



firstfree

## Annual Report 2021-2022

Making Disciples of Jesus Christ Locally and Globally  
by Proclaiming the Gospel in Word and Deed



## **Our vision is**

...to celebrate lives transformed by  
Jesus Christ

## **Our mission is**

...to make disciples of Jesus Christ locally  
and globally by proclaiming the Gospel in  
word and deed

## **Our purpose is**

...to glorify God and further His kingdom by  
making disciples of Jesus Christ in the city  
who worship God in His greatness, reach the  
world through evangelism and service, and  
who love and train one another to  
maturity in Christ

## Staff, Intern, and Apprentices

Jung Eun Hower  
Maggie Johnson  
Francisco Mercado  
Stu Modrzejewski  
Adolfo Ramirez  
Fei She  
Del Shimandle  
Aurora Tallacksen  
Matt Tinken

Director of Finance & HR  
*Director of Music and Youth  
Custodian*  
*Director of Community Life*  
*Facilities Supervisor*  
*Ministry Intern*  
*Interim Pastor*  
*Office and Communications Administrator*  
*Senior Pastor (beginning April 1, 2022)*

Jason Abbott  
Josh Dekker  
Josiah Haas  
Mabel Kwan  
Drew Oller

*Senior Pastor (through May, 2021)*  
*Ministry Apprentice (through Spring, 2021)*  
*Ministry Apprentice (through Spring, 2021)*  
*Custodian (through Winter, 2022)*  
*Ministry Apprentice (through Spring, 2021)*

## Elders and Officers

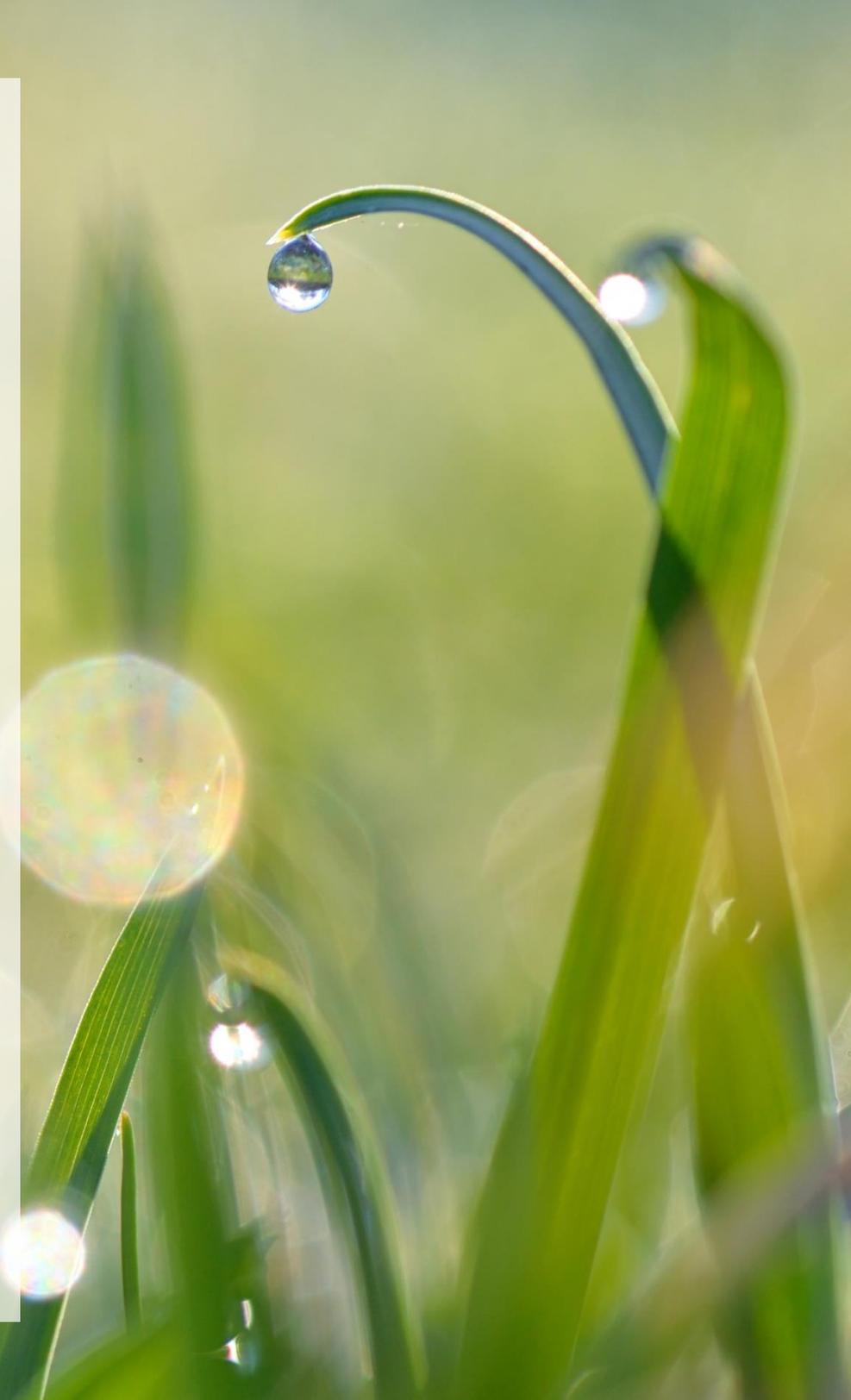
Jeff Cebulski  
Rachel Einfeldt  
Jung Eun Hower  
Stephen Lepse  
Sylvia Lauener  
James Snyder  
Tim Wilkin

*Elder, Secretary*  
*Elder*  
*Financial Secretary*  
*Elder Chair*  
*Treasurer*  
*Elder*  
*Elder (through Fall 2021)*

## Deacons

Seung B. "Bogie" Cha  
Cindy Harris  
Andrea Korte  
Sylvia Lauener  
Tandy Malinak  
Meg Parks  
Daniel Tallacksen

*Global Outreach*  
*Membership*  
*Youth Ministry*  
*Finance & Administration*  
*Children & Family Ministries*  
*Crisis & Compassion*  
*Facilities*



# Elder Chair's Report

Stephen Lapse

**“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” (Romans 12:12 & 13)**

These are God’s words through Paul to the church in Rome – five directives that I’ve attempted to practice (ever so unevenly) during these past two years of COVID. Looking back we all know the challenges we faced individually and collectively as a church body: finally getting to meet in-person for worship but all masked up with limited fellowship opportunities following church; the difficulties in connecting due to COVID restrictions and people’s choices to limit social interactions for the sake of health safety; limited missional opportunities available due to city restrictions and lockdowns; the increased needs of our congregation due to job loss, sickness and relational or emotional challenges; saying goodbye to some dear congregants who left First Free (often due to life changes moving them away or concerns with directions the church was taking); the unrest in our city and nation due to political and racial division; violence in our city; the loss of Senior Pastor Jason Abbott one year ago; and, the weariness of doing ministry during a time of COVID, while also searching for a new Senior Pastor for the second time in two years.

