

2021 CELEBRATION AND VISION | CONGREGATIONAL MEETING
JANUARY 30, 2022

ANNUAL
*Celebration &
Vision
Reports*

E-FREE CHURCH OF BEMIDJI

*Lets rejoice in all that God has done in and through our church
this year, and let's pray for godly vision and clear direction for us
in 2022!*

**We are becoming fully devoted
followers of Jesus together.**

*"He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching
everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present
everyone fully mature in Christ."*

- Colossians 1:28

Lead Pastor

Church Staff

Praise God for a godly staff ministry team at E-Free Bemidji! We continue to pull together in the same gospel direction. We went through some transition this year as we brought on our new Youth & Young Adults Pastor, Douglas Daube. A big thank you to Laura Helweg for her interim youth role last summer! We're also thankful for Lily Buchan who began serving in our nursery. As we begin the year 2022, we're searching for a 10:45 Music Director and a Kids Ministry Director. Praise the Lord for the recent hire of Patti Lofgren as our new Visitation Caregiver! Please pray that our staff ministry team will effectively carry out our discipleship mandate. Pray for continued wisdom, diligence, and passion for Jesus.

Attendance

Measuring Sunday morning attendance continues to be challenging. Praise God our church was able to meet onsite for all 52 Sundays in 2021! Also, our livestream ministry continues on as strong as ever, now with 3 different cameras.

2021 averaged approximately 400 people per Sunday: hovering around 250 onsite and 150 online (estimating 2.5 viewers per screen). We dipped as low as 214 on a cold winter morning and peaked as high as 574 on Easter morning!

Sermon Series

We began 2021 on week # 11 of our sermon series through Acts, which we plan to finish with week #48 on February 6, 2022. Guest speakers included Terry Smith, Paul T., and Dr. Alejandro Mandes.

We also enjoyed some topical sermons including Unity, Communion, Devotion, Discipleship, Contentment, Jesus as King, Advent, Hope and Holiness, and one on Jesus' Glorious Return, connected with our potential Statement of Faith change.

Pastoral Update

Unfortunately, 2021 was not the "back to normal" year that we all hoped it would be. The Covid-19 pandemic lingers on with words like Delta and Omicron dominating the headlines. However, the continued good news is that our God still sovereignly rules and reigns. And, opportunities for spiritual maturing and refinement are all around us.

It has been difficult to say goodbye to some dear friends who've changed to other churches. However, we wish them the Lord's blessing. On the other hand, it's been a blessing to welcome many new people into our Church Family. It's also been a blessing to have more and more people return to onsite worship services and other ministries. We're hoping this returning trend will increase all the more in 2022.

My wife Debbie and I are immensely grateful for the Church Family's kindness in extending us a 3-month sabbatical leave in 2022. We're looking forward to a time of rest, renewal, and study. Lord willing we'll do some traveling, including a tour of the 7 churches from Revelation 2-3. We feel deeply blessed to be entering our 22nd year of fellowship and service at this church, and in this community. We love you all very much!

- Pastor Jerry

Volunteers

A major prayer item is our current shortage of volunteers. From greeters to kitchen workers to Kids Sunday School teachers, etc. we are in great need of godly servants to step up and use their gifts at E-Free.

⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

- Romans 12:6-8

FUTURE VISION

Our church's 100-year anniversary in the year 2024 is now only 2 years away. Let's pray fervently and continually that E-Free Bemidji will become more and more the local church that God would have us be. Pray that we will be in step with God's Spirit, not lagging behind and not running ahead.

At the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus commissioned His disciples to make disciples. Therefore, our desire is to WIN the lost to salvation, to BUILD up believers in their faith, and to EQUIP believers in joyfully serving the Lord.

Ephesians 2:10 reminds us of God's plan for those of us He's saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Colossians 1:29 talks about strenuously contending toward spiritual maturity with all of the energy that Christ so powerfully works in us. This is a steady and deliberate process of daily sanctification and surrender.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, at E-Free Bemidji, let's focus our vision on becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus together!

