especially focused on the next generation. The Kids' Choir sang with children serving as Greeters, Ushers, and Guest Services Hosts. Kids prayed, read scripture, helped lead worship, and shared their excitement around the project. Pastor Todd preached a sermon focused on Exodus 35 referencing when the Lord stirred the hearts of the Israelites to generously provide tabernacle resources. Immediately after the launch, the Lord truly began to stir hearts. By the end of November, the funds received exceeded giving projections. By Jan. 2025, we had reached \$500K+ and the halfway mark! On Feb. 2, 2025, a Talent Show and Silent Auction took place involving 25 exciting acts, 60+ people, 150+ generous auction items and lots of fun together as a church. In one night, the Lord provided \$23K+ through auction sales and a freewill offering! Thank you to everyone who had a hand in these two events. We are planning more initiatives including a Babysitting Fundraiser on Valentine's Day. **At the time of writing, we have 54% of the needed \$1M in hand. Praise the Lord for His faithfulness!**

## ETERNAL IMPACT & PRAYER REQUESTS

We are exceptionally blessed by our heavenly Father in how He has worked in our congregation to bring unity around SEEDS 22:6. This project is not about a shiny, new building but about providing an environment where children can hear God's Word and receive faith in Jesus! SEEDS 22:6 is aiding in the eternal work of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the next generation. First Free is blessed by the many contributions the Lord has provided, and we wait for Him to continue His faithfulness in the second half of this campaign. Join with us to refocus around prayer and ask the Lord to provide the campaign committee with wisdom for the next steps. Pray that our congregation would dwell together in unity around the campaign (Psalm 133:1); that construction will progress smoothly, safely, and within budget; that disruptions to our children's programming will be minimal; that children will hear the gospel and give their lives to Christ (Proverbs 22:6); that our congregation will depend upon the Lord for His guidance in how to give; that each giver would do so from a generous, willing, and cheerful heart (Exodus 35:4-29); that the Lord will grant wisdom to the campaign committee in planning (James 1:5); and that our congregation's faith would grow as we watch the Lord work and provide. Let us celebrate the Lord's provision and respond in faith!

With sincere thanks from the Campaign Committee,  
Jason Piehl, Mo Anderson, Abby Beard, Stephen Gravley, Jake Higgins, Lori Felton, and Greg & Jolyn Florin

# Worship Director

LUKE OLSON

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This past year has been a remarkable time for our music ministry. Our corporate gatherings on Sunday mornings have been a rich tapestry of singing profound, Scripture-based songs. Our dedicated volunteer musicians have experienced significant growth, and I am deeply appreciative of their unwavering passion for leading our congregation in authentic worship through song, Scripture reading, and prayer.

## WORSHIP EVENTS

I extend my sincere gratitude to the additional time and effort our teams have dedicated to serving in the following special worship events:

- Two Contemporary Worship Nights
- Two Prayer Nights
- Three Hymn Sings (with special thanks to Dave Racer for planning and organizing)

## CHOIR / ORCHESTRA

We witnessed a record number of participants in our choir and orchestra this year. Christmas and Easter were particularly poignant moments of worship, during which these ensembles played a vital role.

Our newly established vocal ensemble, The First Free Singers led by Alan Floor, has flourished. They have engaged in local community performances, special events, and Sunday morning services, and their growth is anticipated in the future.

The Kids' Choir under the guidance of Kari Gravley has demonstrated remarkable vitality and enthusiasm. Beth Salmon has joined the team as a valuable assistant to Mrs. Gravley.

## AUDIO / VISUAL TEAMS

Our unsung heroes, the audio and visual teams, are instrumental in ensuring the seamless execution of our services. **Their dedication "behind the scenes" is invaluable.** Our livestream technicians have provided exceptional support in fostering a sense of connection for remote attendees. The sound and media team's contributions, while often overlooked, are essential to the overall success of our worship experiences.

## NON-MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS

In addition to musical achievements, we have commenced the process of completing my EFCA Credentialing. Our family was blessed in October with the arrival of our new son, Leander Gabriel, who was born one day before my birthday. I eagerly anticipate the rest of 2025, committed to maintaining Christ as the cornerstone of our worship endeavors.

# Global Impact Team (Missions)

BRETT ROSSO

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

The 2024 GIT had the following members: Gib Coleman, Doug & Cheryl Conrad, Marty & Sandy Dennison, Maridee Farrow, Gary & Kris Johnson, Chris Keller, Dave Keller, Mike Keller, Josh & Lauren Maske, Pastor Todd Olson, and Brett Rosso. Maridee returned to the team after temporarily stepping down in 2023. Josh and Lauren left the team early in the year as part of moving back to Kansas. Doug and Cheryl stepped down in the fall as part of their preparations to serve as Global Partners in Japan. This past year also brought new team members eager to contribute. Brothers Mike and Dave Keller joined in November and immediately started volunteering. Gary and Kris also joined late in the year bringing experience and perspective from serving as missionaries in Romania. Sandy took over the role of the team chair after Brett finished **five years** serving as chairman. Brett remained on the team.

