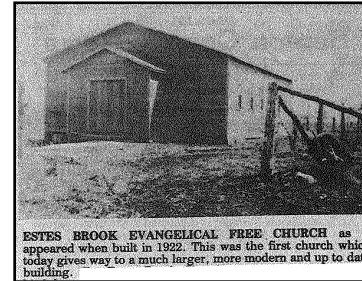


The History of Estes Brook Evangelical Free Church

1922-2022



Original Building
c. 1922

"Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."
(Lamentations 3:22-23)



Current Building

Celebrating 100 years of God's faithfulness
at Estes Brook

A quote from Pastor Dan Werthman that I feel is still relevant today is "We need to be people of VISION and we need REVIVAL in our nation, church, and even in our hearts 'Go and make disciples.' Proverbs 29:18 'Where there is no vision, the people perish.' Without vision, churches become stagnant and slowly die. We need to develop a vision for the future."

Purpose Statement (adopted 1992)

The purpose of the Estes Brook EFC is to glorify God by making disciples of Jesus Christ. We will achieve our purpose by:

Exaltation – We seek to continually worship God, both in our daily lives and as the gathered body of believers in Jesus Christ.

Edification – We seek to assist each other in the progress of Christian growth through the teaching of the Bible.

Evangelism – We seek to tell others how to have a changed life through salvation in Jesus Christ.

The Estes Brook Evangelical Free Church began back in 1922 when a group of Christians moved from Rockford, IL to live in the Estes Brook area. But there evidently another organized work that preceded this one as the minutes say that “the old board shall continue till the next meeting and the treasury (\$17.00) shall be given to the new work.” In 1921, they began meeting in the Clarence Johnson home, and thus, the church in Estes Brook was born. The group of believers felt the need for a place of worship and began making plans for a church building. Others soon joined them and in 1922 they built the church on land donated by Clarence Johnson, where the present building stands today. Rev. Oscar Alberts was called to be the pastor. The first name of the congregation noted in the minutes was the “Free Congregation of Estes Brook”. In 1923 the church was organized under the name of the “Swedish Free Elim Church of Estes Brook”. Because it was of temporary construction, it was nicknamed the “Estes Brook Tabernacle”. In 1940 it was decided to drop the word “Swedish” from the church’s name. In 1942 it was decided to change the name to “Estes Brook Tabernacle”, and later the name was officially changed to the “Estes Brook Evangelical Free Church”.

It is difficult to visualize the first crude building with barn windows and sawdust floor. With the coming of winter, a very poor iron stove was acquired. People emerging from the church on cold winter days had very cold feet and red tearful eyes from the smoke coming through the cracks in the stove. However, their hearts were warmed by God’s Word and full of thankfulness for a place to worship with other believers. The early church was illuminated with gas lights. It was quite a procedure

From Dan Werthman

Estes Brook Evangelical Free Church will always have a very special place in my heart. While I was only there for about two years, I was loved and cared for by the Estes Brook congregation in ways that I have never experienced from any other church I’ve been part of since that time.

Estes Brook took a real 'chance' on me when they called me in 1988. I was newly married and just graduated from seminary. Both my wife Cindy and I were young in our faith, young in life maturity, and without any real ministry experience up to that point. In the two years I was there the people of Estes Brook lovingly taught me about pastoral visitation and care, leading prayer, teaching Sunday School, and how to walk with people through tragedy and loss. You were so gracious to us and so forgiving of our inexperience and immaturity. You welcomed us into their homes and into your lives. I have wonderful memories the hospitality and fellowship we enjoyed both at the church and in many of your homes. You modeled for me trusting faith expressed in loving others.

I've always regretted that my decision to leave and the way I probably expressed it at the time caused misunderstanding and even hurt among you. I left because of nothing the church did or failed to do. I left because, in my immaturity, I was not ready to settle down and be faithful for the long haul. I left because I was thought I was missing something the world had to offer. God has providentially used my decision to go to law school and become a lawyer, but He definitely had to lead me out into the 'wilderness' to humble me so that He could begin to teach me how to be a faithful servant. Only after a long period of that humbling did He then draw me back into pastoral ministry. And my experience in the churches I've pastored since then has always made me appreciate Estes Brook how special Estes Brook was.

