

FIRST WORD

SUMMER 2025

A PUBLICATION OF FIRST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

A Reflection on VBC 2025

By Carrie Boyum

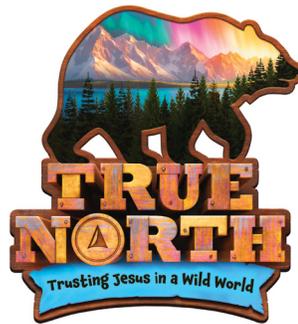
We had a fantastic week of Vacation Bible Camp, June 16–20 as we embraced the True North—Trusting Jesus in a Wild World! We had 123 campers and over 100 volunteers to help make this an impactful week as we learned to put our trust in Jesus.

Kids moved around to stations throughout the church, getting the opportunity to learn about trusting Jesus by making crafts, playing outside games, hearing and interacting with Bible stories, memorizing scripture, and having True North-themed snacks. Songs, skits, and experiments helped kids learn about God while having lots of fun. The church was decorated and transformed into the great north woods, helping kids feel immersed in the theme. Kids had the daily opportunity to write out their God sightings on leaves and add them to the woodland creature wall outside of the Gym. Our mission project this year was to raise money to help kids attend Christian camps that First Free supports: Camp Shamineau, Rock Ridge, and Camp Nathanael (our Up North Camps in Minnesota). The kids, leaders, and other supporters raised over \$4000 for camp scholarships; that will help 16 kids receive \$250 scholarships!

I love seeing kids from First Free and our community put their trust in God, for we know that God is always our True North, pointing us in the right direction.

Carrie Boyum

Children's Ministry Director



Every day we had a theme and a Bible Point that the day revolved around.

During the week we learned:

When we wonder, we can
TRUST JESUS!

When we feel alone, we can
TRUST JESUS!

When we feel powerless, we can
TRUST JESUS!

When we need hope, we can
TRUST JESUS!

When we need help, we can
TRUST JESUS!



Ministering In The Czech Republic

By Lenka Bragg

This summer marks my fifth opportunity to serve as a fellow organizer and leader at an English Camp in Czechia (also known as the Czech Republic). Being able to participate in this short-term ministry is a testament of God's faithfulness, power, and love displayed through generous support of First Free Church as well as believers from many other places in the U.S. and Europe.

Growing up under communism in Czechoslovakia, I was told from a young age that the church made up God to advance its own interests and also that the church was dead. However, when the Velvet Revolution ended the regime in 1989, a few voices began to reach me at a time of personal doubting, searching and questioning. I accepted Jesus into my heart shortly after I came to the U.S. in 1992 as an exchange student and began my life as a

believer. Since then, even after all this time of walking in faith, I am still in awe of God's grace and that he loved me and cared enough to die for me even before I knew He existed.

I did not return to live in my home country after meeting my husband Kyle in college, but I was eager to share my faith with my family during my visits and in my correspondence. However, my efforts proved fruitless and as I grew frustrated with the lack of response, I found comfort in the words of Jesus in Matthew 13:57: "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and his own household." So over the years I continue to love my family members and pray for opportunities to tell them more about my faith in Jesus.

Several years ago, during an Outreach Weekend listening to Katie Dudgeon share about her work in Berlin, Germany, I realized I have a burden for the unsaved people in my country that extends beyond my family. As Katie described the joys and challenges of witnessing to the post-Christian population of Berlin, I found myself sobbing uncontrollably. It was then I knew I needed to pray for more than just my family.

Then a door opened in 2018 when Jason Pensa, the First Free youth pastor at the time, asked me if I would accompany him and the youth group to help run an English Camp in the Czech Republic. My response was an immediate 'yes' as I had been praying for an opportunity to serve there with other believers. The experience was very meaningful to me and having the prayer support of our church in Minneapolis while working with Czech Christians was powerful. For the first time I felt a sense of completeness being back in my home country.

When COVID hit and the second Czech summer youth trip was cancelled, I was naturally disappointed. How could this be taken away after all the years of praying and finally finding a great way

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—Lenka Bragg



to serve? But this time I knew what to pray and wait for and when our church hosted missionary Josh Krato from the Czech Republic in 2021, I made sure to ask if his church needed any help with English Camps. Sure enough, I got an invitation from him the following year to join his church and a group of believers from the U.S. to help lead an English Family Camp in the Czech Republic.

Never could I have imagined back then that our church would be able to sponsor a total of 15 Ukrainian refugees over the last four years to attend the English camp and experience the love of Christ. Never could I have imagined that my brother (who does not attend church) would willingly participate in camp and bring my two nephews and niece to hear the Gospel message, plus join the worship team, and find comfort among believers. The friendships shared with the Czech people, both churched and unchurched, have deepened as many people return to the camp year after year.