Associate Pastor

While not quite a return to normal, 2021 felt a lot more like getting back on track. In August I hit the 3-year mark at E-Free Bemidji. In my role as Associate Pastor, my focus is primarily adult discipleship. There are a number of ways that we seek to help the church family continue to become fully devoted followers of Jesus together. While none of us will be able to claim that we are 100% devoted to Christ in this lifetime, our aim as the church is to “spur one another on” toward this end (Heb. 10:24).

Life Groups

Life Groups have been an essential part of our discipleship ministry and in helping one another to stay connected. In September we were able to increase the number of Life Groups to eight groups. It’s a joy to be able to dig deeper into God’s word together as we seek to apply what we are learning from Acts on Sunday mornings. But even more, I am encouraged by the stories of how our Life Groups are caring for one another and continue to be a safe place for true fellowship and growth in Christ. Please join me in praying that God would raise up additional Life Group leaders and hosts so that more and more of our church family could experience a group that prioritizes learning together and loving one another.

Lake Charles

In March I was privileged to travel with a group of five from our church to Lake Charles, Louisiana in partnership with E-FREEA Crisis Response. We spent the week with Steve Austvold (Global Partner with EFCA North

a team from Thief River Falls E-Free, and the Crisis Response staff in Lake Charles serving members of the community affected by two devastating hurricanes in 2020. It was an incredible opportunity to serve and to see God at work in the midst of great suffering. Every time I think of the people of Lake Charles I’m reminded of Psalm 57:1 (ESV), “Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.”

Connection Café and Fellowship

This past year we have tinkered a bit with how best to utilize the time in between services at 9:45 AM. It’s easy to chit-chat over coffee and donuts, and after a long, tough season, sometimes that’s exactly what the doctor ordered. We hope that you’ve been able to connect (or reconnect) with others in the Connection Cafe. We have also utilized the 50-minutes in between services to offer membership and baptism classes, as well as discipleship opportunities such as our Adult Bible Study (Jonah), the Becoming a Connected Church workshop, and the Jump-Starting Your Daily Devotions class. In 2022, let me encourage you to be very intentional about investing in those 50 minutes in between services in ways that we can become fully devoted followers of Jesus together. Imagine if you were to add just 50 more minutes into your Sunday morning routine in at least 40 of next year’s 52 Sundays. By the end of the year, you would have invested 2,000 minutes (33+ hours) into discipleship opportunities. We’ve got some great options planned for 2022, so don’t miss out!

*May we continue to be a church that aims to become fully devoted followers of Jesus together in 2022!
In Him,*

Music Ministry

We are so blessed week after week by the music ministry at our church at both the 8:30 and 10:45 services. This year I was privileged to serve with our musicians and tech team as I helped to lead worship this summer on a handful of occasions at our 10:45 service. I also had the privilege of helping with music along with our talented volunteers at our August 29th Unity Sunday services. We continue to prayerfully ask God to bring us the right person for the part-time 10:45 Music Director position. Please pray that the Lord would raise up someone who can oversee the 10:45 music ministry and who can lead alongside our incredible 10:45 musicians.

Second Sunday Prayer

With all that God is doing in and through our church family, it is good to pause once in a while and bring our church before the Lord in prayer. Every second Sunday of the month we gather together at 6:30 PM in the East Chapel for Second Sunday Prayer. We typically begin with a brief time of sharing any personal prayer requests or praises. We then move into times of prayer for our church family, our ministries, our community, and our Global Partners, often with Scripture as our guide. Every month, it seems that someone will say to me at the end of the evening, “I wish more of our church would join us for prayer. I know that it’s not easy to make it back out to church on a Sunday evening. However, I would like to challenge every member of our church to join us at least twice for Second Sunday Prayer in 2022. If you are unable to join us in person, consider setting a reminder to pause and pray wherever you are at 6:30 PM on the second Sunday of the month.

