



# Annual *praise reports*

2019 CELEBRATION AND VISION | CONGREGATIONAL MEETING  
JANUARY 26, 2020



## E-FREE CHURCH OF BEMIDJI

Thank you for taking time to read through our church's 2019 Annual Praise Report. Lets rejoice in all that God has done in and through our church in 2019!

**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*

## 2019 Church Praises

- Jan. - Formation Groups Launched
- March - Simulcast Service Launched
- August- Power UP camp \*average of 240 kids per night
- Sept. - Life Groups Launched
- Sept. - Women's Retreat
- 50 youth group students went to Camp Shamineau
- Baptized 6 believers
- Welcomed 5 New Church Members
- Dedicated 5 Children
- Regionally collected 4,014 Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes
- Started supporting 7 new Global Partners
- Hosted 600+ people at the Community Thanksgiving Meal
- Trained 200+ leaders at Rekindle & the Global Leadership Summit

# Lead Pastor

## Staff Update

Our staff is really developing as a team! We're gaining increasing momentum and alignment the longer we work together. It's been such a blessing to settle in and move forward from a point of stability. We were blessed this year to be able to hire paid nursery workers for Sunday mornings: Alisa McLemore, Justine Guderian, and Joni Guntzel. We have also hired some key Interim Children's Ministry Directors: Ashley Joren, Annelise Sterneman, and Mandi Buchan.

Praise God for all the great staff we have as well as all the many wonderful volunteers who serve in SO MANY vital ways! We are so blessed to be a church that loves God and loves people!

## Church Life

*This summer, we switched to a new 10:45 a.m. service time. Overall, this seems to be going well as we head into 2020.*

## Attendance

Our 2019 Sunday morning attendance was 381, down almost 5% from last year's 400 average. While this is not the trend that we want to see, the real concern is making sure that those who are not attending are doing ok. Every part of the church body needs the church and the church needs every part of the church body. May God help us to love and serve one another well.

## Sermon Series

In 2019, I loved preaching through the Sermon on the Mount, the Summer Psalms series, a Baptism series, a Spiritual Training series, an Enlarging His Kingdom series, an Advent series, as well as various "stand alone" sermons on topics like "Giving to God 1st" and "Hard Pressed Thankfulness."

## Pastoral Update

In 2020, I'll enter my 5th year now as Lead Pastor. I serve about 55 hours a week. I spend about 20-25 of those hours preparing for the sermon and collaborating with our incredible musicians on the orders of worship. I invest about 10-12 hours in various meetings with staff and lay leaders. I meet with various people for counseling and encouragement about 8-10 hours a week. I spend the rest of my time emailing, talking over the phone, serving at weddings and funerals, visiting people, and so on. When I can make time, I also really enjoy spending time praying for and strategizing how our church can grow in our effectiveness of making disciples. I also enjoy coaching and encouraging some younger pastors in our area.

*My wife, Debbie, and I look forward to celebrating our 29th anniversary this June. We're grateful for our 4 amazing daughters. Our family is thankful for our Church Family at Efree Bemidji. We love you all and appreciate your encouragement and support so very much. - Jerry Johnson, Lead Pastor*

## Life Groups

Being part of a Life Group this year has been a great source of personal blessing. I'm so thankful that Pastor Eric has helped bring these together. If you aren't in a Life Group, you should really prayerfully consider joining one! Life Groups have the very real potential to radically transform our church into an incredibly mature and deeply caring community of believers.

## Simulcast

I'm SO thankful that we are able to simulcast our services! Praise God for Steven Miller and his tech team who do so much to help us hear, see, and experience our worship services.

## Future Vision

"Becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus together" is why we are here. Colossians 1:28-29 reminds us, "He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me."

Making disciples is what it's all about! I look forward to sharing a few more details regarding our vision for 2020 at the Annual Celebration and Vision Meeting on January 26. I hope to see you there!

May our fervent prayer be, that together we will effectively:

- Win the lost
- Build up believers
- Equip workers
- Multiply disciple-makers

This will mean cultivating meaningful relationships with the lost, planting the truth of God's Word, and reaping a spiritual harvest of newly born Christ-followers.