## EVENTS

Global Impact Sunday was held in late January, and the main speaker was Tim Davis of ELIC. The title of his sermon was *What in the World is God Doing?* Global Partners including Phil & Suzanne Falconer, Neil Baumgartner, and Tim & Spring Becker sharing presentations in the Youth Center during both hours. There was an afternoon event where Tim Davis and the ELIC team provided more details on working in restricted countries and shared stories of God's people living in those places. First Free continued to send short-term trip teams in 2024. In late May and early June, a team served with ELIC in Tunisia as the Lord changed their plans and opened new doors. We partnered with the Payne Avenue Evangelical Free Church to teach and care for children at an orphanage in northern Mexico. Doug & Cheryl Conrad led another team to Japan for children's programming and Vacation Bible School. A team returned to Egypt with International Messengers (IM) for a biblical marriage and family camp. Three servants went to Poland to teach English and help at a youth camp run by IM. In August, we held a special event for the short-term teams to report on how the Lord worked on their trips.

## GLOBAL PARTNERS

The GIT continued to meet with Global Partners in-person and virtually to connect, pray, and listen. The opportunities to hear about ministry challenges and the Lord's triumphs helped the GIT come alongside our Global Partners. Jack & Carolyn Teeter were Global Partners who retired at the end of 2024. They served in Native American communities in British Columbia and Washington and will continue serving unofficially as the Lord allows. In December, Doug & Cheryl Conrad were accepted as the newest Global Partners. Their gifts are being utilized to plant churches in Japan with ReachGlobal.

## MISSIONS PROJECT FUND

The Missions Project Fund has allowed the GIT to help fund short term trips, provide financial gifts to Global Partners for particular ministerial needs, and support college campus ministries with Cru.

Please continue to pray for the gospel to spread amongst all peoples!

# Cultivate: Church | Network | Movement

PASTOR STEVE ERICKSON (*First Free's Church Planting Missionary*)

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Let me begin by saying thank you to Pastor Todd for your curiosity and encouragement in our unique mission. Thanks to all of you at First Free for your ongoing love, prayer and financial support of our mission to make and multiply disciples of King Jesus in the everyday spaces and places of life. We could not do this work without you.

This year saw us add a second missionary to our staff. This was a big step of faith for us, but we knew that this was God's calling. In October, Reece Lamppa joined our staff. Reece grew up at Trinity EFC in Lakeville and served on staff there as a Worship Pastor for ten years. I met Reece in 2021 when I went through our Multiply Training that I assist Dan Moose with in the North Central District. Reece had been working with me for about 18 months while still working at Trinity. The Lord made it clear to him that it was time to join Cultivate full time. Our network has grown to **43 MicroChurches** spread throughout the Twin City Metro Area. We are also working with three MacroChurch Plants.

We had over 100 people commit their lives to following Jesus. In early January, we had a young man trust Christ for his salvation and immediately wanted to be baptized. The only option we had available to us was the (freezing) river, so in we went and baptized this new follower in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

Our growing conviction is that a biblically functioning Micro and Macro Church is centered on King Jesus and organized around disciple making. We believe that we are on course to see a significant move of the Spirit in the MicroChurch movement. In the last year I have been invited into some meaningful conversations with various denominational and organizational leaders seeking to learn more about our alternative expressions of church. I am in conversations with Trinity Evangelical Divinity School about developing a one-year church planting certificate and with another denomination about developing a disciple-making farm system that works with the established church to raise up disciple-making leaders, some of whom will become future church planters.

There is a lot more I can say and many God glorifying stories I would love to tell you. If you want to hear more, feel free to reach out to me at [steve@cultivatenetwork.org](mailto:steve@cultivatenetwork.org) or 952.270.1273. With another missionary on staff, our support needs have doubled. Please prayerfully consider partnering with us. We very much need your help!



God bless you and thank you, First Free Family, for your ongoing and unwavering faithfulness to our Lord. I love you all!

# Deacon Reports – Harvest Gardens Property

JON ADDINGTON (*Harvest Gardens*)

BILL FREILING AND JOHN CHELSTROM (*The Giving Garden*)

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Our community gardens provided a unique outreach opportunity for First Free for our **fifteenth 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 fourth year, we had a Bike Giveaway in which 100 refurbished bicycles were provided to gardeners and their children. Seven raised bed garden boxes were added for Harmony Gardens residents for a total of nine.