Aside from the Bragg family, there have been eight others from our church (Christina Boyum, Lucille Carter, Liz Koch, Kim Sorensen and the Barber family coming this summer) who have volunteered to serve at the camp. We are so thankful for the prayers and support we have received and know we can count on our church friends to lift us up in prayer July 9th-20th!



EXPERIENCING GOD AT CAMP

By Sandra Ogren

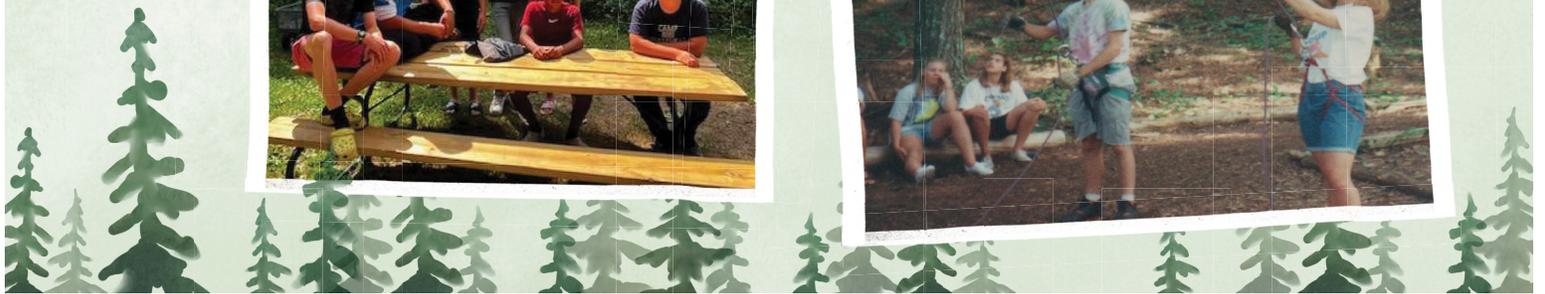
Camp for me was life changing! It is the place where I gave my life to Christ for the first time as a young girl. It is also where I began to put down the roots of my faith and experienced Jesus in a real way. But I might never have had the chance to go had it not been for my home church investing in me through scholarships. Growing up, my mom didn't have the financial means to send us to camp every summer. However, my home church ALWAYS made sure we could go! It wasn't until I was a young adult that I learned of the dozens of families who contributed to scholarships on my behalf for years, WOW! I am so grateful for a church that invested in me and my siblings in this way. Thanks to these scholarships I was able to attend fall retreats, family camps and serve on work crew. When I had the chance to give back by working on staff, I jumped at the opportunity and had the best summer job ever as a counselor at Covenant Point in Michigan. Camp was, and always will be, a special place with deep connections to my faith.

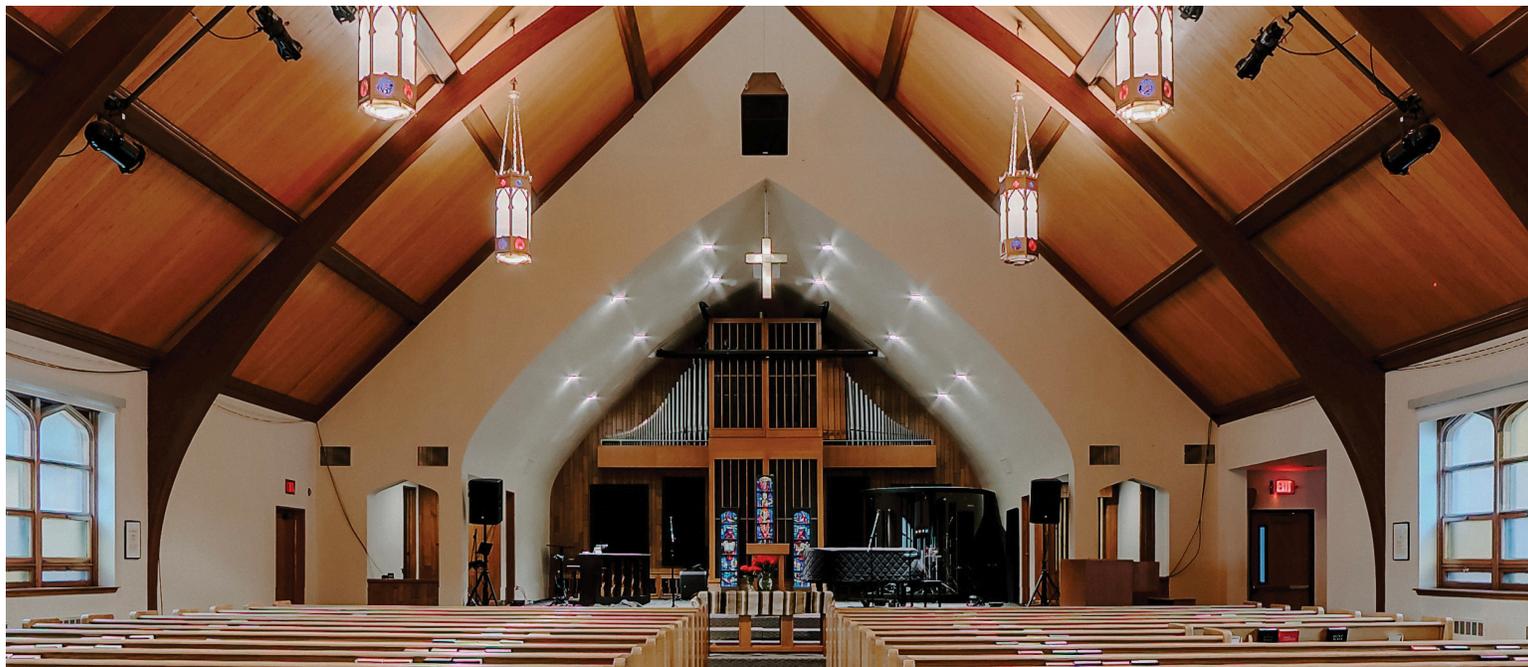
When my own kids were old enough to start thinking about camp, we, of course, encouraged them to attend a week when they were ready. For my boys, one fell in love with Camp Nathanael and one loves Camp Shamineau. Each child has experienced camp in a different way and each time they go they take away something new. Of course, they love the games and the food and the fun, but what stays with them are the people and the spiritual conversations and truths they learn. My kids get to connect with teens and young adults who are passionate about their faith and living it out. They develop strong bonds with their counselors

