

First Free Church
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Firstword

First Evangelical Free Church

A Church Family Publication

December 2010

“THE STORY THAT CHANGES LIVES”

Lee Strobel, a former atheist and reporter for the Chicago Tribune, tells a story about a simple but profound Christmas lesson he received from a poverty-racked family on the west side of Chicago.

“As I sat at my desk (on Christmas Eve) with little to do, my mind kept wandering back to a family I had encountered a month earlier while I was working on a series of articles about Chicago’s neediest people.

The Delgados - 60-year-old Perfecta and her granddaughters, Lydia and Jenny - had been burned out of their roach-infested tenement and were now living in a tiny two-room apartment. As I walked in, I couldn’t believe how empty it was. There was no furniture, no rugs, nothing on the walls - only a small kitchen table and one handful of rice. That’s it. They were virtually devoid of possessions.

But despite their poverty and the painful arthritis that kept Perfecta from working, she still talked confidently about her faith in Jesus. She was convinced he had not abandoned them. I never sensed despair or self-pity in her home. Instead, there was a gentle feeling of hope and peace.

Now as I sat at my desk on Christmas Eve, I continued to wrestle with the irony of the situation: here was a family that had nothing but faith and yet seemed happy, while I had everything I needed materially but lacked faith - and inside I felt as empty and barren as their apartment.

I decided to drive over to West Homer Street and see how the Delgados were doing.

When Jenny opened the door, I couldn’t believe my eyes. *Tribune* readers had responded to my article by showering the Delgados with a treasure trove of gifts

- roomfuls of furniture, appliances, and rugs; a lavish Christmas tree with piles of wrapped presents underneath; carton upon bulging carton of food; and a dazzling selection of clothing, including dozens of warm winter coats, scarves, and gloves. On top of that, they donated thousands of dollars in cash.

But as surprised as I was by this outpouring, I

was even more astonished by what my visit was interrupting. Perfecta and her granddaughters were getting ready to give away much of their newfound wealth. When I asked Perfecta why, she replied in halting English: ‘Our neighbors are still in need. We cannot have plenty while they have nothing. This is what Jesus would want us to do.’

That blew me away! She continued . . . gesturing toward the largess, ‘We did nothing to deserve this - it’s a gift from God. But,’ she added ‘it is not his greatest gift. No, we celebrate that tomorrow. That is Jesus.’

To her, this child in the manger was the undeserved gift that meant everything - more than material possessions, more than comfort, more than security.

They had peace despite poverty, while I had anxiety despite plenty; they knew the joy of generosity,

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“To her, this child in the manger was the undeserved gift that meant everything - more than material possessions, more than comfort, more than security.”

Advent Conspiracy Serving Initiatives

The story of Christ’s birth is a story of promise, courage, hope, and a revolutionary love. So, what happened? What was once a time to celebrate the birth of a savior has somehow turned into a season of stress, traffic jams, and shopping lists. Is this what we really want out of Christmas? What if Christmas became a world-changing event again?

This Christmas during our Advent Conspiracy we want to take Christmas back - back to its real meaning. And so we are challenging you, your family, your small group, and your ABF to participate by giving time. Giving ministry. Serving those who are less fortunate.

We have put together several Advent Conspiracy Serving Initiatives for this Christmas season. Find one that fits you. If you don’t find one on our list, find another in the city at www.doinggoodtogether.org. Don’t let Christ get lost in Christmas. Worship fully. Spend less. Give more (time). Love all (through serving).

You could...

- Bake cookies for the Tubman Center - During the holidays they like to provide home baked treats for their clients. Bring a dozen cookies, muffins, some snack mix, or other holiday goodies to church on Dec. 12. Also needed are plates, napkins, cups, and apple cider. We would like 4-6 volunteers to help pack the cookies on Sunday afternoon, and 1-2 people to help with delivery on Monday.
- Package food at Feed My Starving Children (36 spots available, Dec. 14, 6-7:30 PM)
- Make Lunches for Simpson Housing (Dec. 4, 1-4 PM, at FEFC)
- Gift Tree for FEFC Nursery & Preschool
- Make Sandwiches for Simpson Housing (Dec. 15, 6:30-8:30 PM, at FEFC)

Sign up for all events at the Welcome Desk!

Worship Services  first evangelical free

Five Stories THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

WISDOM COURAGE HOPE LOVE WONDER

November 28 thru Christmas Eve

We exist to
BRING people
into a relationship
with Jesus

CONNECT them
to God's family

MATURE them
in their faith

EQUIP them
for ministry

so that God's name
is EXALTED

-Continued from pg.1

while I only knew the loneliness of ambition; they looked heavenward for hope, while I only looked out for myself; they experienced the wonder of the spiritual, while I was shackled to the shallowness of the material - and something made me long for what they had.