For those of you who may not be aware, I did become an attorney and served for a number of years as a Judge Advocate in the United States Air Force. I then pastored in two other Evangelical Free churches until, in 2015, God clearly called me into the ministry I am involved in now. I serve as an intentional interim pastor with Vital-Church Ministry, as well as a Christian Conciliator and Mediator with the Institute of Christian Conciliation. The path to this ministry service began at Estes Brook, and I thank God for the many lessons He taught me through you. I am eternally grateful for all of you who were part of Estes Brook when we were there, and for the way you loved us.

I pray God's blessing upon Estes Brook Evangelical Free Church and all of you who presently consider it your church home. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look with favor upon you and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)

“Congratulations on the 100-year centennial celebration you are having next weekend. I am a grandson of Millie and Magnie Bleed. I am now 79 years old and live in Arizona. I have fond memories of your church as I visited many times in my youth. I loved the Fourth of July picnic as a teenager. The softball game between the single guys and the married guys was a highlight for me.

One of the great Bleed family stories is about the "church basement" in which my grandmother outwitted the men of the church. I wish you another 100 years in doing God's work.” -Ron Bleed

Solving the Church Basement Problem

One of my favorite stories is how my Grandmother Bleed outsmarted a bunch of men at church. My grandparents Magnie and Millie Bleed were active in the Estes Brook Tabernacle Church (an Evangelical Free Church) upon moving up to the farm in rural Minnesota. The church was very central to their lives and their strong faith. It was their primary community of friendship, spiritual guidance, and assistance during the Depression. Estes Brook is near Milaca. Grandma Millie was a very clever woman. She outshone mentally Grandpa Magnie and the other men regularly around the farm and at church. (I think she was one of the smartest women I ever knew. In her 107 years she did some amazing things to demonstrate her abilities.) The Estes Brook Tabernacle was built in a hurry in 1922 and consequently, cheaply constructed. In 1939 the church had no basement and was starting to add new people. The church needed more space particularly for Sunday School. The trustees wanted to build a basement under the church. The men scratched their heads but could not figure how to do it. They asked “How are we going to get under the church, dig it out, and build the basement?” Even some men with building experience were brought in, but the men could not find any solutions for several months. After preparing the obligatory coffee for the men at the church one evening where the men were once again discussing the problem of the basement, Grandma Millie stood up and said, “The church is too close to the road anyway. Someday the county is going to widen the road. Dig the basement behind the church and then slide the church over on top of a new basement.” The men of the church had to admit that was the best solution, and the church did exactly as she proposed. Grandma Millie’s foresight proved to be very accurate. It was only two years later the county widened the road, and sure enough, the trustees would have had to move the church back anyway. The moral of this story is why not let listen to other clever women today? Some men in 1939 finally decided to and it turned out well.

pumping them up and then lighting each one with a candle on a long pole. Wood cutting was an annual activity, and continued even after the church no longer burned wood but the parsonage did up through the 1980s.

The Pews in those days were homemade and designed for service rather than comfort. Not long after the church was born, a Sunday School ministry began. The sanctuary was also used for Sunday School, as it was the only “classroom”. There were very few Sunday School materials, but the teachers used the Bible as their text and relied on the Holy Spirit and their own ingenuity to make the Word interesting and inspiring. Many came to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior as a result of God working through Sunday School.

It was decided that each family would donate \$1.00 for the lights, to pay \$0.25 each quarter for the Church Watchman (Janitor) and a love offering for the organist. Each family was asked to chop wood for the church, and in July 1923, the sum of \$300.00 was made available for finishing the tabernacle if the title was clear on the property, it still stands on. In October, it was decided to let the floor go “for now”, but to get two loads of new sawdust to put over the old so it would be more healthy and pleasant for the time being.

In July 1924, a wood floor was put in and it was reported that enough funds had come in so that the congregation had no debt. For many years the District Conference regularly sent financial help to the church.