Youth and Young Adult Pastor

My family and I have been so blessed to have joined the E-FREE Bemidji family this fall. Having been here for roughly 4 months now, we feel as if we are starting to fit in and are entering into a routine. We have been so thankful for the welcome and support we have received as we enter into this new place and ministry. Lord willing, we are looking forward to many years of serving at E-Free.

-Douglas Daube

LOOKING FORWARDS THE FUTURE

Looking forward to the Spring semester, we have many exciting things on the horizon, including a Mental Health Bible study, Super Bowl Party, District Blitz, and Manhood and Womanhood Bible studies. As always, our focus is the continued discipleship of the youth and the proclamation and explanation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Young Adults

There have been many areas of outreach towards Young Adults, including some new ministries. Anchor is a Bible study that has taken place in the home of Lydia Johnson. This group has consisted of around 15 that has studied the book of James. The group has been a great group of mature and young believers with some who are seeking to learn more about Christianity.

Many Bemidji State University students have been coming to E-FREE Bemidji and we have started up a chapter of Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ). What started with a group of 6 students has grown to up to 20 as we have focused on making Christ known to all students on campus. During the fall, I had the privilege of attending the Fall Getaway Retreat for students from Bemidji, Alexandria, and St. Cloud and was able to do teaching on evangelism. Emily and I also took a small group to Cru's Winter Conference in Minneapolis with thousands of students from the Midwest. This included a day of outreach in the cities where I was able to help the students share the gospel with residents for the first time! Many wonderful things have been taking place as the excitement to share the Gospel on BSU's campus grows!

Emily and I have also led a young adult Life Group in our home. While we are still growing as a group together, I have been encouraged by the conversations that took place as we dove into each week's sermon. Finding ways to continue to increase the young adult ministry is a focus that I have for the upcoming year.

Youth

Coming in at the beginning of the school year was a huge blessing as we were able to build great momentum from the start. This year, we had Youth Group be combined High School and Middle School. We've averaged close to 60 students each week. We spent our time in 1 Peter as we navigated how we are to live as Christians in a non-Christian world. We saw how Jesus' Kingdom and ways are not like the ways of this world; it is an Upside-Down Kingdom.

During the Fall, we spent two weekends in Motley, MN at Camp Shamineau. We had around 20 High Schoolers attend during the first weekend, followed by 20 more Middle Schoolers attending the second weekend. I am very thankful for the decision to split the weekend into two, as it allowed me to spend even more individual time with the students as we grew in our relationship and fellowship together.

We had many other events that were great times of fellowship and fun this semester. We had our Fear Factor night at the end of October with many fun, fearful, (and a little gross) challenges for the students. We also had a highly requested overnight lock-in that was well attended. We ended the semester with a Christmas Party that was topped off with a lucky pair of students that got to throw a pie in Pastor Douglas' face.



Kid's Ministries

I always enjoy writing the KidsMin annual report and taking the time to think back over the past year of ministry. I am very grateful for the opportunity to serve this church, our families and the kids over the past 4 years. These past years have been incredibly fruitful in the life of our church and I look forward to seeing our KidsMin flourish and grow under the direction of a new person that the Lord moves into this role. I will continue to be as helpful as possible and give as much support to the next director as I can during this transition time



LEADERS

When I think over KidsMin and the gains I have seen this past year I think the most obvious area of health and strength was reflected in the committed and dedicated Wednesday night leaders. There is a deep commitment to the team, kids and our ministry model. This leader commitment provided a great amount of stability which in turn deepened leader-child relationships along with parent-leader relationships. People are comfortable and happy, they know one another, it's like a community that cares for and loves each other. I have loved supporting and working with the Wednesday night team, and am so grateful for each leader who wanted to join this team. Our Wednesday nights average 70 kids and 18 adults.