## Be encouraged!

I am encouraged that despite these challenges I have seen First Free (ever so imperfectly) practice being joyful in hope, patient in affliction and faithful in prayer. I have also seen the sharing of resources and the hospitality practiced by our congregation. It encourages me greatly to see our congregation carry out these practices.

Let me share a few more things that have encouraged me this year.

## Del’s service as Interim Pastor

Having been through five different Interim Pastors during my tenure at First Free, I can honestly say that Del’s service this past year was the most impactful and helpful of any Interim Pastor during my 41 years at First Free. I thank God that Del was here, “at such a time as this”, to guide our church through yet another pastoral change and another year of COVID restrictions. We’re certainly in a much better place to receive our new pastor thanks to Del’s service. Praying for you Del that God has just the right church and/or ministry position for you as we head into the second half of 2022.



## The faithfulness and quality of our staff

Maggie, Stu, Aurora, Jung, Adolfo, Frank, and intern Fei have so faithfully served our church during a time of transition. All have a servant's heart and have effectively served in their areas of responsibility. We are blessed by their ministry amongst us.

## Pastor Matt and Sarah

It goes without saying that we are thankful to have Matt and Sarah Tinken join us in ministry this month. The search team did a marvelous job in locating, vetting and presenting Senior Pastor candidates to us. Thank you, Steve Bishop, Sue Gamble, Emily Lee, Erin Lim and Barb Cebulski. We believe that through your hard work and discernment, God has brought just the right Senior Pastor for this next chapter in the life of First Free.

## Faithful lay leaders and teachers

There are too many to mention here, but for all our deacons, children & youth teachers, small group leaders, Sunday morning tech team, and all others who have served, we are thankful for these faithful servants who ministered during yet another year of pastoral transition and COVID.

## Baptisms and new members

We have held two baptisms in the last year and will welcome six new members into the church at our annual meeting. People coming to faith, growing in their faith, becoming baptized, and formally joining our church community are indicators that God is working in and through us.

**A congregation that has stayed together**, served each other, prayed and financially supported the church despite all the challenges of recent years. Praise God that He has been faithful and has preserved our church.

In the past year the elders have spent a lot of our time assisting Pastor Del with pastoral care, working on the Senior Pastor search, adjusting COVID protocols at church as local pandemic conditions dictate, and overseeing the attempted sale of the 5237 building (thanks Tim Wilkin and Chad Harrell for all the hours put in trying to get this building taken out of our campus planned development with the city).



## 2021-2 Elder Values

The elders chose five values to guide our priorities in the past year:

1. **Vibrant Worship** through prayer, praise, preaching of the Word
2. **Authentic Community** – building genuine Christian relationships
3. **Learning** and personal development at the feet of Jesus
4. **Sharing the Gospel** in word and deed
5. **Simplicity and Rest** through Sabbath observance

Some of the ways we have been able to live out these values over the past year include:

- ❖ Hiring Maggie Johnson to lead worship and youth
- ❖ Hiring Stu Modrzejewski part time as a mentor for Maggie and to work on church welcoming and connection tasks
- ❖ Commissioning Jeff Cebulski to reboot prayer team activities at church in the absence of a deacon for prayer.
- ❖ Restarting the after-service connections time, while also encouraging informal gatherings and small group participation
- ❖ Creation of an elder advisory group so the elders can seek the wisdom of other church leaders on big church issues, while also receiving help with tasks they did not have the time to attend to.
- ❖ Coordinating outreach opportunities and developing an “Outreach Bulletin Board” to allow congregants to get real time information on outreach opportunities available (please refer to the local outreach recap for more details).

## Plans for Next Year

Issues the elders would like to attend to in the next year:

- ❖ Give Matt the summer to get to know church, it's people and the Andersonville community.
- ❖ Do team building as elders and staff, while also confirming roles and expectations.
- ❖ Begin more outreach efforts in our community
- ❖ Build our discipleship programs for all ages (adding a deacon of adult discipleship to work alongside Pastor Matt; increasing Maggie's youth director position to 15 hours per week, while also adding a 15-hours-per-week children's ministry staff position).
- ❖ Make decision on 5237 building. If a clear, compelling vision for the building is established, then we can strongly consider keeping the building. Otherwise, we will continue our efforts to sell the property. The elders want to hear feedback from members on this issue; a portion of our annual meeting will provide this forum.
- ❖ Provide formal teaching on our 'women in ministry' policy. It has been years since we have taught on this subject. As such, the elders will provide a series of teaching opportunities this fall that speak to why we believe scripture does not limit women from serving in any capacity, including teaching, preaching and eldership. While we will be respectful of those who hold different positions, we also want to ensure that the policy of this church, that has been in place for roughly 25 years, is understood and explained from scripture. The elders are committed to ensuring that First Free is a church where men and women can flourish and serve together as leaders.

- ❖ Minister to those that are weary and need a sabbatical from active service at the church (allowing them to take more time to rest in Jesus and 'renew their strength'), and at the same time engaging folks who are ready to jump into ministry as we enter a new season at First Free. Wherever you are, we want to create spaces for you to grow in your relationship with Jesus and to become the person whom God created you to be.

As we begin this new chapter in the life of First Free let us continue to practice being, "joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Sharing with the Lord's people who are in need. Practicing hospitality."



# Interim Pastor's Report

Del Shimandle

Greetings First Free Church!

It is a great privilege and responsibility to serve you. I continue to pray that you will grow in your discipleship to Christ and celebrate His transforming work in your lives.

It has been a great privilege and pleasure to lead the staff and labor with the Elders this past year. The staff (Adolfo, Aurora, Fei, Frank, Jung, Maggie & Stu) have executed their duties with integrity and grace, even when curve-balls are a regular part of church ministry. The Elders (James, Jeff, Rachel, Stephen, and Tim) have carried the enormous responsibility of shepherding the church and have faithfully sought to discern the Lord's leading through such a challenging period of transition. They have tirelessly and graciously worked together to serve First Free Church.

## Sermon Series

This year, the pulpit ministry weaved together several series' that demonstrated the unity, trustworthiness, relevance, and practical nature of the Bible. God continues to speak, and if we remain anchored in the written word the Bible, and the Living Word, Jesus Christ, we will continue to thrive and flourish as we have for 142 years. Beginning with a five-week series on "**Urban Discipleship & Outreach**", we examine passages that undergird First Free Church's mission and vision. Over the summer, we dug into 1 Peter to see how Scripture guides us in "**Living as Exiles on Main Street.**" Then in the Fall, we pivoted into the Old Testament Exilic literature (parts of Habakkuk, Daniel, Esther, and Zechariah), in order to study the source material for Peter's theme, in a series titled "**Thriving in Babylon.**" For Advent, we

continued to see the relationship between OT and NT, in a series titled "**God's Promises Kept,**" which highlighted Matthew's and Luke's emphasis on the ways Jesus fulfills OT prophecy. As 2022 dawned, we began our current series in the Gospel of John, titled: "**The Living Word,**" in which we have been studying Jesus' identity as He revealed it Himself. All these sermon series have been crafted with the same goal that John had for his gospel: that you may grow in believing that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may experience life in His name. (Jn 20:31). Dear friends, the Living Word is still speaking. Keep listening.

