

EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH OF LETHBRIDGE



Annual Report

2020-21



What we're all about.

We love God, love one another, and love our neighbours so that people become passionately committed to hearing and obeying God, and teaching others to do the same. We dream of being a movement of people who build bridges into our neighbourhoods and the world because God has created a bridge of love to us.

We desire to: passionately follow the Father and be transformed into His likeness; graciously enfold anyone into our warm and loving, Spirit-led family; and boldly love our community, speaking hope through Jesus and reaching out to those in need.

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for more information visit us at
www.efreelethbridge.ca

Dear church family,



We are in the midst of a difficult season.

This is not where we expected to be.....

COVID-19 has been difficult, restrictions have been difficult, and now we are in a season of transition.

We all know that God does some of His greatest work through seasons of difficulty. This report is full of signs of His great work. It is amazing to see that He is still working and transforming lives. It is amazing to see He is still moving and drawing people to Himself. It is amazing to see that as our online presence grows (because of COVID-19) so does our outreach. As you read through this report, take time to thank God for all **He** has accomplished through and in our church.

The mission of this church has not changed through these difficult times.

We love God, love one another, and love our neighbours so that people become passionately committed to hearing and obeying God, and teaching others to do the same.

We must be careful to keep our eyes on Christ. He will lead us to serve better, to know Him more and to love our community more.

A big thank you to our staff who have led well through two years of COVID-19. A big thank you to our congregation for continuing to serve and give through this difficult season.

Our prayer is that our souls would find rest in God, that our hope would come from Him. He truly is our rock and salvation. He is our mighty fortress. May we not be shaken as we continue to journey through this season. (Psalm 62:5 - 6) May our eyes be fixed on Him.”

Evangelical Free Church of Lethbridge Board
(Chair: Rich Thiessen)

*Yes, my soul,
find rest in God;
my hope comes
from him.*

*Truly he is
my rock and
my salvation;
he is my fortress,
I will not
be shaken.*

Psalm 62:5-6
NIV

Going Online



”

This time with the tech team was a bright spot in an otherwise dim time.

Through the pandemic I volunteered a lot with the tech team. Working with Mike, Ken, Eric, and Eli was a real blessing. I really felt valued and created some lifelong friendships. The sense of community I felt with the church throughout COVID-19 has actually gone up instead of down and that's largely thanks to my time with the tech crew. Interacting with various members on staff also really encouraged me to grow in my knowledge and my relationship with God. This time with the tech team was a bright spot in an otherwise dim time. - Morgan

In January 2021, I felt what I would call a “calling from God” to check out an online church. After searching a bit, I found E-Free Lethbridge and started to follow their weekly ministry. Through the teaching at E-Free's livestreamed services, and eventually through connecting in person, I learned much more about how I can have an engaged relationship with God and how much He loved me. I was challenged to grow in my faith, and have since been baptized and have become involved in the in-person community. It is a journey that is not finished yet, but I'm so glad to be where I am! - Michael

Thank-you...for your online services. They are motivating, inspiring, engaging and thought provoking...The Lord is alive and being proclaimed during this season of COVID-19. I have been so inspired by the BLESS series and it has renewed my commitment to the mission field the Lord has placed me in at this time. - Gerry