CAKE

Another highlight of this past year was the C.A.K.E Christmas program. I love events- I love pulling together people and allowing them to use their gifts, and then standing back and seeing what the Lord does with the effort, practice, and spirit-inspired ideas that all fall into place. I can honestly say, the Christmas program was a beautiful testimony to all that. God used so many people to meet needs, help in "behind the scenes" roles, give inspiration, and then in turn allowed the kids to have an excellent experience that brought so much joy to our church and community members who attended the services. 50 kids participated and 15 parent volunteers contributed to the program. The between service Sunday School hour was used as the primary practice time for the entire program, we began practicing October 3rd. We had 3 Saturday rehearsals prior to the program also. with parents.

PARENTS

Other very beneficial highlights that have been life-sustaining to our Wednesday nights (Youth & Kids) have been the Wednesday evening meals, and options for parents to stay and join a life group or parenting class. The meals for the families have met a great need and also contributed in making our Wednesday evenings feel much more like a "community". The kitchen ladies have worked so hard and done such an amazing job - what a blessing. This fall we introduced a life group on Wednesday led by Pastor Eric and also an 8-week parenting class led by Terry & Robin Hewitt. I continue to hear great feedback from parents and many are thankful for the opportunity to "plug in" while their kids are doing ministry. I would recommend and advocate for additional discipleship classes on marriage, parenting and technology in the future.

MANDI

I want to especially thank Mandi Buchan who has assisted me and used her gifts to so perfectly to complement mine, it has been a wonderful reciprocal relationship and Amy Graf who is so gifted and committed to loving kids, teaching them to worship and to know the word of God. And to this church body - who has so graciously and patiently cared for me as I have been dealing with Eric's brain cancer. I have loved being the KidsMin Director here and consider a great privilege and responsibility to serve the Lord in this area.

It has been a BIG year - lots of exciting things happening - the Lord has grown our discipleship in kids ministry and added to our numbers. I pray that this will continue as we, as a church, stay committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." -- Ephesians 3:20-21

Women's Ministry

"We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well because you had become so dear to us." 1 Thessalonians 2:8

Reflecting back on 2021, there are common threads woven throughout Women's Ministry: servanthood & ministry, vision, and change...

Servanthood & ministry

Bible Studies

BSF continued in its second year at EFree Bemidji. Led again by Lindsay Nygren, Josie Fultz, and Carol Thomspson, BSF meets Thursday nights. This year's participation more than doubled, with over 40 women participating in weekly discussions on The Unexpected King, a study on the book of Matthew.

Women's Events

Last summer, the Women's Ministry hosted several evening gatherings which featured ministry updates and teaching from some of our current global partners as well as time for fellowship.

Christmas Tea

After a year's hiatus due to the pandemic, Linda Bouche and her amazing team hosted a beautiful Christmas Tea. This year's theme was "Behold, the Light of the World". Our guest speakers, Orlando and Denae Alamano shared their testimonies in being light in their community. Candles flickered, carols were sung and many cups of tea were served. It was a lovely evening to welcome in the advent season.

Vision

In a strategic vision meeting last summer, members of the Women's Ministry team met with Pastor Eric Nygren. Those gathered were challenged to look carefully at the needs of the women in the church and how to best offer ministry to meet those needs. We felt convicted that we as women need to provide significant choices that lead to greater devotion with fewer distractions. Allowing opportunities for follow-up with individual women is the key to successful events, not necessarily the number of events or the number of attendees. Pastor Eric provided the group with the following books: "Discipling, How to Help Others Follow Jesus" by Mark Dever and "How Can Women Thrive in the Local Church?" by Keri Folmar.

After a summer of vision and prayer meetings, Overflow was formed. The goal or mission of Overflow is to unite the women of EFree while igniting our faith in Christ; allowing Christ to fill us in order that we overflow into the lives of those around us. Bi-monthly Saturday morning meetings have been specially designed and planned to allow for that mission to be accomplished. Each morning begins with a Christ-centered devotional, a program or activity specifically planned for that morning, and time for connection and fellowship. Overflow events are welcome to all women who are Juniors in High School and up and will run through May 2022.

