

December 2, 2009

Dear First Free Family,

Merry Christmas from the staff at First Free! As I have been digging into Isaiah and his promising prophecy of the coming of Messiah, I have been caught up once again in the anticipation of Christmas. I pray that during this season, you will praise and worship Jesus, God's gift, as your peace, salvation, and hope.

As a church we also want to join together in celebrating what God is doing through us for the building of His kingdom. Here are some highlights:

- Our two worship services have remained strong, with our average attendance at around 500. We have seen many new faces this fall and it is a reminder for us to continue reaching out to those sitting around us who we have never met before.
- On the first Sunday of October we celebrated the 125th anniversary of First Free. It was a powerful worship service both in the morning and in the afternoon – remembering God's faithfulness to us and then looking ahead. What might God have in store for us? We talked about our dream of having 800 people worshipping with us and about planting a church. We talked about continuing to be a biblically authentic church. And the challenge was, "Are you in?"
- We have added 24 new members in 2009.
- God continues to change lives. We have lit the candle on the organ in celebration when someone receives Christ as their Savior and Lord. We have heard stories of what God is doing as people are changed, as marriages are strengthened, as destructive habits are exchanged for healthy ones, and as people grow to become more like Christ.
- God is doing some amazing work in the lives of our Jr. and Sr. High students. Zion Student Ministry reaches about 80 students a week. They are responding to His call to intentionally love each other and love Christ.
- Our Creekside Friends ministry (children) continues to grow. The nursery and preschool age classrooms are bursting at the seams. We are averaging over 100 children on Sunday mornings and 80 children on Wednesday nights.

This time of year, with its annual holidays – Thanksgiving and Christmas – sharpens our awareness of God's amazing grace. In a world of economic instability, global need, and spiritual darkness, we at First Free are praising the Giver of every good gift for so faithfully providing the funds which enable us to continue to make fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. Please accept our prayerful gratitude, and please pray about any ongoing support which God may lay on your heart. Currently our local ministries budget is behind by about \$37,000 and our Outreach budget is behind by about \$11,000.

We are confident that December will be a strong giving month with the year-end gifts. What a blessing it is to be a strong light for Christ in South Minneapolis.

Yours and His,

Pastor Joel

P.S. Why not begin right now to think and pray about who you could invite to our 4:00 PM Christmas Eve service?