



## **First Free Church – Elder Bios**

### **October 2021**

Dear First Free Church Family,

On Sunday, October 24th, we will have our Fall Ministry Community Meeting. One of our agenda items for the meeting will be to reaffirm elders and vote on officers.

Below, we've listed the people who have been serving as your elders for the last year, along with short biographies of each. As Scripture directs, we ask you to pray over them and commit them to the Lord regularly. It is noted by each name which individuals will be on the ballot at the Ministry Community Meeting in October 2021 to be reaffirmed as an elder for another term.

Please contact the elder team if you have any questions: [elders@firstfree.com](mailto:elders@firstfree.com).

In Christ,  
Your Elders

**Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.**

- Acts 14:23

**Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.**

- Acts 20:28

**Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.**

- 1 Timothy 3:1

## **CURRENT ELDERS**

### **Jeff Cebulski**

**Will be on the ballot as Secretary; elder since January 2021**

After being introduced to Jesus via a Catholic upbringing, I made a personal commitment to Christ in 1970 after reading the Gospel of John and 1 Corinthians. Seeking to reverse a secular direction, I worked for a new Christian radio station in northern Wisconsin. I experienced “believer’s Baptism” shortly after we arrived. During that time, I used my speech skills both on and off the air, speaking at churches on behalf of the station. Teaching emerged as my main gift during my formative years, and I sought to apply it at the church and vocational levels. One small Baptist church asked me to serve as an interim pastor, which I did for a while, until my off-air education for a teaching license ended. After five years in public secondary ed., I resigned my position and applied to serve once again as an interim pastor at another church. This position lasted longer, nearly three-and-a-half years. During this time, I applied to teach English at a new Christian High School, where I served for eight years before returning to the local public school. After my pastorate was over, I eventually was voted onto the Elder Board at the same church, where I served for a few more years.

My vocational direction changed when I went to a university in Georgia to finish a master’s degree, and in 2004 I was hired to teach in the university system there. At the time, two of our four children were attending First Free; when Barb and I visited, we got to know this church under Pastor Bill and were excited to become part of this congregation when we moved back. As someone who has moved up the ranks during our six years here, I am concerned

about regaining the momentum this church had in the past. I have been able to lead two online bible studies and would like more opportunities to address current issues in light of what we, through further studies, learn about the Scriptures and their contexts.

### **Rachel Einfeldt**

**Will be on the ballot; elder since 2018**

As the daughter of missionaries, I learned about God’s love and grace as a young child growing up in the jungle of the Democratic Republic of Congo (then called Zaire). By age 12, I had made my faith my own and fully surrendered my life to Jesus, trusting Him as my Lord. He has been so faithful to guide me, protect me, and correct me as His disciple throughout my life. I moved to Chicago in 2008 and began attending First Free in January 2009 with my husband, Ryan. We have been married for 14 years and have two kids. During this next year of service as an elder, I will take on the unofficial role of “Apprentice Chair,” working closely with Steve Lapse to support him and learn more about leadership. John 14:27 has been a great encouragement to me lately. In it, Jesus says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” I pray that this peace of God, which goes beyond our human understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus as we weather the storms and rainbows that come our way this next year.

Previously served as a provisional board member (in 2018)

## **Steve Lepse**

**Will be on the ballot as Chair; elder since 2018**

I grew up in a Christian home with two very godly parents and became a Christian at age five. There was never a time where I did not identify myself as a Christian and try to follow Him (although there were a number of luke-warm periods in my life). I started attending First Free in the fall of 1980, following my graduation from Trinity University in Deerfield. Over the years I have served in numerous ministry positions, including a long stint on the elder board that ended around 2003. I am a father of three and a grandfather of two (happy to show you pictures at any time:). I have been married to Kim Atwood Lepse for 5 1/2 years. For the last two years, I have been working as a social worker for Unity Hospice, providing support to individuals in the last weeks of their earthly life as well as supporting their family members.

In the past ten years I've come to realize that my namesake (Stephen in Acts 6 & 7) is very providential. I've come to see that part of the mission God has given me is to serve those who have been ignored by the world and by the church, both meeting their needs and pointing them to Jesus. I also see my role as helping the church better see those that have been ignored so that they can serve them and bring them to Christ. One of my favorite verses is John 1:16: "From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another." I intentionally try to practice a daily awareness and recognition of God's blessings which include prayers of thankfulness.

*Previously served as provisional board member (in 2018) and as an elder prior to 2003*

## **Del Shimandle, Interim Pastor**

**Elder for the duration of his role as Interim Pastor**

I am a history nerd who likes to learn, but was never the best student in the classroom. Home is Chicago, but I have enjoyed roaming the globe. I collect musical instruments, and play a little something on each. I am a dancing fool, and I miss having a motorcycle. I love people, and look forward to getting to know you better. I have been part of First Free Church since 1992. I met and married Ruth here, and have raised my two sons here. My grandmother told me I could do anything, but I shouldn't try to do everything. So, my one thing is doing all things as unto my Lord, Jesus. I know whom I have believed (a little bit, I mean), I stand on the Word of God (it is trustworthy, even if my vision is not perfectly clear), and I am looking forward to His return (may I be found faithful)!