## Discipleship

First Free Church's ministry of discipleship (helping people follow Jesus) is carried out in several areas. While the year has been one of transition, the ministry has remained fruitful. The most important development is the establishing of the **Discipleship Planning Team.** The Elders wisely saw the need to ensure connectivity and integration with leaders from the various ministries related to discipleship. Now team leaders from Children & Families Ministry (CFM), Youth, Small Groups, Membership, Global Outreach Team (GOT), and so on, will meet three times per year to collaborate and strategize together in order to better facilitate spiritual development for all ages. Additionally, team leaders in each ministry will be provided "**ARC Profiles,**" that outline their given "authority," and specific "responsibilities," and clarify their "coaching" provisions. Helping ministry leaders know what decisions they can make, what their actual tasks are, and who will help to equip and empower them in ministry initiatives will make our efforts more fruitful!

## Children & Family Ministries

The Sunday School program for our children (Pre-K thru 5<sup>th</sup> grade), led by Tandy Malinak, Deacon of CFM, has adjusted and adapted to each phase of the pandemic. CFM is now re-settled into its regular practice, in which families are together for the first part of the worship service, and then children are excused during the sermon for their own, age-appropriate lessons. As preparation for hoped-for growth in the Spring and Summer, the Elders have wisely determined to hire a director for this vital ministry. However even with a director, CFM would not be able to function without volunteer teachers, of which there remains a shortage. Consider how you could participate as a volunteer once or more per month.

## Youth Ministry

The ministry to Youth (6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades) has also shifted and adapted well to the challenges of the pandemic. With Maggie Johnson (our new Director of Youth this year) at the helm, and with Andrea Korte, Deacon of Youth, continuing her stalwart support, the teens in the program are growing and learning what it means to follow and worship Jesus, and to be in community together.

## Small Groups

The ministry of Adult Small Groups grew slightly, though it has admittedly not been given enough attention this year. It is encouraging that there are growing numbers of people interested in participating in Small Groups. About 40 in the congregation are engaged. There are a few individuals considering stepping into leadership in this area. Being connected to a smaller group of Christians provides fellowship, accountability, and the best opportunities for spiritual growth. If you are not currently in a Small Group, please consider joining one now. Don't wait for "the perfect" time or mix of your "best friends." Commit to a group now, and you will be blessed.

## Baptism & Membership

There are two big highlights as this fiscal year ends and as we launch into a new season of ministry with a new Senior Pastor. First, we recently celebrated two baptisms, including one on Easter Sunday! As you know, it is a truly joyful occasion to celebrate when a follower of Jesus takes this milestone step. It is my prayer that First Free Church's showing and speaking of the Gospel helps more people come to know Christ, and then seek to be baptized. Second, at our Annual Meeting on April 24<sup>th</sup>, there are six candidates for church membership to be voted on (two are renewals of past membership). All six have attended First Free Church's Membership class and will have been personally interviewed to share their testimony of faith in Christ. In addition, all six are enthusiastic about joining in the mission and vision of First Free Church in a more intentional way.



## Pastoral Care & Counseling

On the pastoral care and counseling front, you won't be surprised when I tell you it has been a challenging year for many. I have met with many who are struggling with issues related to isolation, loss, stress, fatigue, depression, relationships, jobs, finances, and addictions. The Elders and I have done our part to counsel in pastoral ways, and then to refer people on to more robust and specific counseling or therapy options. We continue to maintain a partnership with Cornerstone Counseling Center of Chicago and have connections to other Christian counseling and therapy organizations. Please keep each other in prayer, stay connected for support, and avail yourselves of the assistance the church and other organizations can offer.

In closing, I want to say again that I count it a great privilege to have been entrusted with such serious responsibilities. While I have loved and served you somewhat imperfectly, I have loved and served you as best as I knew how. My goal from the moment I first began serving in ministry at First Free Church has been to show and speak the Gospel, in such a way as to encourage, equip and entrust others with the same mission. Thank you for the friendships I have gained, the joys I have experienced, and the lessons I have learned through serving here. May God make the next season of ministry at First Evangelical Free Church fruitful for His own glory.

Grace & Peace,  
Pastor Del Shimandle

# Ministry Intern's Report

Fei She

I have been a ministry intern at First Free since August 2021. My formal academic internship is being wrapped up this May. So far during my internship, our church has entrusted me with a few different ministry responsibilities. I have managed the church's social media content; I have preached two sermons; I have shadowed children's Sunday school; I have shadowed small group leading; I have participated in the greeting ministry. I, myself, have started a small group and have facilitated and co-led this small group for a couple of months now. I have built connections with first time visitors, especially other young adults. I have composed a church blog and will continue to work in that area of ministry.

Although my school academic internship has concluded, I sense God is calling me to stick around First Free church and continue to serve in the ways that I can. My desire is to serve here for the next a year or two, at least. I am interested and passionate about building relationships and creating a God-centered, people-loving community for people of all ages and ethnicities. I am gifted and called to preach the Word of God in words and deed. I have a strong desire to be a welcoming face for the local church.



# Worship



## Worship Music & Tech

Maggie Johnson, Director

Our God is—simply—worthy of all praise. All. And our church, as His people, are called to worship Him, simply because He is. What a beautiful experience it has been and is to worship our God with each of you.

This ministry is accomplished only by the incredible hearts in each and every volunteer who sacrifice their time and use their gifts to serve our church on Sunday mornings.

- ❖ Worship leaders Dan Addington, Natalia Leonard, and Jonathan Lim use their musical gifts to usher the Spirit and lead the congregation so effortlessly and beautifully.
- ❖ Audio and Visual Team members Doug Tallacksen, Dan Tallacksen, Jonathan Lim, Laju Sani, Josiah Shimandle, Elias Wilkin, and Miles Lee are the backbone of our services - problem solving, mixing, streaming - and it couldn't be done without them. Their selfless service behind the scenes is vital to the function of each Sunday morning.
- ❖ Worship team volunteers Lei Toquero, Richard Galime, Heather Leonhardt, Aedric Addington, Sean Courtney, Derek Johnson, David Johnson, Bella Esper, Juliet Lee, Rachael Wilkin, Audrey Tallacksen, Aurora Tallacksen, Emily Lee, Eleanor Lee, Phil Malinak, Ben Cha, Elizabeth Titus, and Stu Modrzejewski all have used their gifts and talents in music to bless the congregation, the Worship Leaders, and, most importantly, the Lord.
- ❖ Emcee Beverly Munro kept the congregation up-to-date on events and opportunities at First Free, along with Norman Leonhardt, and Ryan Einfeldt.

