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# First Word

A CHURCH FAMILY PUBLICATION OF FIRST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

MARCH 2022

## *A Light for the Gospel* BY JAY POUND

14 "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven (Mt. 5.14-16)

In the famous passage from Matthew 5, Jesus does not say we have a light, he says we are a light: "You are the light of the world" (Mt. 5.14). While this may seem a minor point, it makes a large difference. For one thing, it changes our role in Jesus' analogy. We may be tempted, reading this passage, to picture ourselves wandering around with a lamp in our hand. But a better reading would suggest that we are the lamp, carried around in God's hand. The question for us is therefore not where will we take our light, but will we let our light shine where God has placed us (5.16)?

As you will discover in this special issue of the First Word, First Free's history is long, rich and varied. Well into our second century of life, we have met at two different locations in several different building configurations. We have transitioned from Swedish services

to bi-lingual ministry, to English. Started as part of the Free Church Movement (in contrast to state churches), First Free later became one of the founding members of the EFCA (Evangelical Free Church of America).

And yet behind all of these changes, driving and inspiring them, is the same vision, the same call from our Lord to let our light shine before others. In the early 1900's, First Free met in a building in downtown Minneapolis at 12th and 7th at a time when many immigrants from Sweden were arriving to start a new life in Minnesota. Seeing this opportunity, the congregation asked themselves how they might be a light for the gospel where God had placed them. Their answer was to offer Swedish language services at special times to accommodate the long work hours endured by so many.

Later, in a new building at our current location, a new generation looked around and asked the same question, "How can we let our light shine here at 51st and Chicago?" Surrounded now by families instead of laborers, they saw a tremendous opportunity to reach children and their parents with the good news about Jesus. Volunteers began driving and maintaining buses that were

used to provide free transportation to and from church. At its peak, five buses brought 200 children from all over the community to VBC, Clubs and other ministries.

Roughly ten years ago, our church leadership recognized that while we had not changed neighborhoods, our neighborhood had changed around us. Once more we asked how we might be a light here where God has placed us. This led to a new vision (Helping individuals become Christ-centered and Christ-sent together) and a renewed effort to be a gospel presence in our community and city. This mission has produced new partnerships (With Arrive Ministries and the Nokomis Farmers' Market), and opportunities to serve alongside our neighbors at the Twin Cities Marathon and local schools.

One of the many strands that connects us with all of those who have come before us here at First Free is the desire to be a light for the gospel. We take Jesus at his word: we are the light of the world. And our desire now, as it has even been, is to let that light shine before others so they might glorify our Father in Heaven.

### CREEKSIDE ICE FISHING



We had a great time at our Creekside Family Ice Fishing event on January 29 at Lake Hiawatha. We had 79 people come out to join us in the effort to catch fish. No fish were caught that day, but we sure had a good time. Kids sat on buckets and tried to lure the fish to their hooks, played in the snow and in the tents, ate hotdogs, chips, cookies, drank hot chocolate and got lots of energy out!

A big shout out to Jeremy Kobielush, Ted Carter, and Scott Beckett who set up the event and provided all of the tents, equipment, and experience for our Creekside families. We love that this is an annual event where families can come out together for a truly Minnesotan experience here in the City of Minneapolis and to spend time with their church family out on the lake.

*If your information has changed recently (address/email/phone number) please contact the office so we can update it in our system.*

### CHURCH FAMILY NEWS

- Happy 80th Birthday to Wayne Danielson!

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TO HELP  
INDIVIDUALS  
BECOME  
CHRIST-CENTERED  
& CHRIST-SENT  
TOGETHER**

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# The History of First Evangelical Free Church

written by Ross Olson

First Evangelical Free Church began as a congregation of Swedish immigrants to Minnesota in 1884. They had been part of the "Free Church Movement" in the old country. They disagreed with the state church on issues regarding salvation. Was a person a Christian by being baptized as an infant? The dissenters asked, "Where is it written?"

Many came to America for religious reasons and economic hardship. They found all churches in America free because there was no state church. With widespread interest in prophecy came an urgency for evangelism and missions! They started Sunday Schools and Youth Groups.

A national association of Evangelical Free Churches was formed in 1884 in Boone, Iowa. But they did not want to be called a denomination or synod - just independent congregations working together. They were suspicious of authority. Some were nervous about even having a pastor.

