



Annual

2023



Report





A Note from Pastor Shane

As I reflect and pray about what God may have for us in the coming year, I can't help but pause in overwhelming gratitude for all He has done and is presently doing among us. I've been at First Free for 14 of my 29 years in pastoral ministry. With all sincerity, I can tell you that this spiritual family is by far the healthiest and most beautiful community I have ever been a part of.

As we are all aware (because you hear me say it so often), there is much pain, conflict, and darkness happening in the culture. The Bible is clear that darkness will grow darker as we get closer to the return of Jesus. It also states that there will be more pain, deception, and betrayal in the church. I have witnessed more of that in the larger body of Christ in this past year than I've ever seen, even in a couple of major ministries that I love and have walked closely with. It's been painful and heart-breaking to see these beautiful and influential ministries fall prey to the onslaught of the enemy.

As I have been led by Jesus to give some of my time to help with the pain happening in these ministries, it has caused my love and affection for First Free Church to grow exponentially. I have never had more passion to protect what we share together. I know I speak for all the elders, pastors, and staff. We love all of you and are so grateful for what Jesus is doing among us.

We want you to know how committed we all are to protect our own hearts, lives, and all of you from the attacks of the enemy in this hour of history. Jesus is coming soon, and His reward is with Him. As the end draws nearer, the darkness in the culture and in the church will escalate. It is clear from the Scriptures that Jesus wants His glory, power, light, and love to escalate as well.

He simply needs people and places He can trust. We are committed to being one of those places. With all of my heart, I believe Jesus has much, much more for us to walk in together and experience. Let's commit to Him and to each other to fight to protect our own hearts and the beauty of what He is doing among us, and to continue to seek to create an atmosphere that moves His heart to manifest more of Himself, His beauty, His love, and His power among us.

Thank you for being the amazing, generous, loving, hungry people that you are! I have always loved being your pastor, but in this season of my life, I have never loved it more!

With much love and gratitude for all of you,

Shane Hofer

2023 in review

January

2-5: Awakening

We kicked the year off with a week of corporate worship, prayer and fasting.

13-15: Districts Youth Conference

124 students and 36 leaders attended this 3-day conference in Green Bay, WI.

February

4: No Regrets Men's Conference

158 men attended this conference.

March

3-4: IF: Gathering Women's Conference

152 women attended this conference.

April

7: Good Friday Service

955 people attended and 689 households tuned in live online.

8-9: Easter Services

3,372 people attended over 3 services and 2,103 households tuned in live online.

14-15: Focus Conference

244 people attended day 1 and 215 people attended day 2.

28: Worship Night + Baptism Event

816 people attended and 115 people were baptized.

May

24: Member Celebration Dinner

325 members attended this dinner celebrating the past year of ministry at First Free.

August

19: Michael Jr.'s Funny How Marriage Works

1,023 people attended this marriage/comedy event.

27: Family Movie Night/Backpack Bash

450 people attended and 225 kids received backpacks full of school supplies.

September

29: Awakening the Bride

Pastor Shane kicked off his series in Song of Songs, with 732 in attendance and 772 tuning in live online.

October

19-21: Remnant Conference

This 3-day, 5-session conference on healing and deliverance drew an average of 418 people per session.

19-21: Worship Night + Baptism Event

652 people attended and 50 people were baptized.

November

11: Surprised by God with Jack Deere

270 people attended this conference on having a friendship with God.

December

23-24: Christmas Eve Services

3,173 people attended over 3 services and 1,655 households tuned in live online.



Weekend Services

Average attendance

2,003

2022: 1,555 2021: 1,362

Livestream views

71,491

2022: 62,689 2021: 63,268

Visitors followed up with

304

Average livestream views per weekend

1,430



Special Services

Easter attendance

3,372 2022: 2,541
2021: 1,655

Christmas Eve attendance

3,173 2022: 2,732
2021: 1,932



Online

Website & App

220,221 website visits 1,810 new app downloads
39,812 media views 10,922 total app downloads

YouTube

115,855 media views 764 new subscribers
51,008 hours watched 4,380 total subscribers

Facebook

375 new page likes 600 new followers
7,128 total page likes 8,043 total followers