Our church's 100-year anniversary is now 4 years away. Vision 2024 prayers are being lifted up faithfully. If you'd like to join this prayer force, please let me know right away. Together we're asking God to show us where He wants our church's particular focus to be as we promote the supremacy of Christ by celebrating His love, obeying His truth, and enlarging His kingdom.



# Associate Pastor

*Praise the Lord for all that took place in and through our church in 2019! As I look through the pages of my 2019 calendar, I am nearly overwhelmed, not by all that we accomplished, but by all that the Lord did in and through us as we committed ourselves to Christ's disciple-making mission.*

## Formation Groups

It's hard to believe that we launched Formation Groups back in January 2019. In addition to our Listening to Jesus and Growing in Grace Sunday School classes, we added a new option for adults at 9:45 am. With Formation Groups, we hope to foster an environment where solid teaching and group discussion leads us to consider how the gospel forms our thinking, our priorities, and our relationships. These Formation Groups would not have been possible without the help of so many excellent teachers and group discussion leaders. Thank you to all our FG leaders!

In 2019 we tackled 11 different topics including:

- Knowing God
- How to Listen to a Sermon
- Global Vision: Clarifying Our Call to Missions
- Who Is Jesus?
- Christians at Our Best: Engaging the World
- Faith & Finances
- Discipleship Explored (Philippians)
- The Way Love Was Meant to Be (Song of Songs)
- What Is the Word of God?
- Defining Discipleship
- Meaningful Church Membership

In 2020 our Formation Groups have restarted with a focus on loving our neighbor. In the coming months, we will also plan to cover such topics as family discipleship, marriage and the gospel, worship, and the Kingdom of God. Let me echo Pastor Jerry's challenge to view the 9:45 Sunday School hour as a +50. Here are fifty minutes that you can use to invest in your own discipleship growth.

## Life Groups

For me, the highlight of 2019 has to be the launch of Life Groups here at E-Free Bemidji. In early September we kicked off the fall ministry season with team jerseys and tailgating in the church parking lot. That week, we set sail with six new sermon-based discussion small groups meeting throughout the week. I thank God for the leaders and hosts who are faithfully serving our church family each week. Life Groups are designed to be a place where our people can learn together and can love one another. I can testify that this is exactly what is taking place when our Life Groups gather together. In 2020, I am prayerfully asking the Lord to raise up additional Life Group leaders and hosts so that more and more of our people can be a part of the discipleship growth taking place through these groups.

## Second Sunday Prayer - 2SP

Another ministry highlight from 2019 has been our monthly gathering known as Second Sunday Prayer. The name says it all. Every second Sunday of the month, we gather at 6:30 pm for prayer. On some Sundays we've walked around our building, praying together in small groups at various stations. At other times we've gathered in the Sanctuary and have worked our way through a list of prayer prompts. We pray for one another, for the ministries of our church, and for God's guidance as we seek to be obedient to Jesus' call to make disciples. Circle the second Sunday of each month on your calendar or add a reminder on your phone and plan to join us for 2SP in 2020!

## 2019 Ministry Highlights

- Partnering in ministry with an incredible staff team, godly shepherds on our elder board, faithful servants on our trustee board, and committed ministry leaders and volunteers throughout our church.
- Preaching on a handful of Sundays and at the Christmas Eve service.
- Launching our new [efcbemidji.org](http://efcbemidji.org) website.
- Serving with godly men and women on the Global Connections Team, the Worship Committee, and the Christian Education Committee.
- Helping to lead worship at 10:45 on an occasional Sunday alongside our talented students and worship team members.
- Attending the Global Leadership Summit and leading a workshop at Rekindle on Using Technology to Build Community and Outreach.
- Leading our baptism class and membership classes.
- Hosting together with our Welcome Ministry and Serving Team volunteers Welcoming Church Workshops and a Newcomers Lunch.
- Running alongside brothers and sisters in Christ at the Blue Ox 10K.