In 1887 the first missionary was sent to Canton China by the association. Women's Missionary Society sent a woman in 1890; in 1899 a missionary went to Venezuela and in 1920, Congo. At 7:00 pm Sunday evangelistic meetings, many seven day workers came just for their native language and heard the gospel.

Music was important right from the beginning and there were often multiple choirs and string bands. Because many people came to church on the streetcar, they would stay for the whole day with youth group in the afternoon.

Property had been purchased in 12th Avenue and 7th Street in Minneapolis, along what became known as

"Snoose Row" because of all the Swedish Churches. A bigger building was built that seated 1000. Eventually, the younger generation wanted to hear English, and by 1920 the congregation became bilingual as a transition to English only.

In 1950 with members moving farther south, property was purchased on 52nd and Chicago. This was to build the present sanctuary with attached offices and classrooms. An underground river passing below the lower level was studied by experts and then covered up again.

The large parking lot was purchased at that time, realizing that many came by car. Two houses to the north were acquired to allow eventual construction of the educational building in 1965. It included an "activity room" because of pagan connotations to the word "gymnasium."

About 1965 the gas station across the street was purchased, which was eventually used for maintenance when the bussing program was later established. The garage once housed a food shelf. Houses adjacent to it were also purchased. They have been available for housing missionaries, staff and refugees.

Also in 1950, a big question was whether the Swedes could co-operate with the Danes and Norwegians. They eventually merged. There was a common culture - reserved and not very demonstrative. Pastor E. A. Halleen would sometimes stop preaching and sit down in the middle of a sermon if he felt he had lost his audience.

In 1973 a bussing program organized volunteers to canvass the neighborhoods north of the church on Saturday and make a list of those who wanted to come on Sunday. At the peak there were 50 volunteers, five

busses and 200 child passengers. Among those families, Evangelism Explosion volunteers recorded 30 decisions for Christ per year.

Boys Brigade was begun in 1944 and Pioneer Girls in 1945 with programs on Wednesday evenings when the adults were at midweek service. The children were able to attend summer camps of those organizations as well as Free Church camps, Buffalo Bible Camp, then Shamineau. Children also enthusiastically participated in musicals with a message.

The children's programs and youth groups always brought participants from the neighborhood. In 1980 a Women's Neighborhood Bible Study was begun and in 2004, Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS).

To deepen fellowship among church members and attenders, a series of "Fellowship Dinners" was organized, mixing age groups in people's homes. Small groups have been going on now for some time.

The staff has grown as adult volunteer time has shrunk. Youth have always been willing volunteers. This has made possible such activities as Vacation Bible Camp and Street Fest. Organization changed from Deacons and Deaconesses to a Council.

A radio program broadcast the services from 1948 to 1952. Technology allowed cassette tapes of services to be available in 1973. In 2000 a website was established. In 2020, the pandemic accelerated the move to virtual services and interactive online business meetings. Movements of people groups have brought the world to our neighborhood. A Liberian congregation used our baptistry and a Latino congregation met in the sanctuary Sunday afternoons

Many from the congregation have gone into full time Christian service, as pastors and missionaries. The youth group developed partnerships with Rock of Our Salvation Church in Chicago and inner-city New Orleans. Youth Pastor John Gerhardt resigned and moved there to serve with Urban Impact Ministries.

A partnership was established with several mission fields beginning with construction trips to Congo and Dominican Republic. First Free has partially supported missionaries, up to 40 at one time. When including short term missions, those funds represented 37% of the church budget.

Some First Free members have achieved a degree of fame. In the 1920s, First Free's "Sterling Quartet" gave a 28-concert tour ending at Angeles Temple. Several musicians have gone on to Christian music careers.

Former pastor Arnold T. Olson who was elected President of the combined Swedish Norwegian Evangelical Free Church of America, became the de facto representative of American evangelical Christianity to the leaders of the State of Israel.

Practical jokes and humorous incidents indicate that Christians don't have to be boring. Once, when Herb Nordin was singing a solo in the 12th Avenue church, his music mysteriously rose off the stand, went out the top of a window and back in the bottom. Some of his friends had rigged up an elaborate string and pulley system.

The world around us has changed since 1884. The history has included ups and downs, groups leaving, sometimes planting a church in the process. The need for the gospel is always great. Are we prepared to meet the challenge like the church before us?