God continues to bless the Garden Kids Bible Club. Psalm 95:6-7 were our key verses. We followed this theme on eleven Tuesday nights as we studied the first kings of Israel – Saul, David, Solomon and Jeroboam as well as the prophet Elisha – and how the lives of these individuals show the importance of following Jesus. We had fourteen faithful volunteers and ministered to groups of 15 - 35 children. A total of **104 different children** attended throughout the summer! Multiple ethnicities were represented.

One of the greatest blessings is the bond created when working side by side in service to the community. To God be the glory. Special thanks to all those who participated sacrificially for these ministries including:

- 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
- John Chelstrom for planting a wildflower garden along the border with Harmony Gardens
- Dave Peterson, David Birkebak and Steve Verbeek for many hours caring for the gardens and gardeners through the season
- Jim Winberg, Kent Thompson, and George Palke for collecting garbage and moving compost
- 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
- Bruce Novotny and Mahlon Parsons for carpentry skills to construct raised bed garden boxes and reconstruct a children's playset.
- Grace Wellendorf for skillfully handling communications with gardeners as they call the Church Office

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 we delivered a total of **560 pounds of fresh produce**. It was a challenging season this last season due to an overabundance of rain and cool weather early on. We are grateful for God's blessing to our community in reaching families in need with fresh vegetables. 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 2025 as we assemble another team to dig into the ground. A shout-out to our team members: Kate Piehl and Audrey (Age 9), Amy Higgins and Becca (Age 7), Grace Wellendorf, Rose Wald, Lorri Whorton and Karen Olesen.

# Deacon Report – Visitation Ministry

LOUISE ADDINGTON AND DEBBIE ANDERSON

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It was exciting to see what the Lord did in 2024! We continue our on-going ministry of short-term visitation (homes, hospitals and transitional care units) with visits, calls, texts, cards and help. Thanks to Jackie Pickar for her ministry of encouragement through cards. In addition, last January we started the new Care Friends ministry for ongoing one-on-one relationships. These pairings are for friendship, encouragement and Christian fellowship. We now have **41 matches of Care Friends!** Many of you have stepped up to serve in this ministry of brothers and sisters strengthening each other in spiritual care. This has been a wonderful blessing for our church family. Thank you!

The Caregiver/Receiver Ministry continues to meet monthly. There have been 26 units of people involved in this ministry in 2024, either in person or by receiving the monthly devotional letter. We have a wonderful team of leaders including Kathy Russell, Mary Schultz, Dave & Diana Knutsen, and Rob & Jane Hyllested. We have seen how beautifully the caregivers encourage one another and how much fun the receiver group has together. There is an open invitation to participate in these ministries. Please contact us if you are interested in serving or learning more. May the Lord strengthen his church!

Ephesians 4:12-13

*“To equip his people for works of service  
so that the body of Christ may be built up  
until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge  
of the Son of God and become mature,  
attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”*

## Faith Community Nurse

KATHY RUSSELL, RN, FCN

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It has been my joy and privilege to serve our church family as Faith Community Nurse this past year. As I am learning my role, I have enjoyed getting to know people, learning of needs and addressing some of the health needs in our congregation. I have been blessed and impressed to see how well our church family cares for each other especially during difficult circumstances. Many of the ministries like Small Groups, Mini Congregations, Care Friends, Visitation Ministry, GriefShare, and Caregiver Support Group help to meet spiritual emotional social and physical needs. Some of the ways I have been involved include home visits, hospital and care facility visits, post-surgical support phone calls, referrals and accompaniment to urgent care and doctor visits. Thank you to those who trusted in me and asked for help in time of need, and thank you to staff and church family for encouragement in my role.

# Deacon Report – Widow & Widower Ministry

KAREN CHOE

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This ministry is dedicated to following God’s call to support widows and widowers at First Free, based on Deuteronomy 10:18. At the end of 2024, there were 90 widows and widowers in our community. Over the year, we mourned the loss of two members: one relocated and one remarried. Sadly, ten individuals lost their spouses in 2024, and we added their names to our list.

## **SERVICE ACTIVITIES**

Our group got involved in various projects including putting together and delivering Easter baskets for shut-ins, praying for and writing letters to Global Partners, packing boxes for Operation Christmas Child, and hosting a Christmas party for residents at Harmony Gardens.

## **SOCIAL ACTIVITIES**

We enjoyed events like organizing a progressive dinner and going to Minnesota History Center, Hudson Octagon House and the Mill City Museum.