Serving In Our **Community**

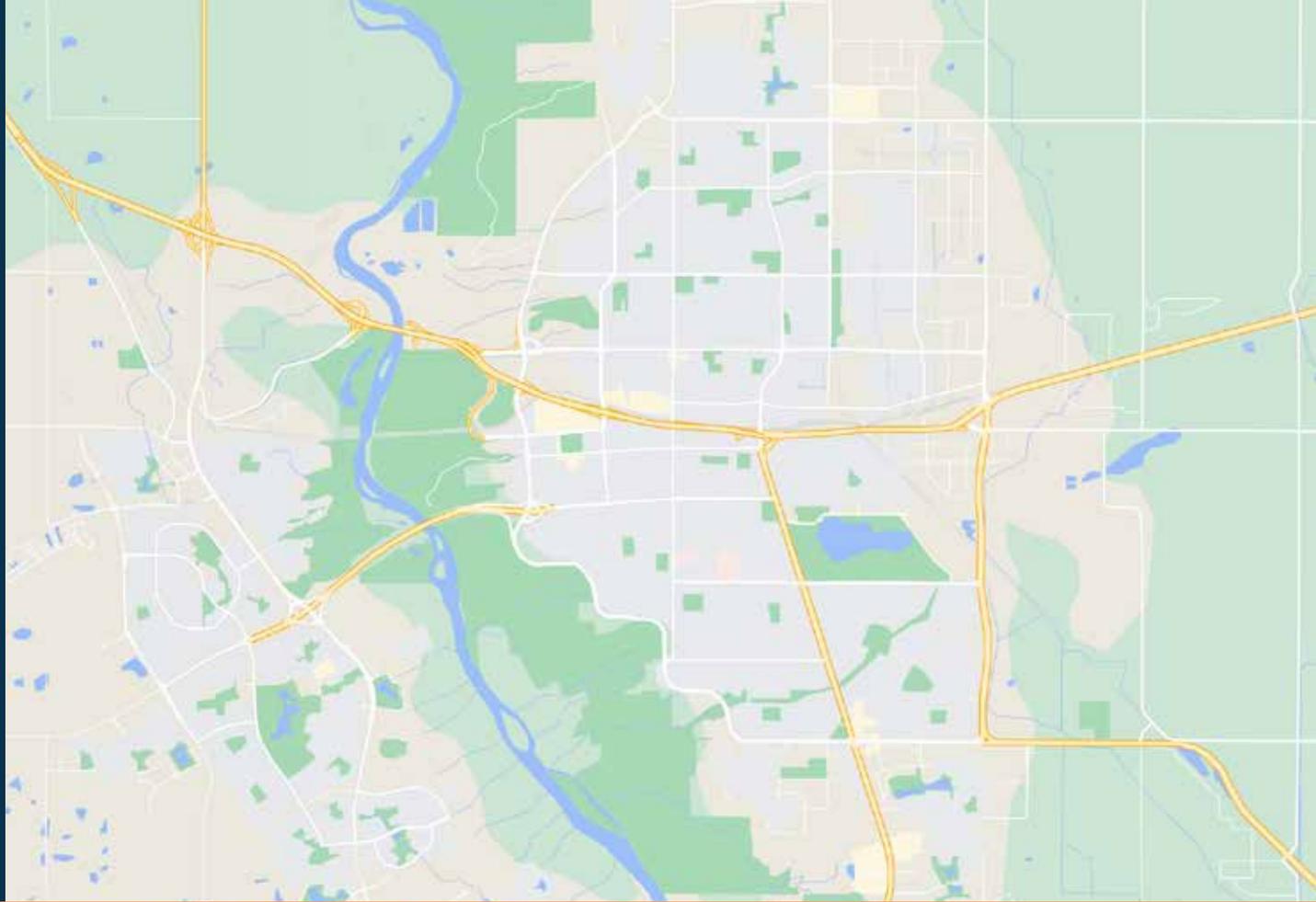
Boldly loving our community, speaking hope through Jesus, and reaching out to those in need.

Laptops for Lethbridge School Division 51

Online school was challenging for many students, but even more so when families were unable to afford the necessary technology. We were glad to be able to give 40 laptops to families in need from six different schools within Lethbridge School Division 51, including families from within our intercultural community.

MyCityCare

As part of our ongoing support of those families living in poverty in our city, we were able to partner with MyCityCare in a number of different initiatives. Over 175 backpacks were filled with needed school supplies and distributed to students within our city. 1200 activity packs were provided to families in need through the Mindful Munchies program, giving some much-needed positive distraction from the struggles of COVID-19. It's wonderful to see the larger church partner together to make a difference for our city.



Mustard Seed

Recognizing the need for affordable housing and support for our homeless community, we were glad to stand strong behind The Mustard Seed in advocating for their applications for projects here in the city. We were disappointed when these applications were denied but remain committed to being a part of the solution to this problem in our city.

Coulee Cleanup

We had four families join us for our Coulee Clean-up in Peenaquim Park. We spent a little over an hour picking up trash in the river valley and it was an excellent experience for both parents and kids! It was a great way for our elementary and youth families to care for our community.

Serving in Our Community

Intercultural Ministries

Intercultural Ministries supported new Canadians throughout COVID-19-19. This was largely possible because of the established relationships that were maintained through telephone and Zoom, as well as through coulee walks and backyard gatherings. Creative adjustments were made in programming, which led to our first Canadian Fall Festival, along with Christmas and Easter gift bag distributions.