We've successfully transitioned back from single-leader-led worship to team-led worship, which has been beautiful to see and experience. It's incredible to see the musical giftings God has given so many in our church—including our youth—and to see the willingness of each volunteer to use those gifts to worship our God.

As we transition as a church into a new season with a new pastor, worship ministry will shift and transition with the flow. It is the hope, goal, and plan that we implement a Worship Planning Team, made up of a select few church members, to be in charge of brainstorming, collaborating about, and implementing new ideas. We are excited about the possibility of incorporating these new ideas and more liturgical ways of worship into our services as we continue to embrace and hold true to the current traditions we have here at First Free.

May we not lose sight of the Who and why we worship. Let us be merely reflections of the Lord and vessels of His spirit!



## Visual Art

Dan Addington, Member

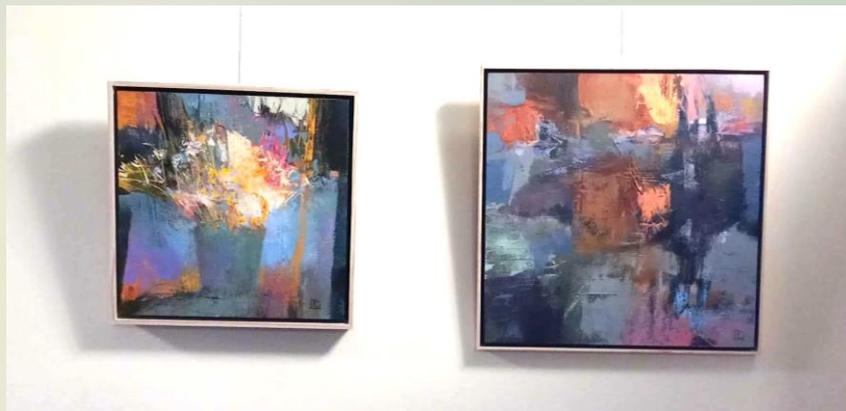
This year, the work of Larry John Davis has been displayed in our sanctuary, adding splashes of color to our worship environment. Larry's style is expressive and has become more abstract over the years. As of late he has pursued new effects through the introduction of cold wax into his oil painting technique.

**“...a juxtaposition of colors, textures and hinted subjects will appeal to your imagination and visual curiosity.”**

Larry shipped these paintings to First Free just before the COVID shut down. He generously suggested we keep the paintings, so that once church was live again, we would have something to view in the sanctuary. It has been a special blessing to worship in the midst of his work for a longer period than usual, and we want to thank him for this generous gift.

This coming year, we look forward to bringing new work by local and regional professional artists into our sanctuary to move us beyond mere decoration. As new work arrives, artwork must be packed and unpacked, installed and de-installed. If you would like to assist with any of these processes, contact me or any member of the staff. No previous experience is required.

Like the other art forms used in our services, the visual arts can play a role in worship by expressing our faith, and exploring our rich, diverse qualities as God's children. In a world both beautiful and broken, visual art point to God as a loving, nurturing creator by providing a picture of that process, literally. These works can serve as a symbol of God's creative power, and how he continues that formative and redemptive work throughout our lives. He is the Potter, and we are the clay.



## Prayer Gatherings

Nancy Hall, Member  
Meg Parks, Deacon

**“Of all spiritual disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father.” - Richard Foster**



This year we said goodbye to some longtime First Free prayer team leaders, a few of whom are in the photo above. Despite the loss, we continued to pray heartily and seek God for our church community and beyond.

This year's regular prayer gatherings included:

### Sunday Morning Prayer

While First Free was not meeting in person, Sunday morning prayer transitioned to an online format. This year we've been able to meet in person once again. A small but committed group has been meeting before the worship service from 9:00-9:45 am in the youth room. Prayer is offered for the First Free family and ministries, the worship service, special needs, and upcoming events. We also pray for needs in Chicago and around the world.

### Zoom Healing Prayer

Sunday through Thursday, we have an online prayer gathering focused on healing prayer. A group of people from First Free and beyond meet 4 nights a week on Zoom. This group began with the need to pray for restoration of Pastor Del's eyesight and has become a valuable gathering for addressing the needs of the body as well as sharing updates and praises.

### Moms In Prayer

A Moms in Prayer group meets once a week during the school year. The mission of MIP is to impact children and schools for Christ by gathering moms to pray.

## Welcoming

Stu Modrzejewski, Director

Like everyone at First Free right now, our Welcome Team is some of the most committed people I know. They've been steady through a very long season. During the most recent phases of the COVID-19 lockdowns, we were still welcoming a steady stream of new faces, with about a half dozen returning on multiple occasions. Some of those have even become recognized faces within our congregation.

Here are some numbers from the past year:

- ❖ We averaged 81.6 people in attendance from April of last year to date.
- ❖ We averaged 1.9 guests every week. some of those were brand new faces; some were friends/relatives of members
- ❖ Our lowest number in attendance was 35, on 12/22/21
- ❖ Our highest number in attendance last year 115, not including children, on 8/25/21
- ❖ Our attendance for the last two months has averaged over 90 people

Some of those number are pretty low; but the takeaway is that we have been steady for the last year, and there's even signs of hope! The goal as a Welcoming Team was to not over-complicate things and simply have a consistent and faithful presence of smiling faces every Sunday, and thanks to our committed team, we've been able to do just that!