## **SHARING MEALS**

We came together for lunch on Valentine’s Day, had a summer picnic by the lake, gathered at the Olson Home for another picnic, and hosted a pastor and staff appreciation lunch at the church.

## **MEETING PRACTICAL NEEDS**

We helped group members with tasks like helping move furniture, picking up medication, repairing appliances, assembling furniture, and other needs that arose.

## **KEEPING EVERYONE CONNECTED**

To stay in touch, we used the FirstLook quarterly newsletter, Weekly News email, personal emails, printed Sunday bulletins, and Christmas and birthday cards.

Our organizing team includes John & Karen Choe, Rose Wald, Janine Frans, Janice Johnson, and Keith Krause with support from Pastor Todd & Sharon Olson and Pastor Andy O’Rourke.

We’re grateful for God’s guidance, for the church leadership’s openness to the Spirit, and for everyone who stepped up to serve. We continue to pray for the physical and mental well-being of the widows and widowers, hoping they feel God’s sustaining love in their lives (Isaiah 46:4).



# Care & Outreach Ministries

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## **CAR CARE – Led by Pastor Nathan Greenwalt**

This is a special outreach ministry that includes opportunities for men and women to serve together. We care for many in our community performing car repairs that are too costly for them to manage on their own. We took **165+ calls in 2024**. The heart of this project is the gospel ministry which our guests experience! Our mechanic volunteers demonstrate the love of Christ as they carefully work on our guest's cars. While this work is being completed, our guests hear an evangelistic devotional and share prayer requests with leaders Sherry Mosner and Kathy Junker. Thank you to Rick Hathaway for helping coordinate every month.

## **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 2024 with 22+ people attending per semester. Half of the participants are not from our First Free. An amazing gospel opportunity! Several individuals have started attending First Free after receiving spiritual encouragement and emotional healing at GriefShare.

## **HARMONY GARDENS PARTNERSHIP – Led by Jon Addington**

Cassia's Harmony Gardens Senior Living (HGSL) is adjacent to Harvest Gardens on County Road C. We 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 2024, eighteen First Free households resided at HGSL, and one HGSL family moved in and chose First Free as their church home. We provided 42 volunteers who logged **~1,650 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 and two First Free Small Groups meet at HGSL. We praise God for the opportunity to care for our own while being 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 123+ 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 2024, our church packed **1,602 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**

- GRACE Group – They provide an encouraging space for women on cancer journeys to fellowship.
- Medical Professionals – Scheduled volunteers watch for health emergencies on Sunday mornings.
- Pro-Life Ministry – They invite us to prayerfully participate in the spiritual battle against abortion.

# Congregational Statistics

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## **Current Church Membership (462)**

### **Average Attendance (643)**

*Includes In Person and Livestream Attendees*

### **Weddings (7)**

Steven Verbeek & Violet Strike (5.27.24)  
Cooper Smitherman & McKenna Kjelskus (7.27.24)  
Ben Dardis & Brittani Hofer (8.9.24)  
Reno Lanenga & Isabel Hindt (9.7.24)  
Elliot Olin & Alexa Gnadke (9.29.24)  
Justin Reimer & Miriam "Mim" Olson (10.5.24)  
Brad Johnson & Stacia McLaughlin (10.12.24)

## **Child Dedications (16)**

Astrid Rosso (Brett & Amanda)  
Bria Olson (Caleb & Julia)  
Charlotte Hank (Rick & Allison)  
Jack Dolney (Jorrdan & Amy Dolney)  
Leander Olson (Luke & Macai)  
Lenora Long (Luke & Kristi)  
Lydia Platter (Avery & Betsy)  
Micah and Noelle Vroon (Ian & Nicole)  
Natalie Salmon (Kevin & Beth)  
Selah Peterson (Bill & Mandy)  
Theo, Ford, Naas and Gwen Mertens (Sam & Natalie)  
Whitney Anderson (Chris & Tara)

## **Baptisms (39)**

*Mar. 31, 2024* Ben Schutz  
Benny Kaetterhenry  
Everly Quinn  
Jake Keane  
Molly Woodbury  
Selah Fischer

*Aug. 4, 2024* Amy, Caleb and Jonah Finley  
Aubrey and Grady Willford  
Barb Fontana  
Brian, Ella and Jenna Keane  
Levi Madison  
Liam Stanelle  
Michael DeMorrow II and III  
Nina Gravley  
Noah Hakseth  
Sebastian and Sullivan Ritenour  
Sophie Eigen  
Steve Kesner  
Tad and Kaylin Kastman

