



## First Free Church - Elder Bios

Dear First Free Church Family,

On Sunday, October 1st, 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 are up for nomination as your elders for the upcoming year, along with short biographies of each. As Scripture directs, we ask you to pray over them and commit them to the Lord regularly.

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

## **Jeff Cebulski**

**Will be on the ballot as Secretary until November 2023; will be on a sabbatical from the elder board from December 2023 until May 2024. 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.

It was during a church-sponsored mission trip to help hurricane victims in Houston that the Lord gave me another chance at life, as

I suffered a heart attack in the midst of our group of workers. This moment seemed to ratify our choice to be at First Free. While we were disappointed with the depletion of many congregants in the years following our membership commitment, the Lord never opened the door out of fellowship.

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 a couple of Sunday morning studies and would like more opportunities to teach about the Scriptures and their contexts. Barb and I are happy to be facilitators of a Colossians Way group and are excited about how the church is trending under Pastor Matt's leadership.

## **Stephen Lapse**

**Will be on the ballot as Chair; elder since 2018. Previously served as provisional board member (in 2018) and as an elder prior to 2003**

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. 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 Lapse for 7 years. For the last 4 years, I have been working as a social worker for Unity Hospice, providing support to individuals in the last weeks/months of their earthly life, as well as supporting their family members.

In my latter 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. I also see my role as helping the church better identify and serve those that have been ignored, both serving them and pointing 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.

## Jonathan Lim

**Will be on the ballot as elder. Jonathan has been on the elder board for the past year and over the years has served in a variety of capacities at First Free.**

I was born into a loving, God-fearing home and came to know the Lord as early as my mind can remember. Although as an adolescent I never doubted God's presence within my family and church, it wasn't until college that I truly understood that my bent heart could only be mended through full surrender to Jesus' will. That reformation of soul and spark of renewed life led me to serve other students on that same journey through campus ministry with Cru at the University of Illinois. It was also at that time that I met Erin, a young and vibrant Christ-follower, who would become my inseparable partner in life and ministry to this day.

Erin and I have adopted First Free as our spiritual home since 2005 and have raised our two children, Ethan and Maisey, within these walls. Over the years we have served in a variety of capacities with many individuals in our church, some who have been with FF for years and others we are fortunate to meet recently. I am currently serving with our vibrant youth program while Erin disciples our younger children in CYFM.

Although my journey of obedience and faith has ebbed and flowed throughout seasons of circumstance, I would like to think that the overall trajectory in life is

holiness. In all seasons, either momentous or mundane, my aspirational "north star" shines brightly ahead:

*"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer." (Psalm 19:14).*

## Dan Addington

**Dan is a new elder candidate and has served in a variety of roles at church, including serving as a long-time member of the worship team.**

I was born in Denver CO and grew up out west, living in various towns in Colorado, Montana, and Alaska. My parents were avid camping and fishing fans, and in the summer I spent as much time in tents, campers, and jeeps as I did in our home. Before I ever was confronted by the Gospel, God had expressed his nature powerfully to me and my family through the beauty and power of his creation.

When I was in 3rd grade, my dad was carpooling with a Christian to work, and over the course of that year, he gave his life to Christ, followed quickly by my mom. We started going to church as a family for the first time, and I was fascinated. Word is I was a frustrating presence for my Sunday school teachers, always asking question after question in class. Finally, my teacher arranged a meeting with the pastor where I could ask him all the questions. That pastor spent time with me after church at the alter talking to me about Jesus, and fielding every question with patience and insight. By the time that year was over, I told him I wanted to be

a Christian and asked him if I could be baptized.

From that day forward, whether I followed willingly or strayed willfully, God faithfully kept me in his embrace, demonstrating unwavering love and faithfulness. He filled my spirit with excitement, joy and direction, and has inspired me to use whatever abilities or opportunities he has sent my way to worship him, investigate him, and proclaim him.

I attended Northwestern College in Orange City Iowa, a Christian college in the Dutch reformed tradition. At NWC, I learned about the importance of God's redemptive work by responding to God's call to share the gospel, care for creation, and serve Christ in everyone. This was a powerful 4 years that deeply influenced my theological thinking, and placed me on a trajectory of expressing my faith through the creative arts.

During this time, God gave me the opportunity to establish and lead the chapel theater ministry, leading to many trips across the country and working with many churches. After a BA in art and theater, an MA in art and MFA in painting, I moved to Chicago to pursue a life in the arts.

I met my wife Steph in a gallery, and from the moment she shared that she was a believer, I was fascinated and captivated. She is an example to me of how to live and serve others and has been an unending source of inspiration. We were married by her father, a pastor, and we have a son named Aedric. Steph and I saw him baptized by pastor

Bill here at First Free. He was the same age I was when I accepted Christ and was baptized. There's not much that will ever rival that day here at First Free. It is thrilling to see his spiritual life take shape and grow within this church. I worship a God that is the Source of all creativity. The Ultimate Maker. Every song I've sung, every painting I've made has been a link in the chain that is my testimony, and every time I strum a chord or lift a brush or make a mark, it is an expression of my gratefulness to God and my desire to participate in his redemptive work on earth and in culture. It is my goal and honor to do that in the midst of this beautiful congregation that we have come to love so much.

*"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." (1 Peter 4:10)*

*"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:17)*

## **Matt Tinken Senior Pastor**

**By virtue of his being affirmed as senior pastor in March of 2022, Matt is designated (via our by-laws) as a member of the elder board.**

## **James Snyder**

**Taking a sabbatical from the elder board until January 2024. At the winter 2024 MCM we will vote to affirm James as both elder and elder secretary**