## Care & Compassion

Meg Parks, Deacon

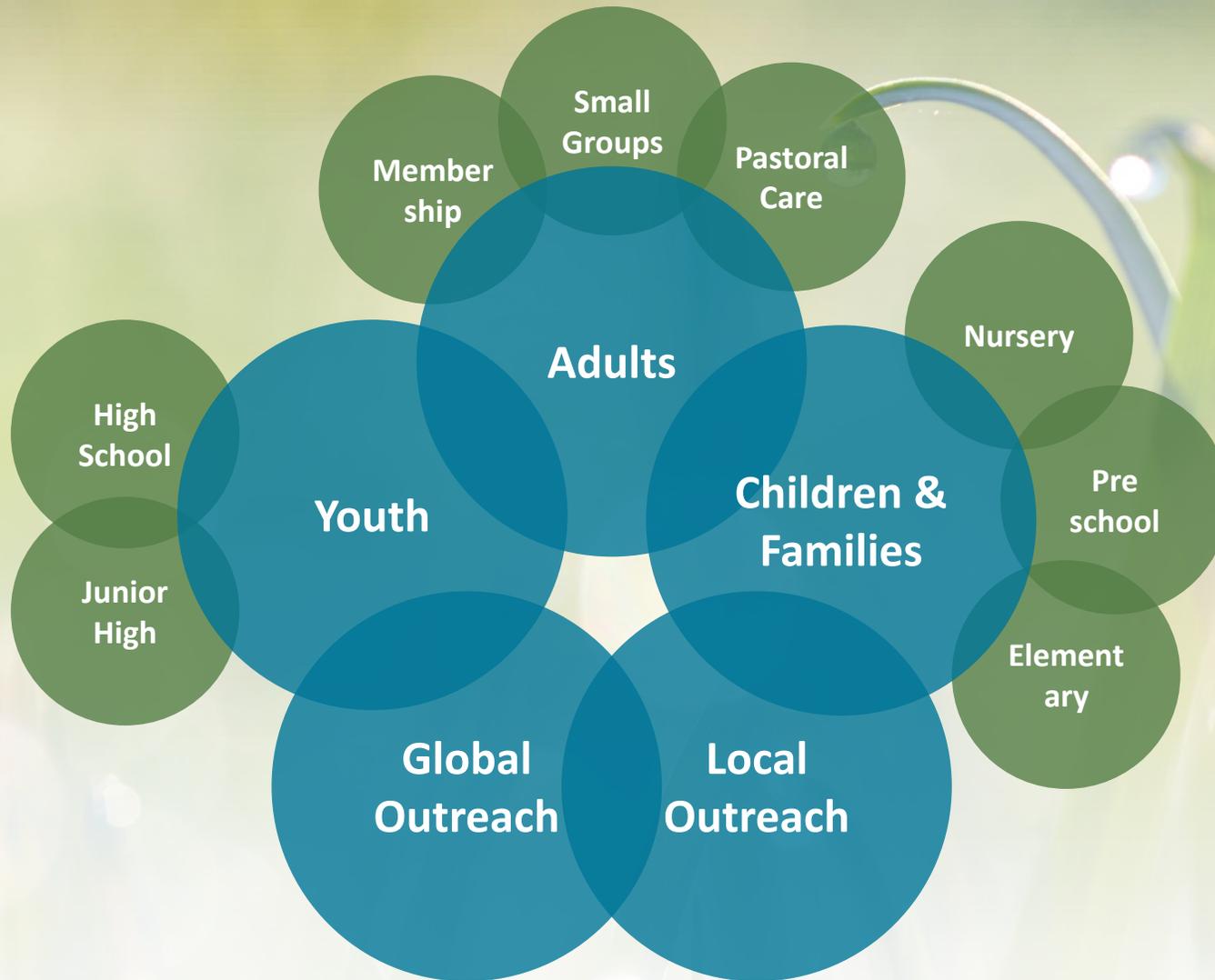
Here's what we did in the area of care & compassion this year:

- ❖ We worked with Cornerstone Counseling Center of Chicago to set aside reserved hours for First Free congregants and set up a plan to help defray the cost for those without insurance. This program began in Sept. 2021 but was discontinued after several months because only one or two people from FF took advantage of it. Cornerstone is still open to help; FF congregants are encouraged to contact them directly.
- ❖ Cornerstone also offered to do a virtual mental health workshop for us on a topic of our choice. A survey was shared with the congregation in February.
- ❖ One request for financial assistance was received by me (others went through different channels) and passed onto the Crisis & Compassion committee in charge of the finances.

- ❖ Meals were provided to assist those recovering from illness and injury. Many thanks to Jennifer Bishop for organizing the meal train and for all those who helped in this way.
- ❖ Cards were sent to people we hadn't seen in a while and to those who had suffered loss or illness. Many thanks to Beverly Munro for taking the lead in this ministry. "Checking in" by email and text helped people feel they weren't forgotten. Prayer requests were forwarded to the faithful praying brothers and sisters of First Free.

Many thanks to those in the congregation who faithfully serve by giving rides and staying connected with people. I'm also grateful for those who inform me of needs in our church family.

# Discipleship



## Membership

Cindy Harris, Deacon

As the doldrums of winter give in to the hope of spring, we at First Free find ourselves at the start of a new season of ministry and rejoice that our church body is showing signs of new life. We look forward to growing attendance as we are able to more safely meet together again for worship and teaching on Sunday mornings as well as gather in different groups during the week.

Another sign of new life is the recent interest in membership by several people who have been attending and serving at First Free for the past year. We hope to welcome these individuals into the church body at the start of the new fiscal year.

The pandemic continued to affect attendance during the past year, but we can be very grateful that our leaders made Sunday services available on YouTube each and every week for those who did not feel comfortable attending in person. More recently, as the COVID case counts have greatly reduced, in-person attendance is growing again for which we give praise to our Heavenly Father.



We know from the Scriptures that God wants believers to meet together in a local body. None of us can grow in our

love for and service to Christ on our own. We have certainly learned in the last two years that we need one another. It's always good to remind ourselves of verses that quite specifically encourage believers to assemble together:

- ❖ The author of Hebrews tells us “consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together but encouraging one another, all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” Luke described how Christ followers met together in the first century - they “*devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*”
- ❖ And the apostle Paul wrote these words to the church in Colossae “*Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.*”
- ❖ Perhaps the verse that encourages our assembling together more than any other is found in the gospel of Luke describing Jesus Himself: “*He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.*”

Let us be found faithful in continuing to meet together in this new year encouraging both those who have grown to love our church over many years of faithful attendance and those who are visiting First Free for the very first Sunday. Let us be a welcoming church where visitors looking for a church home will find their home at First Free.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!

## Small Groups

Del Shimandle, Pastor

The ministry of Adult Small Groups grew slightly, though it has admittedly not been given enough attention this year. It is encouraging that there are growing numbers of people interested in participating in Small Groups. About 40 in the congregation are engaged. There are a few individuals considering stepping into leadership in this area. Being connected to a smaller group of Christians provides fellowship, accountability, and the best opportunities for spiritual growth. If you are not currently in a Small Group, please consider joining one now. Don't wait for "the perfect" time or mix of your "best friends." Commit to a group now, and you will be blessed.

## Pastoral Care

Del Shimandle, Pastor

On the pastoral care and counseling front, you won't be surprised when I tell you it has been a challenging year for many. I have met with many who are struggling with issues related to isolation, loss stress, fatigue, depression, relationships, jobs, finances, and addictions. The Elders and I have done our part to counsel in pastoral ways, and then to refer people on to more robust and specific counseling or therapy options. We continue to maintain a partnership with Cornerstone Counseling Center of Chicago and have connections to other Christian counseling and therapy organizations. Please keep each other in prayer, stay connected to each other for support, and avail yourselves of the support we or these other organizations can offer.

## Marriage Ministry

Rachel Einfeldt, Elder

At First Free, we celebrate the transforming work that God does when he guides two people to commit to one another in marriage, and we value healthy marriages. The elders have taken the lead in overseeing a small marriage ministry this past year. We have supported married couples with pastoral counseling, regular prayer with and for those facing challenges (within their relationship or from the storms of life), accountability conversations, and helping and encouraging couples to find professional resources as needed. We have also mentored one couple through premarital counseling! Investing in your marriage at any stage is well worth it. Since we reap what we sow, we encourage all couples to sow grace, truth, and forgiveness into their relationship so that godly love may grow.