ESL Conversation Cafe

Our ESL Conversation Cafe was especially interesting because it moved to an on-line format where students from around the world unexpectedly joined in to practice English speaking skills. We are encouraged and excited for expanding ministry opportunities in the years to come out of the new ideas tried during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fall Festival

90
participants

We celebrated Canadian culture with food, music, and activities, kicking off the event with western line dancing led by “The Dancing Grandmas”. Jackie’s Kitchen food truck served poutine, while other activities included pumpkin decorating, Canadian bingo, a photo booth, a scavenger hunt, and a “Name that Leaf” competition. The evening closed with a concert by Jamani Duo.

It was a great reconnection with people who have been part of our intercultural community, as well as a good introduction to new people whom we met for the first time. We thank all the volunteers who planned and supported this event, and look forward to staying in touch with all who participated and for the opportunity to engage in other COVID-19 safe activities.

200
served

Christmas + Easter Hampers

She is a single mom living in a very small place who recently lost her job in this last round of COVID-19 shut downs. She cried and hugged me, overwhelmed with all the food, snacks, and gifts.

Another mom was grateful that she was seen and known. The kids ran over and asked why I had brought gifts. I told them their church family loves them. The little girl cried and the boy hugged me. So sweet.

The gifts were so special to drop off. She is remarkable, having gone through a recent separation. She wept with gratitude. It was a reminder to her that God sees her.

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The response of the single mom and especially her 4 children was exciting for me and George to witness as we made the delivery to their home this past Saturday. The mom's response of "you shouldn't have!" was by far superseded by the children who were more than willing to assist in dragging in the haul you provided for them. They seemed to dive right in to see what was in all the bags and boxes before mom got after them to calm down and wait until she was done speaking to us.

George and the Intercultural community would also like to thank you for meeting the needs of one of the families they are seeking to build a bridge with.

- Don



It Feels Like Christmas



Advent Conspiracy

continues to be an important part of our church life. We redirected our Christmas spending in 2020 to support two key ministry partners: International Justice Mission (IJM) and Southern Alberta Bible Camp (SABC). Both were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, experiencing pressures on their revenues while pressing forward in their ministry. We celebrate that we were able to donate \$148,455 to these important ministries.

\$75,000

to International
Justice Mission (IJM)

Our church partners with IJM to end sexual violence in Guatemala and the first \$75,000 helped offset pandemic related costs so that their important work could continue. In March 2021, we were informed that 4,647 survivors of violence had received support in the previous six months through their Institute for Victim Care and Assistance. We praise God for each intervention!

\$73,455

to Southern Alberta
Bible Camp (SABC)

We are thrilled that we could be a part of their latest building project in providing mattresses for the bunks in their new lodge. The initial goal was to raise \$25,000, but we were able to surprise SABC with a cheque for almost \$75,000. SABC's Executive Director, Jon Gartly, and his wife Melissa spoke about how thankful they are for the church's support and how they look forward to seeing these mattresses used to achieve the camp's mission - Seeing lives transformed by the gospel!



Christmas Drive-In

36 Shows

475 Pylons Used

750 Cars Attended

2000-2500 Attendance

Coldest Temperature -12°C

Even though the story was familiar, Carol Heynen's script was fresh and fun. Eric Braun's song, which turned into a dance number for the whole cast, was awesome too!

Caitlin Mitchell did a great job directing the drama presentation with the small but mighty cast, who gave it their all every performance.

Joel Gross and the parking crew did an awesome job of making everyone feel welcome. Even though it was cold and snowy, everyone felt warm inside!

”



Hymn Sing + Drive In Services

“What a great blessing to hear Hymn Sing from our church and what a fantastic job putting it together.”

- Joyce H

Thoroughly enjoyed the video presentation of hymns and the Word by Pam and David. Our Activity leader in River Ridge Seniors Residence featured it Sunday morning at 10... because of distancing only 10 were allowed in the room...there were 9 - PTL [Praise the Lord]. It was wonderful to feel like I was finally in a church setting...looking forward to next Sunday.

- Joyce P

I loved it. I expected to love just being able to pray and sing my heart out and it was great for that but I got so much more than I was expecting. I have really been struggling. That is an understatement. But Luke said something about thriving and not just surviving and the Holy Spirit took over talking to me from that point on. I needed a breakthrough and I got it! I am so grateful and excited to be on the right track again.

