

Candidate Profiles

2026 Elected Officers

ELDER CANDIDATES



Chad Ball

Spouse: Carri

Children: Lindsey, Max, Addison

Member for: 9 years

Employment: Pharmacist for Dandurand Pharmacies

How do you desire God to use you as an elder?

Showing hospitality to others has always been important to Carri and me, whether it is opening our home, delivering a meal, or just being available to others. Fellowship and building relationships are an integral part of the Christian life. I think this is the reason serving in the church has always been important to me; I desire to grow and foster deeper relationships. Serving as an elder in our church is an enormous responsibility and I will give the time and effort that it deserves to properly serve this congregation. I feel that I am equipped to help guide this church with the other elders, pastors, and staff in continued faithful ministry of this church.



Eric Ross

Spouse: Jaylen

Children: Will, Ben

Member for: 10 years

Employment: Covalent Construction Solutions

How do you desire God to use you as an elder?

This church family has been such a blessing in my life and the life of my family. I am grateful and humbled by the opportunity to serve the church in this capacity. In the same manner as I have seen over the years, I look forward to leading and teaching others as we grow in our love for God, one another, and the lost. I love serving and teaching kids (preschool through high school) and seeing them encounter the gospel, respond in faith, and commit to following Christ as Lord of their lives. My prayer is that God would keep me and use me to accomplish his purposes.



Ken Bengtson

Spouse: Connie

Children: Seven adult children

Member for: 54 years

Employment: Retired

How do you desire God to use you as an elder?

I've served in multiple roles throughout my time at First Free. I love people and desire to build up one another in our faith. It would be easy at my age to drop out and let others step in. However, the race isn't over and much can still be done to reach out locally and beyond with the good news of the gospel. I've experienced tough times and good times seeing the Lord working in my life. Life's experiences shape us and allow us to either be used by the Lord in and through them or lose out. I know as I read prayer requests from you I can empathize and pray with an understanding heart.



Byron West

Spouse: Patti

Children: Ryan

Member for: 21 years

Employment: Retired

How do you desire God to use you as an elder?

I am grateful for the nomination to serve as elder. One important aspect of the position of elder is to be of sound doctrine. I feel that I have been grounded from the Holy Spirit, my parents, and the teaching I have received from a variety of sources including First Free. I strive each day to stay true to God's Word and to ensure that our church body does the same. I seek to help shepherd the flock through prayer, teaching, and encouraging those who I am in fellowship with at First Free. In addition to those duties, I feel a responsibility to provide counsel to our pastors and staff to ensure that our church stays strong in the proclamation of the gospel.

DEACON CANDIDATES



Derek Claassen

Spouse: Lindsey

Children: Taryn, Brecken, Aven, Madden, Jordan

Member for: 13 years

Employment: Prairie Construction LLC, Owner

Deacon Committee: Trustees

How do you desire God to use you as a trustee?

I feel that the giftings God has given me to run my custom home building business have fit very well into the trustee role that I have done for nine years in understanding the ministry focus and financial considerations that apply to First Free. I hope to be able to continue to serve in that role.



Austin Gottlob

Spouse: Rebecca

Children: Jonathan, David, Grace, Lily

Member for: 8 years

Employment: Baughman Company, PA

Deacon Committee: Trustees

How do you desire God to use you as a trustee?

I enjoy working behind the scenes to serve and help where necessary. My job as an engineer allows me to work with project management, design, construction, contracts, budgets, billings, etc., and provides experience that should be useful to serve as a trustee. I have a conservative view of finances with goals of avoiding debt, saving where possible, and trying to be a good steward with all that God has provided.



Judy Hollander

Spouse: Ross

Children: Blake, Mary Ann, Clark

Member for: 40 years

Employment: Retired

Deacon Committee: Trustees

How do you desire God to use you as a trustee?

My time serving as Children's Ministries director gave me a close look at all the ways First Free makes effective ministry happen. I saw how stewardship of budgets and the building are critical to making disciples! Serving as a trustee would be an exciting opportunity to help facilitate the mission of First Free. I look forward to the opportunity to learn and collaborate in this role.



Bill Umholtz

Spouse: Nancy

Member for: 11 years

Employment: Retired

Deacon Committee: Trustees

How do you desire God to use you as a trustee?

I am now retired after working in the commercial construction and commercial roofing industries for forty years. I believe that this experience has given me valuable insight into structure and property maintenance and integrity. In my final position as superintendent at Buckley Commercial roofing, I became more focused on time and resource management, and making the best decisions for the benefit of our company. I believe that this relates very closely to the role of trustee. More importantly, being good stewards of the properties that God has blessed us with is the lens that I believe that we should look through at every decision, considering sound biblical beliefs, and prayerfully seeking God's wisdom in all matters.



Lisa Vance

Spouse: Judd

Children: Sara, Erin

Member for: 20 years

Employment: INTRUST Bank

Deacon Committee: Trustees

How do you desire God to use you as a trustee?