In April 1927 it was decided to have English meetings every other Sunday night and in 1930 they decided to have English meetings every Sunday night. Monthly funds were pledged to the church in amounts of \$1, \$2, and

\$2.50 each year. Sometimes there were also so much per family for the janitor.

In October 1938 it was decided to buy an additional ½ acre of land from Rev Axel Thorwall for \$14.00 for parking. Improved lighting was also installed. In 1941-42 a basement was added to the church and the church was moved back at least 15 feet. This was called “the sinking fund”. (See story by Ron Bleed on p. 10)

In 1946 the church acquired the cemetery from the original owners.

As years passed, God provided for many improvements along the way. Electricity replaced the gas lights just as the gas lights finally gave out. The homemade pews had done a marvelous service over the years, but they were getting old and worn and an opportunity arose to buy opera seats when the old Metropolitan Opera House in Minneapolis was demolished. So, God’s faithfulness in His provisions for the church can be traced down through the years.

The church building was remodeled and enlarged several times to accommodate the growing congregation. An increasing number of children and youth attended as well. Soon Sunday School classes were offered for all ages. In 1963 the church added on to the east side of the building to enlarge the sanctuary and basement. In 1975 the Pastor’s study was built upstairs in the church and the former Pastor’s study became part of the Nursery. In 1977-78 a major building program took place. A beautiful new sanctuary and basement fellowship hall were built. The fellowship hall was named after Frank and Esther Anderson, charter members of the church. The loan for this was paid up in only 10 years (5 years early). GOD

A Poem by Don Matheson

One hundred years is a long, long time,
And I have been asked to write a meaningful rhyme,
It’s a formidable task, but I will do my best,
To honor the anniversary committee request.

God in His wisdom a century ago,
Saw a great need in Estes Brook here below,
He raised up some folks with a love for the Lord,
To establish a church, they were in one accord.

Seems that the Scandinavians were the majority here,
The Swedes and Norwegians were very sincere,
Names like Anderson, Olson, Paulson, and Swanson,
And I think there were also a lot of them Johnsons.

They gave their offerings, and built the first church,
They cut down trees of oak, pine, and birch,
Estes Brook Tabernacle became it’s name,
Later shortened to “The Tab”, but was one and the same.

These families had kids that were growing up fast,
They wanted to teach them some truth that would last,
They decided to use that old reliable rule,
That God uses truth taught in Sunday School.

The first Pastors came all ready to preach,
The Bible in hand and hoping to reach
Folks that were needy and lost in their sin,
Asking the Lord for lots of people to win.

The years went by and after much prayer,
The members and friends continued to care,
So they shared God’s Word where ever they could,
And welcomed the presence of all those who would.

Over the years in this very special place,
God has been showing His wonderful grace,
Hundreds have found Jesus in a personal way,
And they will be with Him at the end of their day.

This humble poet has a word of thanks to share,
I’m so full of praise that this church has been there,
The challenge for you is to continue to pray,
That God’s blessings keep on in a wonderful way.

PASTORS

Oscar Alberts 1922-1923
Martin Kjenner 1923-1924
Folke Ekblad 1925-1926
Arthur Anderson 1926-1932
Alfred Stone 1933-1937
Walter Cahill 1937-1941
Alden Hansen 1942-1944
Edward Erickson 1944-1948
Wallace Norling 1948-1950
Richard Beals 1951-1953
Rodger Henderson 1952-1956
Lawrence Palmquist 1957-1968
Harry Swanson 1969-1978
Donald Matheson 1978-1986
Irv Woolf (Interim) 1986-1987
Jim Gallatin (Interim) 1988
Wayne Hensley (Interim) 1988
Daniel Werthman 1988-1990
Wesley Macy 1990-2014
Dan Osborn (Interim) 2014
Angus McDonald (Interim) 2014-2016
Dale Hutchcraft (Interim)
Jim Anderson (Lasare') 2016-2017
Tom Sahlstrom (Interim) 2017-2018
Jeff Starnes 2018-present

IS SO GOOD!!! In 1984 a Veteran's Memorial and Flag pole were added. In 1986, an entryway was added which was later torn off and replaced in 2001-2002 with a new building expansion of an entryway, offices, and elevator, donated in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Victor Anderson, some of the first members of the church, was added to the church. In 1987 the church added a hearing aid transmitter which has been very beneficial for some of our congregation.