*Nov. 24, 2024* Charlie Quinn  
Cheryl Gysbers  
Graham, Brooks and Hayes Keller  
Koby Radcliffe  
Sarah, Caleb and Seth Jahnke  
Sawyer Kjelskus  
Sydney Anderson  
Talia Saum

# Congregational Statistics (continued)

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## **New Members (34)**

Feb. 18, 2024 Al & Sandy Northquest  
Amy Bruno  
Ian & Nicole Vroon  
Jaden Barnes  
Kathy Russell

May 19, 2024 Carol (Christy) & Faye Christiansen  
Daryl & Cathy Wissink  
Greg & Susan Santema  
Judd & Deb Whiting  
Michael Merry  
Ryan & Kristin Gerbrandt  
Sam & Sara Choo

Aug. 18, 2024 Al & Ann Fenderson  
Avery & Betsy Platter  
David Frans  
Gary & Kris Johnson  
Justin Reimer  
Sam & Natalie Mertens

Nov. 17, 2024 Bill & Christina Larimer  
Larry & Linda Aalderks

## **Deaths (13)**

Roger Christensen (1.13.24)\*  
Charles Farrow (2.7.24)\*  
Jack Gustafson (2.22.24)  
Lori Wald (2.23.24)  
Don Hamann (2.29.24)\*  
Harold Broman (4.16.24)\*  
Carol Jaehnert (4.19.24)\*  
Petie Sturre (4.30.24)  
Fern Pfaff (5.15.24)  
John Good (8.11.24)\*  
Rich Krejce (9.12.24)\*  
Jerry Eide (9.18.24)  
Cindy Johnson (12.4.24)\*

\* Church Member

First Evangelical Free Church  
 Financial Report as of June 30, 2024

	General Fund	HCD Fund	Care Fund	Missions Project Fund	Memorials	Harvest Gardens	Capital Projects	Other Restricted	Total
Balance as of 7/1/23	\$ 560,607	\$ 1,969,157	\$ 10,705	\$ 69,131	\$ 193,897	\$ 5,466	\$ 2	242,202	\$ 3,051,167
Year-to-date Receipts & Transfers	2,276,456	33,322	32,339	147,502	10,405	18,164	6,867	150,643	2,675,698
Year-to-date Expenditures & Transfers	2,065,139	8,045	24,433	130,306	-	23,180	1,988	160,072	2,413,163
Net Change	211,317	25,277	7,906	17,196	10,405	(5,016)	4,879	(9,429)	262,535
Balance as of 6/30/24	<u>\$ 771,924</u>	<u>\$ 1,994,434</u>	<u>\$ 18,611</u>	<u>\$ 86,327</u>	<u>\$ 204,302</u>	<u>\$ 450</u>	<u>\$ 4,881</u>	<u>\$ 232,773</u>	<u>\$ 3,313,702</u>

**FIRST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH  
 GENERAL FUND BUDGET VS. ACTUAL  
 YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2024**

Actual	Budget	Over/(Under) Budget	
\$1,088,139	\$1,167,500	(\$79,361)	Salaries
\$13,285	\$19,750	(\$6,465)	Staff Expenses
\$234,865	\$281,300	(\$46,435)	Benefits
\$1,336,289	\$1,468,550	(\$132,261)	COMPENSATION/BENEFITS
\$58,030	\$88,100	(\$30,070)	Other Elder Expense
\$58,030	\$88,100	(\$30,070)	LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
\$223,105	\$224,500	(\$1,395)	Missions & Outreach - Individuals
\$96,409	\$94,450	\$1,959	Missions & Outreach - Organizations/Other
\$319,514	\$318,950	\$564	MISSIONS & OUTREACH
\$1,608	\$8,250	(\$6,642)	COMMUNITY OUTREACH
\$10,745	\$17,000	(\$6,255)	WORSHIP & MUSIC
\$27,445	\$27,400	\$45	COMMUNITY LIFE
\$50	\$2,700	(\$2,650)	DISCIPLESHIP & TRAINING
\$1,705	\$1,700	\$5	LIBRARY
\$0	\$1,800	(\$1,800)	YOUNG ADULT
\$17,653	\$25,050	(\$7,397)	Youth Ministries
\$34,710	\$30,950	\$3,760	Children's Ministries
\$52,363	\$56,000	(\$3,637)	YOUTH & FAMILY
\$52,896	\$61,300	(\$8,404)	OFFICE & COMMUNICATION RESOURCES
\$204,494	\$216,000	(\$11,506)	PROPERTY & FACILITIES
<b>\$2,065,139</b>	<b>\$2,267,750</b>	<b>(\$202,611)</b>	<b>TOTAL GENERAL FUND EXPENSES</b>