Instagram

5,279 new followers
7,938 total followers

Emily's Story

I was raised in a Christian home and considered myself to have a strong faith in Jesus. What appeared to be a picture perfect life on social media, held 5 years of the worst pain, heartache and emotional trauma I've ever known. Watching my dad and father in law's health decline due to terminal illnesses, ultimately resulting in the end of their earthly life, being diagnosed with cancer myself, an immensely neglected marriage, and the incredible challenges of raising four children left me feeling incredibly empty and emotionally exhausted. Looking back, I can say without hesitation that the only reason I am here today is Jesus. On my lowest, most hopeless moments, when I didn't have the strength or the will to take another step, I called out to God for help. Every time, He gave me enough to get through. I know that if I hadn't ever reached those lowest points in my life, I wouldn't appreciate the fragility of health, and that every day on this earth is truly a gift from God. I wouldn't realize that although I love my four children more than life itself, God loves them more and can protect them far better than I. I wouldn't know the deep, loving marriage my husband and I have—full of forgiveness and serving each other. I wouldn't trust God's abundant provision over my best-laid plans. The last 5 years have held the most difficult, painful experiences of my life, yet, I've never known and seen Jesus more clearly in every-day moments. He is so good and loves me so well. On my darkest days, in my weakest moments, it is well with my soul. I'm grateful and humbled for each day on this earth. My type-A planning personality has witnessed the truth of not knowing what tomorrow holds. But I know it's in His hands. My family finding First Free as our church home about five years ago has been such a blessing. The music, messages and people are such beautiful evidence of God's love.



Baptisms

166

People baptized



Worship

91 active worship volunteers
486 average Worship Night attendees
72k total First Free Music streams

Prayer

149 hours devoted to Prayer Room
45 active prayer volunteers
314 online prayer requests

Care

100 active care volunteers
160 Care Center appointments
264 Pastoral Care appointments

First Free Kids & Awana



Average weekend attendance

351 kids

2022: **286** 2021: **245**

77 active kids
volunteers

43 kids chose to follow christ
during a service or Awana

22 kids were
dedicated

381 2022: **278**
 2021: **245**

kids signed up for Awana

156

Awana volunteers

First Free Youth



Average Wednesday night youth group attendance:

178

2022: **121** 2021: **94**

42

active youth group volunteers

Districts 2023:

124 students

36 leaders

Alpha

267 people went through
the Alpha Course

Spring 2023: **131**

Fall 2023: **136**

2022: **232** 2021: **107**

Dawn's Story

A co-worker introduced me to Alpha. Despite missing the first two weeks, my husband Casey and I joined out of curiosity. Casey was already working on his faith, reading the bible daily and attending church regularly. I grew up attending church every Sunday, singing in the choir and had daily bible class as part of the curriculum, but I hated going to church and I honestly don't remember much from the bible classes. Although they gave me a firm foundation and some discipline, it was mostly built on fear and being obedient to my parents. As soon as I started Alpha, however, I immediately started to change the way I thought about God, life, faith and death. This class was exactly what I needed.

My dad was diagnosed with a brain tumor in September 2021, which prompted soul-searching conversations about his relationship with God. He was a Vietnam War Veteran, and his experiences over there, and the things that he had done, left him feeling like he was unforgivable. In his final days in the hospital, I fervently prayed for his peace and forgiveness, wrestling with the uncertainty of his salvation. His passing on February 3, 2022, left me devastated, triggering a period of excessive drinking, which continued on into my time at Alpha.

The turning point came during Holy Spirit night at Alpha. There was a video session focusing on inviting the Holy Spirit into our lives. I prayed to let the Holy Spirit in. I begged for forgiveness and that the Holy Spirit would fill me with His presence. I needed rest. I needed peace. What I didn't know was that I needed love. Suddenly, my body began to feel tingly. My breathing became more rapid and I felt the sensation of warm caramel pouring over me. I was bursting at the seams with love and joy. Later that night, when I was back home, I heard the

rumbling of a train, which I had never heard before in the 10 years I lived in my home. Its horn sounded four times which triggered a childhood memory with my dad, and reassured me of his presence in heaven. This was a gift from the Holy Spirit, and I simply closed my eyes and thanked Him for the sign of my dad's salvation.

I feel so incredibly blessed to have had this experience with the Holy Spirit. It has completely changed my life. I no longer feel an urge to drink, I am journaling often, and I am excited to attend church every Sunday! I am excited to share the word of God with others and with my husband. I no longer feel tortured by dad's passing, and I am not afraid of death. Thank you for opening up the church to have programs like Alpha, and for making vulnerability okay.