Change

After serving as the Chair of the Free Church Women's Ministry, Judy Mouser stepped down. Though she remains a stalwart component of the ministry team, Debbie Johnson and Mishel Carlson are serving as co-chairs of the team. The rest of this amazing team are Leanne Frost, Josie Fultz, Serena Hall, Lydia Johnson, Sharna Johnson, Jan Mauer, Judy Mouser, Lindsay Nygren, and LaMae Ritchie. We welcome any others who would like to be part of this group. Please reach out to any of the ministry team members and let us know.

Elder Board

2021 was a challenge for many in our church. Although we had more familiarity in 2021 with the patterns of living in a global pandemic than we did in 2020, it still felt difficult to connect and feel connected with our brothers and sisters in Christ. It was perhaps even harder in 2021 since we had gone so long without regular face-to-face gatherings. Our Reopening Strategy Task Force continued to provide tremendous service to the Elders and our church through the beginning of the year as we gradually returned to more and larger in-person services and ministries. We were pleased to be able to conclude the Task Force in 2021. Thank you again Task Force! We have returned to nearly regular in-person worship, youth and kids ministries and discipleship activities, but it feels like there are a lot of faces missing. Pray for the Elders as we discuss ways in which we might gently and lovingly reach out to those we haven't seen for a while.

Elders Study to be Better Elders

The Elders have together been reading the book, *Church Elders*, by Jeramie Rinne. We have been challenged and encouraged through this study of the Biblical position and responsibilities of Elders in a local church. We recommend it to anyone interested in learning more about church leadership and Biblical eldership.

Pastor for Youth and Young Adults Search

This year we said goodbye to our brother, Pastor Albin. The Elders launched a search committee of Danny Paddock (Chair), Mark Carlson, Alyssa Hartje, Terry Hewitt, Jerry Johnson, Brett Kurschner, Shelly Mustful, Amira Raukar, and Gerri Thorsgard. This group worked hard to quickly identify our church's needs for this position, promote the position, gather applicants, and identify 2 promising candidates. The committee, the Elders, and staff interviewed, and recommended Douglas Daube for the position. He was approved and called by the congregation and accepted the job. Praise God that he was willing and able to jump right into this ministry and it felt like our Youth Ministries and Young Adults Ministries hardly missed a beat! We owe a special thanks to Laura Helweg and some others who kept the youth program flourishing during the

In closing,

I pray this blessing for all of us in 2022:

"May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." Romans 15:5-7 (ESV)

Benevolence Fund

The Elders administer the Benevolence Fund. These monies are designated and kept apart from our General Fund. The Benevolence Fund is used at the discretion of the Elders to help with special needs within our congregation family. We strive to be good stewards of the money you generously contribute and designate to the this Fund. The requests and gifts are confidential, so we cannot share all the details, but I wish we could share some of the notes of thanks that we are blessed to receive. The balance of the remaining unneeded 2020 Christmas Caring tree funds that was transferred into the Benevolence Fund in 2021.

2021 Benevolence Fund Report	
BEGINNING BALANCE (12/18/20)	\$ 4,452.65
Incoming Contributions	\$ 7,466.00
Outgoing Gifts	\$ -8,859.15
ENDING BALANCE (12/16/21)	\$ 4,864.50

Pastoral Support and Counsel

I am so grateful for our Pastors. I hope you will continue to pray fervently for them. Each Pastor reports monthly at our Elders meetings. The Elders hear about our Pastors day-to-day challenges and goals. It is our privilege to see how God is using them and we are blessed to serve alongside them in the ministry of our church.

2021 Elder Board

Mark Carlson

Scott Buchan

Karl Salscheider

Drew Gauwitz Sr.

Terry Hewitt

Randy McKain

John F. Williams

Bob Carlson

Terry Smith

Trustee Board

The trustees would once again like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your continued generous giving to the church....