*Seeing what God has done here in 2019 fills me with praise, excitement, and anticipation for what He will do in our midst in 2020. I would appreciate your continued prayers as I prepare for my upcoming trip (February 8th-23rd) to connect with our Global Partners. Also, keep your ears open for a very special event coming April 3rd-4th with our Global Partners Steve & Kathy Austvold, a workshop designed to help us further develop our missions strategy.*

*What a privilege it is to serve at E-Free Bemidji!*

*In Him, - Eric Nygren, Associate Pastor*



# Youth and Young Adult Pastor

*As I closed my third year here at our church, I looked back on some amazing times with students and young adults, as well as the love I have received along the way. I am so happy for the opportunity I have to serve God here in Bemidji. I want to extend a special thank you to all who have welcomed Annelise into our church family. It was great to have a special wedding reception last July. We are so grateful for this church. We look forward to the time ahead and the ministry that God has for us here in Bemidji.*



## Student Ministries

2019 was a great year for our student ministry. We saw students come to accept and follow Jesus as their personal savior, while others deepened their discipleship walks.

Last January we were able to start a new middle school winter retreat with Camp Oak Hills, despite the -30 degree temperatures. Other major events that took place in the spring of 2019 included a lock-in, a well-received prayer night, our annual district conference in Duluth, as well as a weekly focus on the meaning of discipleship. We wrapped up the spring saying goodbye to some amazing seniors. It is hard saying goodbye to such great students but we are grateful for the road that God has for them. Over the summer we spent each month gathering together around a campfire. With my wedding smack dab in the middle of the summer we had to play around with that. However at the end of the summer, the high school students and I went to the Island at Camp Shamineau. We had a great few days. Wet, but great. We were able to spend time growing in relationships together as well as looking forward to the fall.

As school started in the Fall of 2019, we saw a great number of new students join us on Wednesday nights. A huge encouragement to start the year. This 2019/2020 school year we have been walking through the book of Galatians. Specifically, how the book of Galatians can help us bring gospel clarity to our everyday lives. Seeing the world through the lenses of the gospel is our main teaching point for the year. God showed up in big ways this past fall. We were able to have a group of 50 go to Camp Shamineau's Fall Fling retreat. Students were able to draw closer to Jesus and enjoy perfect weather. We held two outreach parties. One in October and then closed 2019 with a Christmas party in December. During our Sunday school times throughout 2019, both high school and middle school students have learned more about their own spiritual formation. A key distinctive for our Sunday school.

## Young Adult Ministries

As young adults enter and leave college, join the ranks in the work force, or start families, they show the drive and devotion it will take to be the next generation of leaders in our church.

Leaders like Dan Frost who has been serving in Sunday School and youth group but who has stepped up to serve on our trustee board. There are so many young adults at our church who are committed to following Jesus.

In our young adult ministry, we have experimented with several types of ministries; small groups, worship nights, etc. We are continuing to strive to find our niche in Bemidji however.

Please pray as we launch a young adult survey to best figure out how to serve them as we look for the next steps in 2020.

*God has blessed our youth group in amazing ways. Students are learning what it means to be fully devoted followers of Jesus. They are taking their own personal steps in their faith journeys. Students are learning that it is their own decision, not just their parent's, friend's or pastor's decision. Be praying for the youth of our church. They are facing an ever changing and confusing world. Being the next generation is difficult and can be more cumbersome when others are not supportive. I am so glad our church values student ministry.*  
**- Albin Sterneman, Pastor of Youth and Young Adults**



# Kid's Ministries

*First, I want to sincerely thank the pastors, staff, trustees, elders and this congregation for your willingness and flexibility in supporting me during my husband, Eric's health crisis and our family's situation this fall. This has been difficult for me to write because of the current shadow that lays over my personal life right now but I do not want that to "over shadow" all the good that has transpired in KidsMin. this past year. I enjoy writing these reports and taking the time to reflect and see what God has done, is doing and will do. It is good to look back and thank God for his faithful hand in our church, kids' ministry and my own life.*



This past year was the first full calendar year that I was able to direct and lead our Wednesday and Sunday ministries. I continued on with the curriculum choices I had made the previous year and honestly believe that consistency and follow through is key to giving the kids at E Free a solid foundation that builds on what they have learned and not just repeating Bible stories from the Old Testament over and over because we change curriculum. Every curriculum has its benefits and drawbacks, there is no perfect curriculum, however I am very satisfied and happy with what we are using. On Sundays we continue Answers for Kids for Sunday School (PreK through 3rd), A Case for Faith of Kids (4-5th grade Tweens') and TeamKID on Wednesday nights for E Free Kids Club.