College Community

Average attendance: **55**

First Free Groups

54 groups **1,056** group members

Hearing the Voice of God

180 attendees

Marriage Course

66 couples attended

Membership

65 new members **577** total members

Prayer Course

122 attendees

Prime Timers 55+

Average attendance: **86**

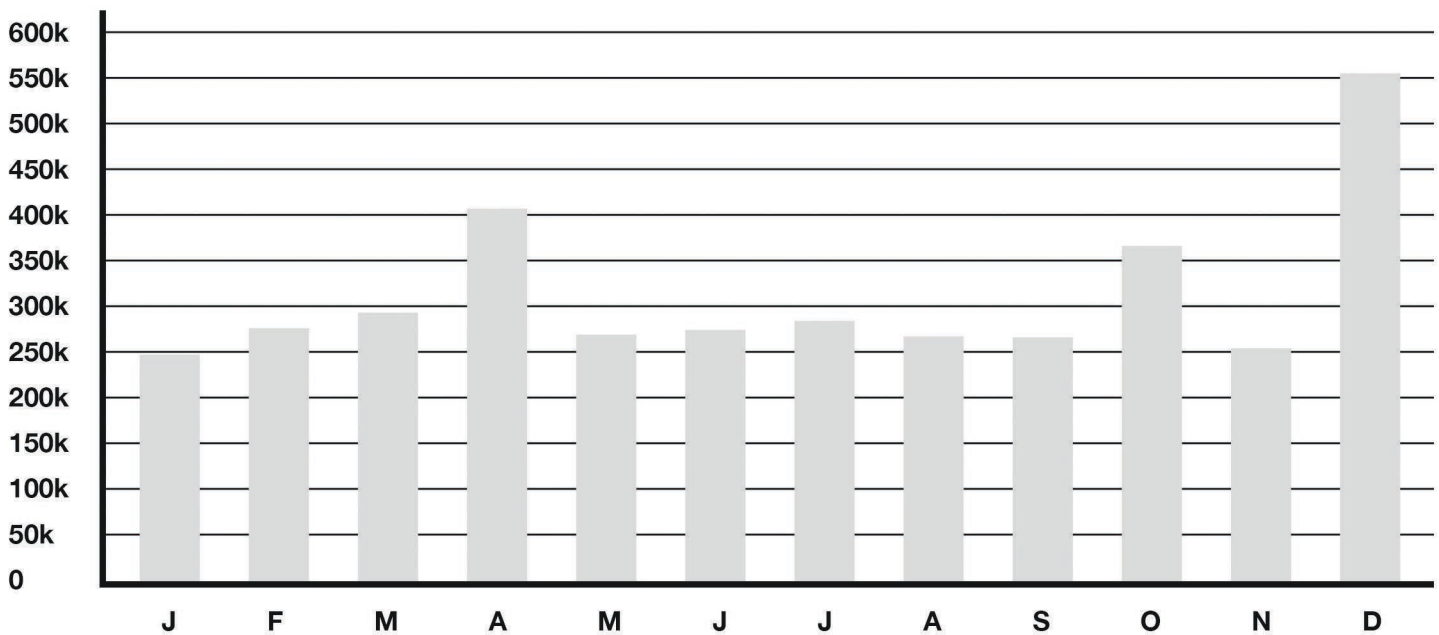
Financials

General Fund giving in 2023

\$3,770,014

1,109 contributors **139** first-time givers

Monthly breakdown



Annual Growth

2023: **\$3,770,014**
9.5% increase from prior year

2022: **\$3,441,791**
7.3% increase from prior year

2021: **\$3,207,471**
10.8% increase from prior year

Benevolence

Benevolence Fund giving in 2023

\$250,960

\$121,572

donated to community families

263

families served
through benevolence

\$25,385

supported our food pantry

465

families served through
our food pantry

\$92,944

donated to local charities

15

local charities served

\$20k

donated to Turkey & Syria
for earthquake relief

\$15k

donated to Israel

\$5k

donated to Ukraine

Total disbursed from Benevolence fund in 2023

\$279,903

First Free Store

1,690 Items sold in the First Free Store

\$4,282 in profits donated to Local Outreach,
Global Missions and Anti-Human Trafficking

Global Missions

\$141,182

raised in December for
our mission in Laos

40 people went on
a mission trip
to Panama

10 people went on
a mission trip
to Laos