## Come to the Well

Rachel Einfeld, Elder

During the last weekend of August 2021, the elders organized an all-church retreat weekend called "Come to the Well" in partnership with Chris Bruno and his colleague, Tracy Johnson, from Restoration Counseling. Chris is one of First Free's long-time global ministry partners, and he has both a deep love for the body of believers at First Free church and a passion for walking alongside people as they seek transformation and healing from hard things. The goal was to care for and equip our body to grapple with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the unexpected resignation of our Senior Pastor after less than two years, and with personal losses, burdens, or transitions.

The weekend included:

- ❖ Friday night worship on the theme of "Now Then: Grief, Gratitude, and the Not Yet,"
- ❖ Saturday morning leadership gathering on the theme "The Curious Moments Between" to learn about processing communal trauma and lament together,
- ❖ Saturday afternoon one-on-one counseling sessions
- ❖ Sunday morning worship focused on meeting God in transitional space with a message from Deuteronomy 34 and Joshua 1.

We were encouraged to see strong engagement throughout the weekend, including 114 attendees on Sunday!

## Youth Ministry Recap

Maggie Johnson, Director

**Youth Ministry Mission Statement: To find our story within the story of God and to help others find their story**

I will sum up this year in First Free's Youth Ministry in three words: Donuts, Terrance, and We-Are-Always-Running-Late-I'm-Sorry! (Ha. I'm kidding... only kind of...) If you want to hear the stories behind these three words, feel free to ask a 6th-12th grader. And if they don't give you an answer, ask a youth leader or myself!



I think the real three words to sum up this year, since I started back in July, are these: Consistency, Fellowship, and Deepening.

### Consistency

Starting in the fall of 2021, after pandemic-driven inconsistency for the past 2 years, we decided to gather for two hours (almost) every Sunday night for Youth Group. There we play games, worship, learn about Jesus, and have real discussions together. We typically have 15-20 youth and between 3 & 5 leaders each

Sunday. Moody Bible Institute has provided us with some amazing PCM student volunteers, currently: Abby Alder, Jacob Brown, Caleb Hirl, and Rachel Plummer. They've been incredibly fun, reliable, & helpful. We've loved having a consistent meeting time, separate from church on Sunday mornings, where the youth are given the time and space to interact with God and create a unique and special bond between one another.

### Fellowship

In addition to our weekly Sunday night Youth Group, we have had many opportunities to grow in relationship with one another and among leaders. This year we had a Christmas party, a movie night, a Family & Youth Camping Trip, and a journey to see ZooLights. Every youth gathering is full of lots of laughter and connection.

### Deepening

Most importantly, our youth have grown in their personal relationships with Christ. In the fall of 2021, we studied through the Armor of God in Ephesians 6, learning about what it looks like to be a warrior for Christ in physical, mental, and spiritual battles. This spring, we've had a series of one-offs, covering topics such as anxiety, the woman at the well, temptation, trust, joy, and humility. We've also had the honor of learning from our Moody student volunteers as they've shared their stories and how they've experienced the goodness of God throughout it. Through it all, we've witnessed the deepening of conversations in small groups, relationships with one another, and relationships with Jesus.

None of this could be done without the incredible help of our amazing volunteers who sacrifice so much time to serve the youth. Special thanks to Andrea Korte, Youth Deacon, who shows up selflessly and graciously, behind

# Youth Ministry

the scenes or up front, usually bringing snacks. Incredible thanks also to our committed youth leaders—Jonathan Lim and Mindy Wilkin—who selflessly sacrifice and use their gifts each Sunday night. Thanks also to the occasional help of Dan Addington, who steps in when needed, and Adolfo Ramirez, who makes sure the room is set up just right every Sunday night. Lastly, thanks to Meg Parks, for being our prayer warrior!

In the coming year, we hope to take the youth on a retreat and continue to get them involved in other areas of ministry here at First Free. We currently have youth serving with Children & Family Ministries, the Audio Visual team, and the Worship Team. I look forward to what God has next in store for the youth program and the church. What a blessing it is to work with and alongside the next generation of Jesus followers here in our church! May the Lord continue to bless this ministry.

To the Glory of our Risen King!



## Children & Families Recap

Tandy Malinak, Deacon

Change was the name of the game this year! We've done just about everything in terms of the whens and hows of classroom instruction as we've worked to meet the parameters this pandemic demanded: Zoom-only, hybrid, in-person, all-ages, split ages, and timing. We are immensely blessed to have a patient congregation, flexible teachers and assistants, and a growing and engaging group of children.



### The Numbers

We graduated 6 children to the Youth Group last June, and will see 5 more off this year, effectively shifting the balance in Treehouse down to a younger population come September, as at least 5 Arctic children sweep into 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Meanwhile, the numbers of children overall have grown slightly over the school year, from 27 in September to a current 31. We still don't see everyone on a single Sunday, but the ages are split fairly evenly across the three classrooms.

For teachers, we currently have 27 active and 3 inactive (but will return!) adults, along with 5 youth. Most serve once per month in the room of their choice, but they are not as evenly spread as the children. The Nursery is booming, the Arctic has just enough, and the Treehouse could stand for a handful more. Some of these teachers are years-long veterans, while others are fresh, February recruits. Regardless of their tenure, I am so grateful for them. CFM would not exist without their dedicated service!

### The Doings

Last September saw the introduction of the new Kid Zone in the lobby south of the Sanctuary. With seasonal updates and displays, a themed Kids' Art Wall, and a variety of resources available for kids and families, this area has proved itself a prime hang-out spot both before and after service.

Also in September, we transitioned back to being fully in-person for our classes. We were blessed to have a pair of Moody students with us in the fall at a time when we were, in many ways, starting out brand new again. Since then, except for the break in January, we've engaged directly and weekly with our children, and it has been a refreshing and healing season for many.