Or, more accurately, for the One they knew.”

Over several years, Strobel with the questions of a reporter investigated the historical evidence for Christianity. And in the end, came to the conclusion that the baby in the manger really was the unique Son of God.

This Christmas, I want to challenge you to allow the story which still changes lives to change your life. And then invite a friend to hear the story once again at one of our Christmas services. -Pastor Joel



Youth NYE Bash!

6:00PM-12:30AM

\$20



Grand Slam, Skateville,
Student Testimonies,
Large Group Worship Experience,
Tons of fun!!
Bring your Friends!!



Ladies Christmas Tea

Dec. 11, 9:30-11AM

For all ladies of the church.

Invite your Friends & Neighbors!

Meet Our Members

- Russ Anteronen

Q: How long have you been attending First Free? Are you involved in any ABFs or Small Groups at First Free? Which ones?

A: I have been attending First Free since I was about 5 years old. Our next door neighbor, Mrs. Fisher suggested I try it out. I liked it, and here I am still attending in my 60s. That puts me in the Agape ABF where we now discuss aging along with myriads of other biblical and social concern topics. It really is amazing the different incomes and social classes in our class—yet we seem to get along and learn from each other and God's Word.



Q: What is one of your favorite Christmas traditions?

A: Nowadays, since I was an only child and both of my parents have passed on, I just enjoy spending time with friends on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. We eat holiday comfort food, play table games, and enjoy fellowship together. Thankfully, relatives on my father's side invite me for Thanksgiving day and Christmas get-togethers where I most enjoy singing Christmas carols. When I was a child, I enjoyed reading the story of Christ's birth and thinking about how my father was a carpenter, just like Joseph.

Q: What was your favorite Christmas gift you received as a child?

A: One of my favorite gifts was a sled which I used to go down the big hill by Minnehaha Creek and Cedar Ave. I even flew into the creek a few times!

There surely has been a lot of change, both in the world and in our church, over these many years. The foundation of God's Word and the abundant life we have in Jesus Christ is a great comfort and hope for today and the approaching holidays.

Is Something Missing this Christmas?

~ Eric Twietmeyer

Most of us scramble to rearrange our lives around family, friends, food and festivities over the holidays. Our jaunt through moments of merriment will with hopeful hearts leave us content and satisfied at end of season. Grateful. Gracious. Gifted. Without Tums or antacids to ward of anxiety. We hope.

But what if we missed something? Something important? Were we so rushed that we missed the plot?

I don't want to miss the plot. I want to be present for each moment, each person. Especially the Person of greatest importance. As we plan our services at the church, we celebrate the coming of Christ every week during Advent. I couldn't be more excited about what God is going to do in our times of corporate worship. The culmination of our anticipation comes on Christmas Eve. It's not because that is the day my wife is supposed to birth our firstborn, though that will be momentous. Rather, because the birth of One far greater will be remembered, His life proclaimed, His offer of eternal redemption explained, and the opportunity given to respond to Him in worship.

As our musicians, actors and technicians prepare to tell The Story, whom can you bring along that might be missing something this Christmas? Together we will experience classic art, drama, and both traditional and modern renditions of Christmas carols. We've added an extra service at 3 PM, so more people can make it. Come, pray, and worship. Or you might be missing Something.

Alpha Meets for 10 Weeks

Starting Jan. 20

6-8:30 PM @ FEFC

Do you have a neighbor, a co-worker, a family member who is asking questions about the Christian faith? Who needs to know the Lord? "Alpha" is a practical introduction to the Christian faith. It includes a series of talks and small group discussions where all questions are welcomed. Alpha starts January 20th and will meet on Thursday evenings for 10 weeks (an evening meal and childcare are provided).

Start praying - WHOM CAN YOU INVITE?

Questions? Scott Bookhout at (612) 721-6144.



Alpha



Christmas Eve Services

3 & 4:30 PM

(Nursery Child Care Available)



Debt Reduction Workshop

Get your finances ready for 2011!

Ever wonder how much you can afford to spend on housing, auto and food? At this workshop you will determine what you are actually spending and learn at what level you should be based on your income. (Participants will work at separate tables and all information will remain confidential.)

Thursday, December 16th

Room 108

6:45 PM

Please contact Joel Burns at

rexsox@usfamily.net or

612-724-6510.

Spouses are encouraged to attend together. Please RSVP if you plan on attending and if you need childcare.

January Workshop: Developing your debt reduction strategy.



MEN'S BREAKFAST

SAT., DECEMBER 4
8:30 AM