## Power UP Camp - 2019

Last year at this time I mentioned that the Covenant Church and E Free Kids were considering collaborating for a city-wide VBS – Power UP Camp. That collaboration took place August 4th-7th and was very positive for both churches and for many, many kids.

We worked extremely hard organizing, decorating, promoting and executing an awesome VBS. We had 286 kids register and averaged 240 per night. We had 100+ volunteers between the 2 churches. One of the benefits to working together on this kids' event was the shared work load, the benefit of combining financial resources, the advantage of talents and giftings from a greater pool of individuals but the greatest in my opinion was the testimony of unity it spoke to the community about our 2 churches.

Our "Kick Off" this fall in our kids' ministry was definitely impacted by Power UP as many kids, families and additional volunteers have plugged in to our kids programming because of that event.

Power UP was a ton of work and really took all of my energy & focus from May to August but I will testify and say – it was worth it! As of today, I am not planning a large, collaborative, city-wide VBS for this summer – but would prayerfully consider it for 2021.

## E-Free Kids

This past fall we added a separate class for 1st graders because our numbers have increased (prior the classes had been 2 grades combined).

I anticipate that the fall of 2020 we will add a 2nd grade class and that every classroom in the lower level will be used. This really is exciting for me and us as a church, it shows that we are seeing a commitment from younger families and from faithful volunteers committed to our church body.

We also officially implemented our secure check-in system this year in all areas of ministry from Nursery to every organized KidsMin scheduled event.

## Sabbatical Update

On this "unexpected" sabbatical my passion and love of Jesus, kids and E Free Kids ministry has not died off. God is using this time in my life to renew and move me into a greater love for him and His church.

Many people have asked me "if & when" I will return to my role. I can confidently say that it is my heart's desire to back soon but at this point our family has many unknowns and I am unsure of the timing.

I have been spending more time in the office this month doing behind-the-scenes-work. I am hoping to be more visible and slowly transition back in and help out when I can.

*Please continue to BOLDLY pray for our church, our church body, and all the ministries. My vision for KidsMin continues to be the same. Please pray that KidsMin will be a growing-thriving-effective-powerful part of the larger church body that disciples and leads kids and families to Jesus. \*May our love for Christ and one another point the world to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

**- Gerri Thorsgard, Kid's Ministries Director**



# Visitation Caregiver

*I am grateful for the privilege I have had over the past year to spend time with various people from our congregation. As the visitation caregiver, my primary responsibility has been to visit senior adults in their places of residence.*

I have also spent time visiting people from our congregation who have been hospitalized. I have arranged meals for individuals and families when I was aware of the need. I am grateful for the people in our church who have willingly prepared and delivered meals to people experiencing illness or other challenges. Over the past year Debbie Johnson has served families in our congregation when a child is welcomed into their home through birth or adoption. She has arranged meals for them and given them a gift on behalf of our church. I am grateful for Debbie's ministry and the blessing it has been to many families. This responsibility will be passed on to a new volunteer in 2020.

On the fourth Friday of each month the senior adults meet at the church for a potluck lunch and a time of fellowship. At the September meeting it was decided to change the name for this gathering from fifty-five plus to Senior Connection. I have enjoyed participating in these events, and I have helped to arrange some of the programs.

I continue to facilitate the Welcome Table in our church foyer. I coordinate the volunteer schedule and stock the materials that are used to welcome guests to our church. In November we gave away the last of the church mugs, which were ordered in 2015. We now have new mugs to give as a gift to welcome guests to our Sunday morning services. My prayer for 2020 is that we will continue to make our welcoming ministries a priority, and that we will grow in our ability to help those who are new to our congregation feel welcomed and valued.

- Kay Sue Eriksson, Visitation Caregiver

## Women's Ministry

Each year, as I reflect on the months gone by, I am always first struck by the amazing way God shows up in the lives of women in our church. Each lady is gifted by Him and it is a joy to see those gifts being offered up to Him in service...sometimes up front but more often behind the scenes. Our church is blessed with many faithful servants who work alongside women's ministries throughout the year. The evidence of that service shows up in the beauty of seasonal decorations, in the providing of a meal to a family in need, to hosting a church potluck or coming alongside a family at a time of loss by providing food for a funeral.