## **James Snyder**

**Will be on the ballot; elder since April 2019**

I grew up in the church, and turned to Jesus as a young child. I have been attending First Free since 2007, becoming a member soon after, and met my wife Janice Nuuhiwa at the Artist Bible Study small group hosted by Jeff Dangel and Dana Chen. We adopted our son Simon from China 8 years ago. I have previously served on the Global Outreach Team and am still serving on the Facilities Team (previously the deacon). I look forward to continuing to serve First Free with the Elder Board.

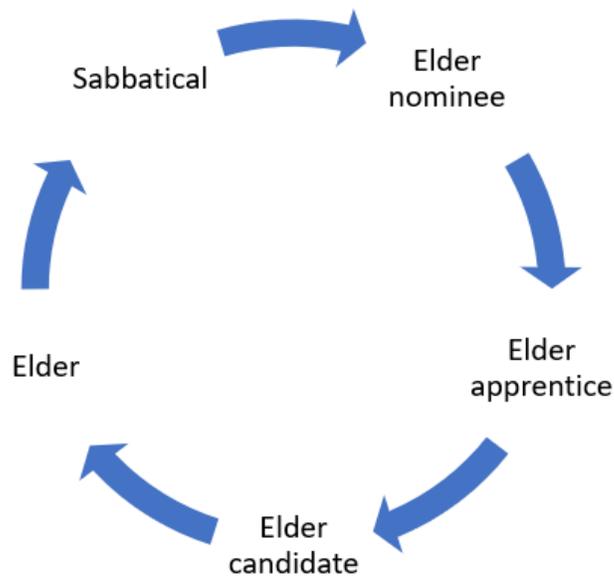
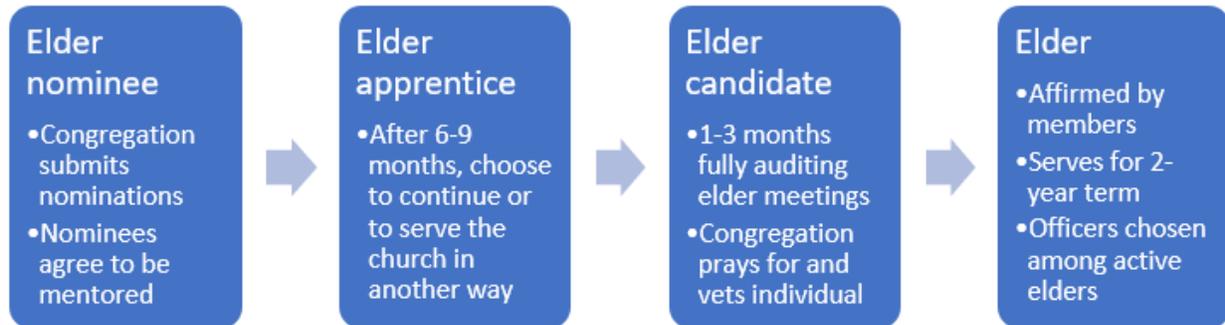
## **Tim Wilkin**

### **Not on the ballot--elder sabbatical; elder from October 2018 to 2021**

I consider it a great honor and one of the privileges of my life to serve you, our church over the past three years - during a historic time - in this way. I am sensing the need to step back and catch my breath a bit. My family and I are overwhelmed though, with gratitude for the prayers of the church during this tenure, and it's also been a fertile time for me spiritually. I will miss working with this great group of servants, who pray for you regularly, care deeply about the church body and desperately want to see it thrive and grow in the knowledge of God and of the Word. I'll still be involved in a number of areas: Facilities Team, Nursery(!), Welcome Team and the Racial Reconciliation cohort study, so I'm not going

away. I'll also be available to the Board for miscellaneous chores to hopefully lighten their burden in some small way. Please continue to lift the Board up in your prayers - it's a heavy mantle to carry during "normal" times, let alone the challenging times that we're going through now. I also feel somewhat guilty: if anyone should be stepping down temporarily to catch their breath it should be Steve Lapse and Rachel Einfeldt, who are going to continue on serving the church (now approaching their fourth year!) - so please lift them, their families and their work up in your prayers especially; that they would be rejuvenated and their burdens be made light.

## ELDER NOMINATION AND MENTORING PROCESS



A new nomination period will be opening in November 2021, during which everyone from the congregation is invited to nominate any member who meets the qualifications to serve as an elder in the future. Nominees who agree to become elder apprentices will submit to a 6-9 month mentoring process before they decide whether or not to move forward as elder candidates. More information about this will be shared at the Fall Ministry Community Meeting and during the month of November.

All qualifications and responsibilities for leaders in the church can be found in the bylaws:

- See Article VI for Elder Board
- See Article VIII for Officers
- See Article X for General Leadership Expectations, include section on deacons