Vacation Bible School was an important ministry throughout the history. Another important ministry of the church was tent meetings usually one or two weeks a year with traveling evangelists and "tent meetings", often with Maywood Covenant and Country Church and maybe also First Presbyterian of Foley. We continued having Tri-Church meetings with Maywood Covenant, and The Country Church or The Foley Presbyterian Church 3 times a year for many years.

In the early days the church rented a house for the pastors, then a parsonage was purchased in Oak Park. In 1969 land was donated by Mrs. Mable Peterson for the church to build a parsonage. This new parsonage was used until 2004 when it was sold to Creation Moments. In 1990 land was donated to the church by Geraldine Bergstrom which became our ballfield.

Music has always had a significant role during church services. A "string band" being one of the favorites down through the years and continues today. We have also had several Men's Quartets down through history. We have had several music teams through the years. We had 2 "hired" worship leaders in all the years, Trevor Klinemeyer and Tom Michaud.

MISSIONS

There has also been a warm “missionary spirit” at Estes Brook. Mission Conferences were held almost every year to introduce the congregation to missions in various parts of the world and to get to know the missionaries better that our church supports. Several families and individuals have made a commitment of full-time missionary work, ministering to others at home and abroad.

Full-time: Darryl and Millie Carlson, Bill and Sandy Jenson, Bruce and Jan Johnson, and Bruce and Linda Henne

Short-term: Orval and Pat Matheson, Shelley Jenson, Dale Matheson (YWAM), Kathy Matheson (YWAM), Tracy and Lucas Shoemaker (Covenant Players), Julie Greener (Aunt Pearl), Jenny Johnson, Stephen Kjos (teaching English)

Many short mission projects: Auctions have been a real boost for fund raising for the Teams and individuals to Bolivia, Venezuela, Spain, BUMP, SUMMIT, Wonderland Camp, Kentucky, New Orleans, Malawi, and Ukraine

Other Missionaries that our church has supported: Robert Chapmans, Kaye Thompson, Tom Nelsons, Elizabeth Anderson, Wayne Paynes, Roger and Monica Totman, David and Sasha Bliss, Harry and Sue Maravelas, Mark and Glee Williams, Marcus and Carla Snedecker, Phil and Suzanne Falconers, Daryl and Valerie Griffin, Dick and Alice Grenemyer, Butch Derosier, Tony and Laurie Thompson

Other Ministries the church has given support to: Camp Shamineau, Trinity Junior College (Canada), Trinity College and Seminary, TEAM Seminary in Venezuela, North-

western College (KTIS), North Central District of the EFCA, White Cross, Beacon subscriptions, Campus Life, Gideons, Angel Tree, RRLCC, Tson’s Romanian Mission, Place of Hope, Compassion Ministry, Operation Christ-

WOMEN’S MINISTRY

Women’s ministry (WMS) has played a vital role in the life of the Church from the earliest days, including supporting missionaries Elizabeth Anderson, Millie & Darryl Carlson, and Alan & Carol Hillis. Through White Cross they wrapped and sent bandages to Africa. And they hand-made items for sale at Lydia Children’s Home in Chicago. They have been the cornerstone of serving ministries in the church, with organizing potlucks, congregational care, bridal and baby showers, and many other forms of ministry.

YOUTH EVENTS

The youth have sponsored various events through the years that have been enjoyed by all: Valentine’s dinners, All-Saint’s Day Celebrations, Spaghetti Dinners, and Easter breakfasts to name a few.

YOUTH PASTORS

Ken Dalbey 1976-1977

Bruce Henne 1979

Greg Hull 1979-1981

James Halverson 1988-1989

Kevin Passion 1994

Ryan DeWilde 1995-1997

Mike Drakely 2000-?