This year we had the privilege of hearing from two of our global partners...Sarah Page at our Mug and Muffin gathering and Hosanna Thomas out by the campfire this past summer. This summer also included some canoe/kayak trips on local lakes and rivers headed up by Edie (Heem) Perrine as well as monthly prayer nights for ladies to come and pray together, led by Ellen Ward.

### Ladies Weekend Activities

We hosted a Ladies Night Out in March and were able to hear from Ashley Joren, Leanne Frost and Kari Bergsven as they led breakout sessions.

There were also several Catch-Up Weekends throughout the year for women to work on a project of their choosing while fellowshiping with one another. Many thanks to Ellen Ward, Becky Koehnen and Becky Kangas for heading those up.

### Women's Bible Studies

Our Monday evening community bible study happened in the spring and we took a short break in the fall to look into different formats to use to keep women in the Word.

Many thanks to Gerri Thorsgard and Judy Mouser for their many years faithfully leading this outreach. And welcome to Janice Meidinger and LaMae Ritchie as they take over this ministry. Holly Howes continues to lead a women's Bible study as well.

### New Name!

White Cross became Blankets of Blessings to reflect their desire to bless the community with various sewing projects.

They provided blankets to a number of agencies in town in addition to several other projects.

*Serving on the women's ministry team this past year has been Edie Perrine, Ellen Ward, Robin Hewitt, Judy Mouser, Kristie Kangas, Josie Fultz and Lindsay Nygren. We are always overjoyed to welcome new faces to the team as well!*

- Robin Hewitt, Chair



# Elder Board

*2019 was a year of building and improving on foundational things. We Reviewed and updated a number of our guiding documents, including our By-Laws, Constitution and Employment Policies. Thank you to everyone who played a role large or small as we expect these will assist us as we move forward.*

*We usually share something light to eat near the beginning of our Elder meetings and during that time we took turns sharing our testimonies, or we reviewed a chapter in a book by Jeremy Rinne, titled **Church Elders:***

***How to Shepherd God's People Like Jesus.***

*Really great to hear the testimonies and very practical and helpful book .*

## Benevolence Fund

The Elders with the Pastors' help administer the Benevolence Fund and the Christmas Caring Tree. These funds are completely separate from our General Fund and are used to help with special needs in our congregational family and community. The requests and gifts are confidential. You can contact any of the elders if you or someone within the congregation has an extraordinary need that we might consider assisting as a church. Thank you for your generosity and praise God for this opportunity to bless people in need.

*We are looking forward to 2020 with a thankful and hopeful heart! Thank you to everyone in the congregation who serves God in and outside of our church doors. It is such a privilege be in ministry together! We have so many faithful people who use their giftedness to God's glory. Let's keep pressing on! - Bill Oakes, 2019 Elder Chair*

## Ministry Visits with Elders

We continue to have those serving in key roles within and outside the church come and share with the Elder Board so we can understand, pray for and support their efforts. Some of our visitors this past year included: Daniel Carpenter who chairs our Global Connections Team; Timmy Kue, who was serving as an intern with Pastor Albin in Youth Ministry; Jenny Hodgson and her ministry with Grief Share; Sharna Johnson, who coordinates our Nursery Services and Jim Hodgson reported on efforts to begin addressing Sex Trafficking problems in our region.

## 2019 Elder Board:

Bill Oakes - Chair  
Karl Salscheider - Vice Chair  
Randy McKain - Secretary  
Terry Smith  
Ron Bouchie  
Jerry Decker  
Drew Gauwitz  
Pastor Jerry Johnson  
Pastor Eric Nygren  
Pastor Albin Sterneman

## New Member Interviews

We feel privileged to meet with those interested in church membership. During those meetings we go over the EFC Statement of Faith and hear their testimony of how they came to faith in Christ and try to answer questions they may have about our church. We welcomed 5 new members into our congregation in 2019!

