



FIRST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH
5150 CHICAGO AVE S.
MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55417

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First Word

A CHURCH FAMILY PUBLICATION OF FIRST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH
JANUARY 2023

Unprecedented Times? BY PAUL ANLEITNER

Over the last few years, you've probably heard the phrase, "these are unprecedented times," uttered more times than you can count. Perhaps you look around at the state of the Church in America and think, "Things have never been this bad." For those of us who have at least a few decades of life experience under our belt, we might look back on days long past and pine for a return to memories of yesteryear when it seemed like being a follower of Jesus was so much simpler.

If we're not careful, a narrative can begin to take shape within us that the state of the world and the Church is getting worse with each passing generation. But I'd wager that if I could somehow plopp you into a time machine and send you back to the first-century church at Corinth and you saw what was going on in their church culture, you'd probably have a change of perspective.

Church members getting drunk on the Communion wine during the service, a guy in the church sleeping with his stepmom, and rival factions competing for power in the church - that's only a small snapshot of the mess that the church at Corinth was going through (1 Cor. 11, 5, & 1)! Now I don't mention that so we can pat ourselves on the back and say, "Well, at least no one's getting drunk on our Communion grape juice here at First Free!" That's not the point.

I mention this in hope that you would see that from the very beginning of the Church, each generation of Christians faces obstacles and difficulties as they navigate following Jesus within a host culture that holds to values and practices that can be antithetical to The Way of Jesus. While God is always at work in the broader culture that Christian communities inhabit, filling that culture with glimpses of his truth, goodness, and beauty, we can also recognize that there is much within the broader culture we live in that is antithetical to The Way of Jesus. These unhealthy values and ways of living can easily permeate into Christian communities, confusing us on the difference between dark and light.

This is what was happening to the Christian community at Corinth. It wasn't just that some people liked their wine a little too much or that there was just one really inappropriate relationship going on in the church, it was that they had been baptized and called into a new kind of culture where Jesus was Lord, but they were still stuck, in so many ways, in the destructive patterns of living that were normal in their surrounding pagan culture.

One letter from the Apostle Paul didn't solve it all either. In fact, he needed to address them again in hopes of correcting even more issues that plagued their community. By this time, many

in Corinth were beginning to question whether or not they should even listen to Paul's gospel message anymore. Some had become so confused about what was darkness and what was light, that they began to believe the message of Jesus that Paul proclaimed might have been a message of darkness instead of truth. What did Paul do about this? How did he help them see the truth in the midst of such dark deceptions?

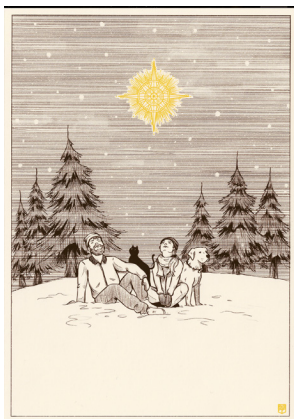
As we start 2023, we are going to be investigating this second letter to the Corinthians together during our sermons in hopes of uncovering timeless biblical insights for how to build a Christ-centered and Christ-sent culture here at First Free that can sift through the values of our broader American culture and reject that which is not shaping us towards our ultimate good in Christ. We want to be a people shaped by God's story and empowered by the Spirit through our union with Christ to build the kind of community that carries the transformative culture of the Kingdom of God into the broader culture we inhabit, filling it with the light of the Gospel.

We hope to see you in worship with our whole community together each Sunday at 10:30 am. Happy New Year!

Thank You!

Thank you to those who submitted Advent art, played in our Christmas Orchestra, volunteered for our Advent Festival and helped with Creekside Christmas Worship and with decorating the church for Advent.

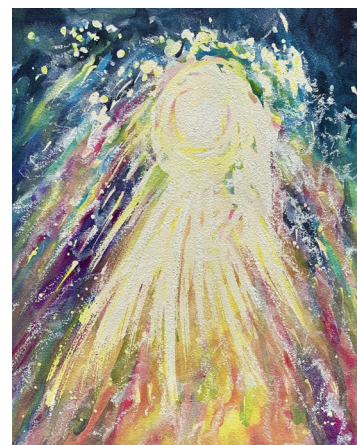
Thank you, your contributions helped make this an amazing Christmas season!



Christmas Star
by Eliana Nordell



Angels Announcing
by Karen Manos



Birth of Hope
by Marlene Maloney



Happy Mary and Baby Jesus
by Aaliyah Peterson

Would you like to receive the newsletter via email?
Contact the office at info@firstfreechurch.org

**OUR MISSION:
TO HELP
INDIVIDUALS
BECOME
CHRIST-CENTERED
& CHRIST-SENT
TOGETHER**

FIRST FREE STAFF

JOEL SUTTON
SENIOR PASTOR
joel.sutton@firstfreechurch.org

JAY POUND
ASSOCIATE PASTOR
jay.pound@firstfreechurch.org

PAUL ANLEITNER
WORSHIP PASTOR
paul.anleitner@firstfreechurch.org

JASON PENZA
STUDENT PASTOR
jason.penza@firstfreechurch.org

CARRIE BOYUM
CHILDREN'S MINISTRY DIRECTOR
carrie.boyum@firstfreechurch.org

STACEY URBANZ
CHILDREN'S MINISTRY ASSOCIATE
stacey.urbanz@firstfreechurch.org

JEANINE BRUEN & ALLIE DANIELSON
FAITH COMMUNITY NURSES
nurses@firstfreechurch.org