through Bible study, praising God at chapel or around a campfire. There is nothing like hearing a group of teenagers praising Jesus, singing, and worshipping him with their whole hearts!

I can do everything at home to teach my children the Bible, bring them to church, have great Christian friends, and deep spiritual discussions, but I can not create a camp experience in my living room! There is just something different about being away for a week, in God's creation, focusing on Him and allowing God to speak, that is unique to the camp experience.

Here at First Free, I love that we send kids to camp, not just those that can afford it, but anyone who wants to go! I love being part of a church body that sees the importance of the camp experience and puts energy and resources behind raising money for scholarships. I was part of VBC last week and saw the excitement among the kids when they heard we were raising money for places that they know and love. They were cheering and shouting each day when they heard five more, ten more, kids could go! That's because when you love something you want to share it with others so they can love it too. We have such great camp ministries here at First Free, and I love that so many of our kids get to go. Whether it's Camp Shamineau, Camp Nathanael or Rock Ridge, I would encourage you to check it out. Our family will keep investing in sending kids to camp because I know God meets kids there. He met me there and it changed my life!





Practices in Worship

By Emma Delisi

Since entering my new role as Worship Director here at First Free, I have continuously reflected on my time and how my faith journey has been shaped by the people within our church. My family started attending First Free in 2005. Since then I have participated in almost all aspects of our church community; receiving my NIV Adventure Bible as a Kindergartener, going on middle school hikes, entering Youth Group, going on missions trips, serving at VBC for the last 10+ years in various roles, and participating in worship, both as a congregation member and as a leader.

First Free's worship ministry has and still continues to play a key role in the formation of my faith. Since moving into my role as Worship Director this past January, I have felt especially called to continue to explore different aspects of worship within a context that makes sense for the unique characteristics of our church. The power of congregational prayer has played a key factor in tying together the reality that each individual person connects to God through their own expression of song and music—but the center of that worship and musical experience is the posture of our hearts. Congregational prayer and practice helps us to ready ourselves for the experience of worshipping, lamenting, singing praise, rejoicing in God's love for each and everyone of us.

The idea of prayer is something that the worship team and I have discussed pretty frequently in our times of connection during our rehearsals together. We have discussed how the songs that we sing and the music we play can be expressed as prayer, especially when we feel that we don't have the words or the power or energy to do so. This idea that our

songs are also prayers has been a powerful motivator for myself and Noah to find songs and liturgy that express the prayers of our hearts, to speak to the everyday experiences of each individual person, so that we might have the words to pray when we don't necessarily know what to say. One of our most recent Contemplative/Reflective songs has the lyrics "when we don't know what to pray the Spirit groans for us.... So come Holy Spirit to the silence of our hearts, and sing out within us the promises of God". What a beautiful reminder that God hears us even when we don't have the words to say, and how wonderful it is that we can worship in this facet together as the Body of Christ.

Our church has such a rich blessing to be able to gather as people from many different age groups, backgrounds, and at different places in our faith walk. The intergenerational framework of our church compels us to push one another into a deeper relationship with God and into caring, uplifting relationships with one another. On Sunday mornings, being able to worship alongside one another, I often feel overwhelmed by the fact that so many people within the congregation have poured into me over the years. To be able to hear our voices join together in worship, through song, prayer, scripture, is a beautiful thing, and a reminder that our faith grows and flourishes more when done together with Christ at the center.



"To be able to hear our voices join together in worship, through song, prayer, scripture, is a beautiful thing."

—Emma Delisi