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FIRST WORD

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THE SECRET LIFE OF A SUNDAY MORNING

Written by Noah Neumann, Music Director

There is a particular kind of faith required to be a musician on a Sunday morning. It is the faith that you won't break a string, or that the tracks will jump to the next song when you're sure you've pressed the right Konami Code on the Looptimus pedal to your right. Maybe it's the faith that the little lingering cold in the back of your throat will let you hit that one note in the bridge, or that the pesky buzz in the stage right position won't be all that noticeable, or that loud 'pop' you sometimes hear. And, of course, there's the faith that a 'gremlin' as we so lovingly call them, won't rear its ugly head.

Our routines on a Sunday morning are generally the same. Emma and I get in around 8:15 (I'm probably closer to 8:30). Dan is already in the booth, usually putzing around with one of many goings on up there. Most folks have already had some sort of caffeine. And then the band trickles in.

If Dave is on bass this week he'll already be ready to go in his position. Al will walk in with his Birkenstocks and work on making sure the drums are set up correctly for whatever we need this week. He'll inevitably mention who was playing at Carbone's over the weekend. Then DJ, in his finest flannel, will arrive at the piano (or bass). And someone will have decided there will be an extra long passage of Scripture to read, so you can be sure Ellie will be there to read it.

Once we have our pre-rehearsal coffee we'll go over the songs of the week. Most we've done before. Every once in a while we'll get to do something new. Maybe it's a song we're trying to play just like the recording. Or maybe it's an idea for a song that gives us the freedom to get creative... here's our next injection of faith! At some churches it may be unheard of to try and arrange a new song on a Sunday morning, but in my experience, that's when we're at our best.

Then it's time for our post-rehearsal coffee. This is our Community Group time where we have a moment or two before service to fellowship in the green room (which is actually green!). It's our time to argue about movies, compare marathon times, and play the occasional moment of Pokemon Go. Outside of being able to worship as a congregation, these are the moments I look forward to the most. Being able to do life with this incredible collection of people is a constant source of joy to me and a reminder of what being a part of The Body looks like.

Finally it's time for us to worship together.

Even with our faith there's always a little mishap, a 'gremlin' inevitably makes its presence known. The track didn't skip when it was supposed to, someone messed up a lyric, we thought we were going to build a section when we were really supposed to drop out. But they're usually easy enough to laugh off. We bond over the gremlins in the Green Room once we get off stage. We take what we do seriously, but try not to take ourselves too seriously. It's a beautiful thing to be able to so freely worship with our gremlins. After all, we're a bunch of imperfect people making music together, and occasionally the music has a mind of its own.

And that's one of the beautiful things about worshiping together: we don't have to wait until everything is perfect to participate. We can worship with a scratchy throat, a missed cue, a forgotten lyric, or a stubborn gremlin lurking somewhere in the sound system. We can come as we are, imperfections and all, and lift our voices together.



Visit **firstfreechurch.org** for information on events, community groups, ministries, service opportunities, the sermon series, and more.

ALL REAL LIVING IS MEETING

Written by Paul Anleitner, Associate Pastor



The philosopher Martin Buber once wrote that "all real living is meeting," and I think he was on to something. We become most fully who God designed us to be in face-to-face community: across a table, in a living room, side-by-side in a pew. Yet our culture is steadily losing the habit of meeting.

Last month, writer Derek Thompson published an essay called "You Are No Longer Invited to Dinner," tracing fifty years of survey data on how Americans gather. The numbers are sobering. In 1975, 42 percent of Americans hosted friends or family in their homes at least once a month. Today that number is 12 percent, a drop of roughly 70 percent. Between 1975 and 1998 alone, the share of people who threw or attended a monthly dinner party was cut in half, and today about a third of Americans haven't attended a single dinner party in the past year. Game nights, volunteering, and neighborhood projects have all seen double-digit declines too. Thompson observes that compared to the endless scroll on our phones, a dinner with friends is a remarkably inefficient way to spend an evening. It requires coordinating schedules, cleaning the house, cooking, and pushing through a little awkwardness. Many of us have quietly chosen the easier path.

For followers of Jesus, this matters deeply. From the very beginning, God built us for one another. In the garden, the first thing God called "not good" was a human being alone (Genesis 2:18). And when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, the newborn church immediately began sharing life together:

"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:46–47)

Notice how naturally worship and table fellowship sit side-by-side in that passage. Following Jesus has always happened in homes, around meals, among friends who know each other's names and burdens. Community belongs at the heart of discipleship, right alongside prayer and the preaching of the Word. It's one of the primary ways God forms us into the people he made us to be.

That's why I'm so encouraged by what God is doing here at First Free. Beyond our Sunday worship service, our church is growing in community in some wonderful ways:

- **Community Groups** at 9 a.m. are outgrowing their rooms. (A good problem to have!)
- **Two new Small Groups** launched this fall, giving more people a place to study Scripture and pray together during the week.
- **New Front Door Communities** are being added each season, opening fresh entry points for connection.
- **At least a dozen people** are taking steps to pursue membership this fall.
- **Our revamped Connections lunch** gives people new to First Free a chance to share a meal with Pete & Erica Lehner and members of our staff on most first Sundays of the month.

If you've been on the edges, consider this your invitation. Join a Community Group or start a Front Door Community. Grab a Connections lunch with the Lehners. Open your own home for dinner. In an age when fewer people are being invited anywhere, the church can be a place where everyone has a seat at the table.





UPCOMING ADVENT EVENTS

Learn more at firstfreechurch.org/events

- **Creekside Family Advent Festival** — December 5, 10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.
- **Kids Christmas Worship** — December 13, 10:30 A.M.
- **Christmas Orchestra** — December 20, 10:30 A.M.
- **Christmas Eve services** — December 24, 3 P.M. & 4:30 P.M.