2021 Board Members

Dan Frost
Todd Guntzel
Steven Miller
Jim Ritchie
Linda Shutter
Duane Tader
Jessica Westlund

As trustees, our main responsibilities are managing the finances & maintaining the physical church plant. Each month we spend time reviewing both of these areas in our regular meetings. In our April trustee meeting, due to your generosity, we had about \$340,000 in the general reserve. It was determined at that time that we wanted to set a goal of keeping about a three month balance in our general reserve. Our expenses run approximately \$65,000 per month, so a three month reserve would be about \$195,000. With those numbers in mind, the trustees decided to spend some of the reserve. First, we paid an additional \$25,000 towards the church mortgage. This saved the church a decent amount of interest & moved us quicker to our goal of being debt free. Second, we inspected the church siding. It was in very rough shape with areas of rot, cracks & holes that needed repair & areas that needed new caulking & the paint was definitely in need of an upgrade. This project was mainly done in August to the tune of about \$43,000. A smaller money project was repairing the many holes & cracks in our parking lots. Thanks to a lot of hard work by Ron Bodeneimer, our facility manager, this was accomplished for about \$1000. Another larger project to be done soon, is upgrading & replacing the outdated fluorescent lighting in the fellowship hall. This has been in the works for quite some time & like so many things these days, there were long delays in getting the fixtures. This project will run about \$23,000. Of course there are many other items that come along during the year that require additional expenditures that aren't always able to be planned for but thanks to all your faithfulness, we were able to cover all these expenses & still finished the year with a strong reserve balance of \$320,226.

2022 Trustees

Ron Bouchie
Stephen Helweg
Steven Miller
Jim Ritchie
Linda Shutter
Duane Tader
Jessica Westlund

We also want to thank the church staff for working hard throughout the year to help keep our expenses in line. There are definitely stressful times throughout each year as we watch the finances ebb & flow but the Lord continues to always be faithful & he continues to bless this congregation.

- Todd Guntzel, Trustee Chair, 2021

Visitation Caregiver

Praise God for bringing Patti Lofgren to serve in this ministry position!

Global Connections Team

Greetings from the Global Connections Team! This busy year our team consisted of: Justin Burpo (treasurer), Daniel Carpenter (chair), Hannah Carpenter, Christine Kangas (who served with us a good part of the year before being called away), Rachel Lofgren, Pastor Eric Nygren, Sherry Shindelar (secretary), Sarah Page, and most recently we've been joined by Karin Thomas, and Peter Eriksson (chair-elect).

Changes in Partnership

This year we had number of changes in Partnership: Jim Frick retired mid-January. Also early in the year Roger and Muriel Anderson - whom we had been supporting in retirement- let us know they no longer need our financial support. This summer Paul and Karin announced official retirement and no longer need financial support from us. Then later in the year Steve Hanson announced he had resigned from Timber bay. Leo Bird is not with CIM any longer and is serving with another ministry in the Southwest. We are not currently supporting either Steve or Leo. These changes have allowed us to re-allocate funds to give a little more to some other partners who are under-funded without increasing our budget.

One-Time Gifts

As usual the GCT team met with existing and prospective partners, both in-person and online. We considered requests for both ongoing and one-time needs, and were able to designate several gifts. Among the one-time gifts were giving toward an AC unit for our partners the Trust organization in BD, and for a jaw surgery for Darlis Anderson.

Ambitious Undertakings!

Our most ambitious project for the year was giving our old Missions policy a grand overhaul. In addition to our regular monthly meetings, we had had several intense workshops of carefully thinking through who we are and what the Lord is calling us to as a church, missions wise, as we went through everything line by line. No huge direction-changes, but this improved clarity and intentionality to our purpose and strategy. Thanks to Pastor Eric for spearheading this and putting in a lot of work drafting, editing, and leading those extra meetings. We invite everyone to read our new and improved policy document.

The other big undertaking was sending an update letter for all our Global Partners. This included things like asking how we can pray for them, how their support level is, if they have had any major changes to life or ministry, what the best way is for us to contact them, etc. We then read and discussed their responses.

It is a blessing working on this team of gifted people who are passionate for the Lord and His work around the world! And it is wonderful to serve our giving and loving church as we partner with those doing that Kingdom work! On to 2022! Come soon Lord Jesus :]

—Daniel Carpenter, 2021 Global Connections Team Chair