# Trustee Board

*The Trustees again want to thank the Congregation for their generous and consistent support of our Church and its ministries.*

In 2019 we did fall just short of our budgeted giving by about \$6,800. (\$665,885 required vs \$659,023 actually given to the General Fund). In the late summer of 2019, we were actually over \$30,000 behind but a strong final quarter helped close the gap. Had we not had a Sunday Service cancelled on the last Sunday of the year (due to hazardous travel – weather problems) we likely would have reached our budget goal.

The actual dollars spent for 2019 in the General Budget was \$656,135 and total income was \$666,876 (which includes building rent & interest income), leaving net income of plus \$10,740. In other words the Church did bring in more cash, than was spent.

The budget approved for 2020 by the Congregation in October does call for a 4.6% increase in giving. In 2019 the budget was not increased. In addition to increasing the general budget in the coming year, we have also merged the Global Partners budget.

The Global Partners budget is now 31 line items in our General budget. For 2020 these 31 line items for the Global Partners was not increased, and remains at the same level as 2019.

**- Chuck Nordquist, 2019 Trustee Chair**

## Trustee Board Updates

The Trustee Board for 2019 included Bob Munz, Duane Tader, Deb Williams, Gib Mouser, Todd Guntzel, Mike Fritz, Richard Anderson and Chuck Nordquist.

Mike and Richard are leaving the Trustee Board as they have completed 4 years of service. We want to thank them for their faithful service and contribution to our Church.

In 2020 we have two new Trustees joining us; Steve Miller and Dan Frost will be starting new two-year terms this month. We are thankful for their willingness to serve and appreciate young men with their talents stepping up. Mike Fritz and the audit committee completed their work in December and presented their report to the Trustees, Elders, and various staff.

We also want to thank Jerome Decker our EFC Treasurer, Kandi Paddock our Financial Secretary, and Ron Bodenheimer our Facility Supervisor for their dedication throughout the year. They are outstanding employees and will be continuing in their roles this year.

# Global Connection Team

## 2019 Ministry Highlights

- Enjoyed visits from a number of our GPs
- Sent several one time/special needs gifts to various GPs
- Hosted a fundraising meal for one of our GP families
- Boosted Barnabas groups with a special meeting, reminders and multiple sign-up opportunities
- Finished GP Flip Books
- Merged the GP Budget into the General Fund

*This year the GCT consisted of Justin Burpo, Christine Kangas, Sherry Schindelar, Pastor Eric Nygren, Evelyn Kue, and Daniel and Hannah Carpenter.*

*Toward the end of the year Evelyn and family moved, and we are grateful for her blessing the team with her skills and hard work. Justin Burpo has also just left us to finish his master's degree in Chicago.*

*We would love to have another body or two join us! A couple niches we are desiring to fill are a "techie", and decorator/designer.*

We were able to contribute to several short-term endeavors. No longer needing our support were Dale and Bobbie Fredrickson, and Jason and Spring Kane. We were pleased to begin supporting Stephen and Rylie Helweg, Jonathan Maus, Micah and Katie Carpenter, and Timothy and Evelyn Kue.

We have long had a place for short term trips in our church's giving, and of course we support many long-term global partners, but in 2017, we created a mid-term category. This was prompted by the happy situation of several young adults who have grown up in our church making two-year commitments to serve. This year two of those have decided to continue on in longer-term commitments and so we "graduated" them into our pool of "long-termers". It has been a pleasure to behold God moving and those we love moving forward with Him in faithful service.

Joyfully, - **Daniel Carpenter, GCT chairman**

## Global Partner Prayer Flip Books

Our old prayer flip books were in sad need of updating: looking at the pictures of our global partners families, you realize those kids are a lot taller now!

This past year we have been working to get new pictures/contact info etc., as well as include our new partners. Multiple people's hard work went into this, with special thanks to Evelyn Kue who put it all together in its final design. It ought to be in all of our hands within this next month, Lord willing!

We hope this will be a really useful tool for remembering our global partners in prayer.

## Global Partner Budget Merger

After talking about it for many years, the vote was cast this summer to merge the Global partner's budget into our church's general fund starting in 2020.

It is our desire that this be a meaningful and deliberate demonstration of our local body of believers choosing to support our global partners together.