My father was a self-employed contractor, and I spent much of my childhood engaged in the "business of business"—helping him pay bills, proofread contracts, and manage day-to-day operations. That early exposure sparked a lifelong love of oversight, which led me to a career as an auditor while occasionally serving churches during my younger years. Not everyone finds joy in church meetings or discussions about governance. But for me, the gift of collaboration and problem-solving is something God has consistently called me to use throughout both my personal and spiritual journey. I believe serving as a church trustee would be one of those moments—an opportunity to strengthen his kingdom and serve the church with the skills he's entrusted to me.



Sandy Friesen

Spouse: Don

Member for: 41 years

Employment: Retired

Deacon Committee: Missions Committee

How do you desire God to use you as a member of the Missions Committee? Since I was a kid, I've been fascinated with stories of missionaries serving around the world. My first taste of missions was a First Free short-term missions trip to Guatemala in 1989. Since then, I've been on numerous short-term trips. We also support several missions partners in finances and prayer. I have served on the Missions Committee in the past and look forward to serving again. I believe the Missions Committee serves as a vital link between our partners and the church body.



Mary Lou Meyer

Spouse: Jim

Children: Jacob, Adam, Kathryn

Member for: 7 years

Employment: Retired

Deacon Committee: Missions Committee

How do you desire God to use you as a member of the Missions Committee? I've been involved with many of our missions partners over the last twenty-five plus years. When I was the bookkeeper at the church, I not only sent money to them, I was also worked with Lucas in many areas like keeping the missions board up to date. I love being able to pray, support, and help our missions partners. What a blessing the church's missions policy is to them. Being on the Missions Committee these last two years has been such a blessing to me and I have been able to get to know them on a deeper level. I am very thankful to be able to be involved in their lives in this way.



David Netherton

Spouse: Fay

Children: Mike, Steve, Matt, Jay

Member for: 44 years

Employment: Retired

Deacon Committee: Missions Committee

How do you desire God to use you as a member of the Missions Committee? I have had the joy of serving as the Elder representative on the Missions Committee for the majority of the last thirteen years. During that time Fay and I have participated in several short-term trips and visits to some of our overseas missions partners. This has grown my love for missions and reinforced the vital role of each person on the committee to support our missions partners in a variety of ways.



Gary Sundquist

Spouse: Bonnie

Children: Three adult children

Member for: 3 years

Employment: Retired

Deacon Committee: Missions Committee

How do you desire God to use you as a member of the Missions Committee? Our goal when we retired was to be able to spend time ministering to people, specifically with remodeling/construction/household maintenance sorts of things. We have tried to focus on 'widows indeed' (1 Tim. 5:3), or people who have few other family or financial resources. We have been able to stay as busy as we want. I'm not sure how exactly that kind of ministry relates to the missions committee except that there may be a chance for us to do some work with/for partners on home assignment. About a year and a half ago we were able to help rehab a house for Luke and Jubilee Shaver and would enjoy doing that kind of thing for others.



Bill Wadsworth

Spouse: April

Children: Nathan, Jessica, Sara

Member for: 13 years

Employment: Retired, Yost Driving School

Deacon Committee: Missions Committee

How do you desire God to use you as a member of the Missions Committee? I have been involved with discipleship through local Navs for years. I have traveled overseas for work (Italy) and to meet our son-in-law Jonathan's family (India). I sensed the darkness of these societies which need the light of Christ. I like to share the gospel and serve people as Christ compels us to do.

— more candidates on back —

Sunday, November 17

Snacks at 5:00 pm

Members Meeting at 6:00 pm



Joe Schmidt

Spouse: Eva

Member for: 4 years

Employment: Athletic Trainer at

Advanced Orthopaedic Associates and at Prairie Dunes Country Club

Deacon Position: Coffee/Donuts

How do you desire God to use you as a deacon?

I'm honored to be nominated to help coordinate the process gathering at the hot bean watering hole and fried bread table here at First Free! I've been on the coffee team for about four years now and stepping into this role as Joe, the deacon of "joe," will be an opportunity for me to deepen my connection with the church. Getting coffee and donuts on a Sunday morning is great opportunity for connecting with members/attenders/guests of our church. As Jesus has welcomed me into his church, I want to be able to warmly welcome others to our church building through this opportunity. As I've coordinated numerous young adults events in the past, coordinating the coffee and donut team will give me the opportunity every week to grow in hospitality.



Justin Syrios

Spouse: Emily

Children: Hallie, Graham, Clark

Member for: 11 years

Employment: Textron Aviation

Deacon Position: Baptism/Communion

How do you desire God to use you as a deacon?

Communion and baptism are unique in that they are how we tangibly experience the gospel together as a church body. Each time we participate in communion or observe and affirm a baptism, I am reminded of my new life with Christ. I love to use my skills in organization and coordination to help make sure that these critical parts of our services run smoothly and bless the congregation.