In our classrooms, we've continued to use the devotional book, *Amazing Stories for Young Believers*, as a guide for our lessons. It offers a great deal of flexibility in terms of activities, applications, lesson choices, and presentation options, and every teacher is able to bring his or her unique method of expression to the morning. In transitioning to in-service classes, however, the length of the class period lengthened significantly, rendering this

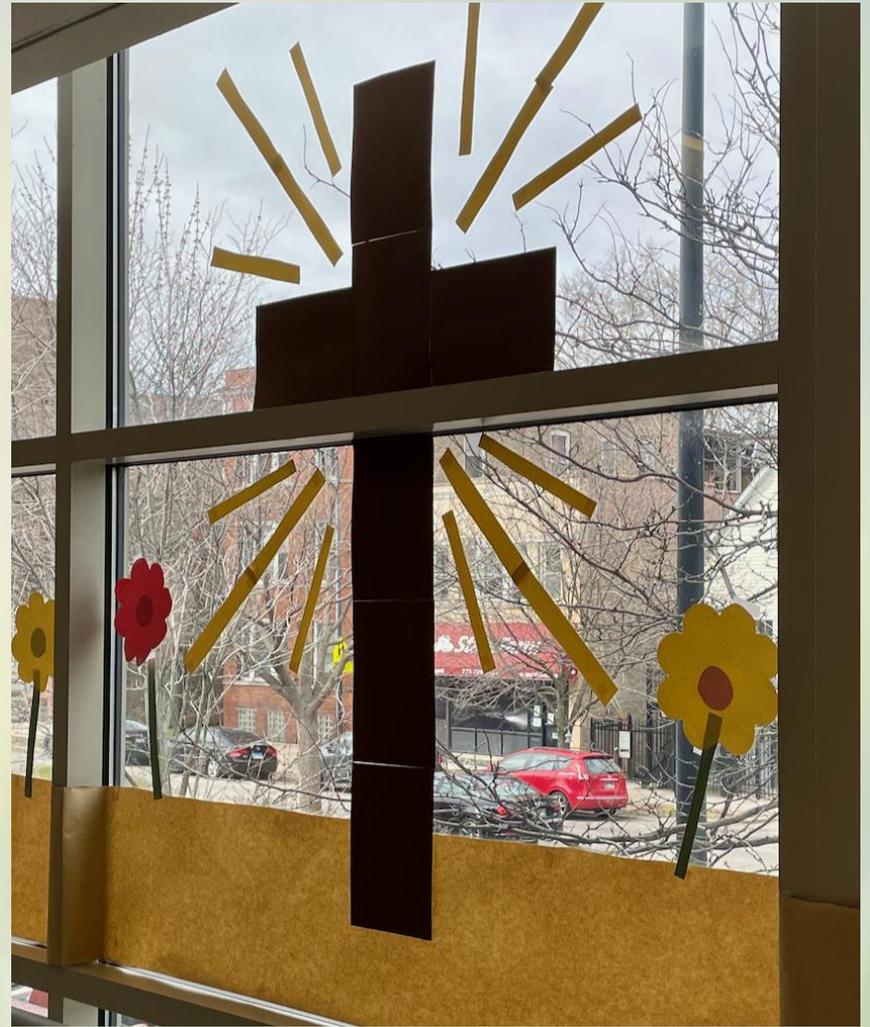
# Children & Family Ministries

wonderful book less than adequate for our needs. While we will continue to use it through the end of the school year, we are now in the process of finding two things to replace it: a VBS-style curriculum for summer Sundays, and a fully new curriculum for the general classes in the fall.

## The Plans

Besides the curriculum changes, there are a number of other projects in the works for CFM, all with the aim of improving our space, deepening our children's learning and involvement, and building up the skills and community of the adults who care for them (parents and teachers alike!). Included in this are the goals to add more art and color to the older children's classrooms, especially Treehouse; to reinvest in regular, more focused training for the teachers; and to create more times and places outside of Sunday mornings for families to interact. If any of these goals speak to you, and you would like to get involved with them, let me know!

There is always need in a ministry: a need for more people, more resources, or more time, in particular. CFM does need all of these, and we are looking forward to seeing how God faithfully continues to meet these and other needs. Thank you for keeping our children, their families, and the teachers in your prayers!



## Global Outreach Recap

### Seung B. "Bogie" Cha, Deacon

In February, we were able to have a commissioning service for our new global ministry partner and hosted a luncheon afterwards with Q&A and much needed prayer. (Due to the sensitive nature of the ministry, the name and location of this ministry partner have been omitted).

Last year, we were able to see most of the ministry partners via video presentation or live, except for one ministry partner; due to the sensitive nature of the ministry, the video was not broadcast.

This summer, we are expecting several ministry partners to visit, and we will host luncheon and Q&A afterwards to listen to their stories of what God is doing. We are hoping, within the next year, to send a short-term mission team to support our ministry partners who would like us to come. Our team members include Sue Gamble, Clarissa Guillen, Ryan Einfeldt, and Seung B. "Bogie" Cha.

**"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" – Romans 10:14-15 (ESV)**

### Ministry Partners

This year First Free supported the following ministry partners. (Two ministry partners are not listed due to the delicate nature of the region in which they live and work.)

#### Rachel & Gilbert Balia, DR Congo

AIDS orphan care and sponsorship with ReachGlobal

#### Chris & Beth Bruno, USA

Global partners since 1997. Leadership and counseling with Restoration Project.

#### Kevin & Andrea Bult, Mexico

Global partners since 1999, attended First Free beginning 1995. Church Planting with New Church Initiatives, serving with Camino Global

#### Bill & Joy Carrera, Peru

Global partners since 1998. Attended first free beginning 1995. Serving with Wycliffe Bible Translators, Bill teaches at a school for missionary children and Joy is a pilot.

#### John & Nancy Hall, USA

Global partners since 2016, Attending First Free since 1997. John is the Internal Operations Manager, also financial auditing with Operation Mobilization (OM)

#### Brant & Heather Hougas, USA

Brant is the Office Manager, and they co-direct and manage many of the camp operations at Living Waters Bible Camp in Wisconsin

#### Ben & Daniela Marx, Peru

Global partners since 2017, attended First Free beginning in 2007. Serving with SIM, teaching theology at a Bible school in Arequipa, Peru

#### Anne Reid, Canada

Global partner since 1997. Serving in British Columbia, Canada with Master's Mission. She disciples First Nations teenage girls and is camp cook for a Christian summer camp.

#### Greg & Mary Ellen Schrock, Mexico

Global partners since 1998. Attended First Free beginning 1993. Finance & Children's Education for Wycliffe Bible Translators

#### Jonathan & Jodi Thar, Taiwan

Global partners since 1996, Attended First Free 1987-1992. Church planting, evangelism and discipleship with SEND International

#### Marc Wittig, Colombia

Serves with CUSC/MUI

## Community Outreach Recap

Tim Wilkin, Member

This past year has been another challenging one in which to meet our community with acts of love and service. With the ongoing global pandemic and various rises in COVID strains, our ability to reach out remain limited. That doesn't, in any way, reduce the amount of need, however, and shouldn't deter us from seeking creative methods to identify and meet those needs.

In the past year, the elder board has worked to continue building-out a network of organizations and support services that can meet needs as they are identified. The goal is to connect people to the services they need if when we can't meet those needs within our church community.

Some in our church are involved with local organizations like **Care For Real**, a food pantry, that provides free groceries to those in our neighborhood experiencing food insecurity. We maintain a partnership with **Chicago Christian Counseling Centers**. Our conversations with **Passages Elementary Charter School** are on-going, so that we might identify ways we can connect with and assist families that represent 30 different countries from around the world, practically right in our front yard. Many in our church remain actively involved with **Breakthrough Urban Ministries** (a homeless shelter in East Garfield Park which was started at First Free 30 years ago), whether through financial support, volunteering, or both.