- Wendy



Support Groups

In a time when we were unable to gather in homes, we were thankful to be able to host some small groups at the church, providing people with a safe way to have the connection and community they craved.

GriefShare is a support group with video based teaching, to help anyone on the grief journey. I was honoured to facilitate this group through the winter months. While not overtly evangelistic, its Christ centered approach clearly includes the gospel. We each experienced a measure of healing through the video teaching of David and Nancy Guthrie, the video testimonials of previous participants, and the personal interaction with our own journey. While I was aware of the GriefShare program, my own first hand participation allowed me to see its value as a ministry of the local church.

- Ian

1 Conquer Men's Group (A 13 week study with about 20 participating)

3 Seven Pillars Men's Groups (A 32 week study with 8 in each group)

1 Griefshare Group (a 12 week group with 7 regular participants)

Conquer is allowing men to find freedom from addiction, experience a deeper and more authentic relationship with Christ, and build genuine relationships with other men. One small group has continued to meet – their wives won't let them quit! They are seeing the difference this experience is making in their families, marriages, and relationship with Jesus. Other men who have gone through the study are coming back as leaders to help their brothers find freedom and joy as well.

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Youth Ministry

The YM team has been amazing, keeping us all rolling and updating and changing. I'm so grateful for our leadership and the way they've been looking out for us and supporting the small group leaders as we supported the youth.

All in all the year was far from perfect but it definitely was not a bad year. Different? Definitely. Confusing? 100%. But through it all we still connected, still grew, and still were there as a community to support each other. Youth ministry was a strong connection point for a lot of people that would have otherwise been struggling to find others to connect with over this year.

- Alex





Young Adults

Fireside with Blood Tribe Elders

In late June about 80 young adults and a bunch of leaders/staff/members of E-Free followed Les Vonkeman and his team out to the Blood Reserve for a fireside chat and Q&A with Blood Tribe Elders. The Elders shared stories about their culture, traditions, and current events while we enjoyed berry soup and Bannock that some of the locals prepared for us. It was a time to listen, learn, and build relationships with our Indigenous neighbours. We hope and have been praying for more opportunities like this in the future.



Ministry with **Women**

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” This has become our year of discipleship - following Jesus.

Over and over, we saw women follow as He led them to gather others around them. They saw needs, and they met needs. Things moved from large gatherings to phone calls and zoom conversations. Bible studies moved into smaller groups, finding ways to meet safely. We had a number of studies spread out over the city and surrounding communities, as well as many that met online.

Mom Collective

Our Mom Collective program was able to run safely, while still offering a chance for 50 young moms to connect. This was an isolating time for many families, which grew our appreciation of those times set aside to be in community. Our leadership team followed Jesus weekly, trusting him to give them the resources, space, time, and ways to love others.



Annual Conference

We moved our annual conference online and engaged together through chat. We had over 100 sites viewing in their homes, with their daughters or mothers, or bundled in blankets outside to watch with a friend or two. The theme was appropriately entitled “Even if...”, focusing on the hope of Christ that does not change and does not depend on circumstance.



Celebrate! **Baptisms**

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*I was baptized...
and it was a
truly amazing
experience. I am
so thankful for
everything God is
doing in my life
and so thankful for
a wonderful church
family I have
become a part of.
Thank you.*

- Michael

Our Lives Tell

Stories About God

I have an acquaintance who works with Career Transitions in Lethbridge. They hold a huge event at the Exhibition in February, needing a ton of volunteers. The Exhibition suggested she reach out to our church because “it is full of kind people that just want to help and serve the community”.

Praise God -- this is how we want to be known!! And it starts conversations. She asked how long we had been going to EFree and how we got involved. God is good to help plant seeds.

THANKS for your part in opening up opportunities for our church to serve the community.

- Melissa

In September, our church was encouraged to build bridges into our neighbourhoods by throwing 12 outdoor (COVID-19 compliant) community parties, plus a handful of street parties. In other neighbourhoods, we intentionally showed up at events planned by the Neighbourhood Association. These parties were opportunities to invest in our relationships with our neighbours and love our community in a fun, social setting. My favourite story is from Copperwood: two volunteer families agreed to host the party and had over 150 people show up! Then, responding to a concern about hygiene, they completely disinfected the playground when they were done.

- Jeremy





EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH OF LETHBRIDGE

4717 24 Avenue South
Lethbridge, AB T1K 7C1

403.329.3125 | info@efreelethbridge.ca