SCOTT BECKETT
FACILITIES TECHNICIAN
scott.beckett@firstfreechurch.org

JOANN BURNS
OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR
joann.burns@firstfreechurch.org

DAN FERGUS
TECH DIRECTOR/COMMUNICATIONS
dan.fergus@firstfreechurch.org

SARAH OLSON
GRAPHIC DESIGNER
sarah.olson@firstfreechurch.org

EMMA DELISI
WORSHIP ASSOCIATE
emma.burns@firstfreechurch.org

DOUG NELSON
MIDDLE SCHOOL DIRECTOR
doug.nelson@firstfreechurch.org

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Missionaries of the Month

Rocky and Rachel Bliss

Rocky and Rachel Bliss serve with ReachGlobal in Illinois. Rachel is the "Southeast Asia Advocate" serving in CONNECT. These positions serve both the local church here in the U.S. and missionaries and indigenous partners globally.



What's your favorite food?

My favorite food is usually something in the Mexican cuisine.

What's your favorite game to play with your family?

I enjoy playing Azul with my family.

How have you seen God use you in the last year?

This last year I have been surprised that my training in trauma informed expressive arts therapy has helped so many people. I do online zoom sessions, volunteer at an inner-city Rockford after school program, have enjoyed serving Ukraine refugees with disabilities in Europe, and training of the Kinshasa city team in DR Congo. In December I will serve at a member care retreat for our GlobalFingerprints team in Sumatra, Indonesia.

NEW JAN 8TH: COMMUNITY HOUR

Starting Sunday, January 8th, we will be switching to a new Sunday schedule.

- Community hour from 9:00-10:00
- Fellowship half-hour from 10:00-10:30
- Worship hour from 10:30-11:30



All of our adult groups will meet together during the 9:00 Community hour, along with Creekside and Velocity. Children's Church will continue as usual during the 10:30 Worship hour. This new schedule will allow our whole congregation to worship together in the same service, and will make it easier for us to help people find and join a Community Group. This format will also provide our staff more opportunities to be involved in different ways on a given Sunday morning. We are excited for this new schedule and for the new options and opportunities it will provide.

- EMBARK: Room 301
- LIVING LIFE: Room 105
- SEEKERS: Room 203
- FAITH BUILDERS: Room 109
- AGAPE: Room 104
- SENIORS: Room 103

CREEKSIDE CHRISTMAS WORSHIP



DISCOVERING FIRST FREE

Interested in learning more about First Free? Want to become a member? Check out Discovering First Free January 29th and February 5th during Community Hour.

Contact the church office to sign up.
office@firstfreechurch.org



CREEKSIDE FAMILY ADVENT FESTIVAL



SAVE THE DATES



**Outreach Weekend
Sunday February 26th**

Terrace on Chicago
March 4, 2023

UPCOMING EVENTS

VISITATION CLASS

Sunday, January 15th from 10:30-11:30 a.m.
What is visitation? Visitation combines a friendly visit with a prayer or Bible verse to encourage those who are in the hospital or are limited getting out of the house. The visitation team is coordinated by the Faith Community Nurses. If you would like to learn more come to a training session on Sunday January 15 during the 10:30 worship hour in room 103. Please RSVP by calling the church office (612-827-4705), or email: nurses@firstfreechurch.org.

CREEKSIDE FAMILY ICE FISHING

Saturday, January 28th from 9-12 noon
Creekside kids of all ages, parents, grandparents, caregivers, and siblings are invited to go ice fishing at Taft Lake on Saturday, January 28, 2023 from 9-12 noon. Meet on Taft Lake, by Taft Park in Richfield. Look for the blue teepee out on the lake. All fishing gear will be provided—but feel free to bring your own gear if you prefer. Hot dogs, chips, and hot chocolate will be available (while supplies last). All kids must be accompanied by a parent or a caregiver.

EXPRESSIONS SUPPORT GROUP

Sunday afternoons at 2:00 p.m.
The Expressions support group is similar to other small groups at First Free. It is a place where people "do life" together: supporting and encouraging each other, praying for each other, serving, and seeking biblical wisdom together. However, membership in this group is dedicated to people dealing with chronic illnesses ranging from ongoing diseases to mental illness, such as chronic depression and anxiety.

Creativity is a big part of this support group. The "art" we make is a wordless expression of feelings or thoughts, not about making something beautiful---no experience with art is necessary, and stick figures are welcome! Using art is one way to foster talking about difficult things and often generates delightful observations and discussions.

Expressions generally meets twice monthly on Sunday afternoons at 2:00 PM. All art materials are provided, and there is no cost to attend. Upcoming gatherings are 1/8, 1/22, 2/12 and 2/26. If interested, please contact Dee Huanca (ddhuanca@msn.com) or 612-388-0268 or contact one of the Faith Community Nurses (nurses@firstfreechurch.org).