Maybe the biggest initiative in the last year has been the development of a relationship with **World Relief** and the establishment of the CARE Team. New member candidates Darlene and Jim Conner have volunteered to take the lead on this team, whose goal is to support and

provide aid to refugees in our community; and whose mission is the movement of the Gospel through care.

## CARE Team

Jim Connor

In the fall of 2021, First Free Elder, Stephen Lepse, shared his vision with the church to create a team to help care for a World Relief family. Stephen saw First Free as a community resource-rich in people and provision, through which the gospel could flow with prayer, so long as the right people were in place. The provision was a First Free apartment rent-free for six months to a needy family. After speaking before the congregation people responded and a team was formed including, Darlene and Jim Conner, Fei She, Barbara Cebulski, and Steph Roberts. Jim volunteered to lead the team and World Relief provided the training and orientation. By January, the apartment was ready and the team training was complete. The Family moved into their new home at First Free on March 15<sup>th</sup>. It took the family fifteen months from when their flight their home country, until they arrived at First Free in Chicago. Click here to read a similar migration story to those of our guests:

<https://www.pressherald.com/2018/12/23/from-angola-to-portland-a-migrant-familys-treacherous-journey-to-freedom/> )

Thank you, Jim! And thank you, CARE Team for your work at showing the love of Christ to this family in need. Let's also continue to lift this Team and family up in prayer as the challenges with food, schools, employment and navigating the legal system continue to materialize.

# Local Outreach

Over the next year, we hope to reinforce our existing outreach opportunities and partnerships. We'll continue to update the church regarding the CARE Team's needs as they become aware of them. We also look forward to re-establishing connections with seniors living in the **Schneider Building**. Additionally, we're on the precipice of launching an exciting initiative: the **Outreach Board!** This has been a little longer in development than hoped, but you may have seen verses and signage related to this. Our hope and prayer in this effort is to help people easily connect to opportunities and exercise their God-given passions and calling to reach out to our neighbors. Through QR codes posted around the church, you can easily connect to pages on the First Free website to constantly learn about new opportunities, as well as get ideas for getting involved – and through these opportunities, work together not only to serve the community in love and grace, but also to disciple one another while doing life together as we grow in developing the mind and heart of Christ.

Over the last year or two, Isaiah Chapter 1 has become a stark, personal warning to me. As I understand, the imagery used in the Hebrew is reminiscent of a

courtroom, where God is acting as judge and jury—calling the heavens and earth as witnesses—showing the people of Judah how they've broken one covenant with Him after another. How they've generally taken advantage of and neglected to take care of those in need, to the point where even fulfilling their God-ordained rituals, sacrifice and worship (even praying more and more!) has become a sickening stench. What is the corrective prescription for this as described by God Himself? Verses 16 and 17:

**“Cease to do evil, learn to do good. Seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”**

Micah 6:8 puts it similarly:

**“He has shown you, oh humankind, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”**

May I be intentional about seeking God, to have Him show me how He would have me be involved in taking care of my neighbors—no matter how young or old, no matter who they are, no matter how large or how small the task—that I might demonstrate to the world the unstoppable, never-ending love of Jesus that He has for every single person on the planet.

# Operations



## Facilities Recap

**Dan Tallacksen, Deacon**

**Adolfo Ramirez, Supervisor**

First Free is generously blessed with space to worship, learn about our Loving Father, gather, love one another, play games, and share life with each other. The facilities team is led by Adolfo Ramirez (Facilities Supervisor) and Dan Tallacksen (Facilities Deacon). The team was supported over the year by one staff person, Frank Mercado and a number of volunteers: Jeff Korte, Laju Sani, James Snyder, Doug Tallacksen and Tim Wilkin.

Responsibilities and significant accomplishments over the prior fiscal year included:

- ❖ First and foremost, managing the safety and protection of the church facilities
- ❖ Managing the needs and maintenance of 5237 and 5239 apartment buildings
- ❖ Ensuring clean facilities each week prior to Sunday worship service
- ❖ Ensuring clean facilities each week prior to use by various space share partners
- ❖ Managing space sharing contract negotiation, setup, cleanup, access, and other needs.
- ❖ Replacing all of the overhead light bulbs in the sanctuary from halogen (500W per fixture) to LED (80W per fixture)
- ❖ Negotiating a lower elevator maintenance contract, saving approximately \$2000 / year
- ❖ Negotiating a new maintenance contract for the rooftop HVAC units in FLC
- ❖ Negotiating a new maintenance contract for the 21 mini-split HVAC units

- ❖ Negotiating new electric and gas supply agreements which is likely to minimize the increase in utility costs
- ❖ Preparing the apartments for new tenants and the refugee family
- ❖ Managing back-lot tents during the summer after worship for congregational gatherings
- ❖ Meeting with vendors to get project quotes
- ❖ Replacing the frame and window in the bathroom of the office building
- ❖ Stripping, waxing and polishing the floors in the FLC



Some of our upcoming needs and targeted tasks for the coming year include:

- ❖ Managing the tuckpointing and repairs of the sanctuary wall.
- ❖ Investigating falling office building siding and recommending a fix.
- ❖ Determining if there is a cost-effective solution to prevent the drains in the lower level of the FLC from backing up each time the alley behind the church backs up during heavy rain
- ❖ Regularly updating the facilities project list
- ❖ Completing cost / benefit analysis on the replacement of the main boiler

## Communications

Aurora Tallacksen, Administrator

Technology is always changing and our ways of communicating evolve along with it. It feels like we caught up with technology a bit this year when we released our new updated website and began using an online bulletin, accessible by scanning a QR code in the lobby, for sharing announcements, song lyrics, and the like. Our new website is far more colorful, modernized and clear, and hopefully more representative of the character and ministries of First Free. The online bulletin allows us to do less printing, spend less time formatting, and puts the lyrics and announcements right in the hands of those who'd prefer to view them on their mobile devices.

I also want to credit Fei She with regular updates to our social media accounts. Earlier in the year, he was posting short devotionals for those following us on Facebook and Instagram. More recently, his posts quote and illustrate our Sunday morning messages. These are beautiful and encouraging reminders pointing us to Christ.

Plans for next year include:

- ❖ updating the photography on the website and elsewhere with more pictures of First Free and fewer stock photos,
- ❖ streamlining production of the weekly email online announcements to reduce duplication of efforts.

## Addenda

The following documents could not be included in this report for various reasons. They will be distributed separately.

- ❖ **2022 Financial Recap, Sylvia Lauener, Treasurer**
- ❖ **Selling 5237 North Ashland: A Brief History, Tim Wilkin**
- ❖ **Full CARE Team Recap, including prayer requests and family needs, Jim Connor**