

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF FORT LANGLEY EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH LEADING TO THE SEARCH FOR A NEW LEAD PASTOR**

Fort Langley Evangelical Free Church is the story of God's faithfulness in blessing the dedication of a small group of inspired Christians who wanted to serve God in their community. The work began in the early 1970s with the prayers of Agnes Jenstead who wanted to see a Bible believing church established in the village of Fort Langley. Out of her conversations with people from various church and denominational backgrounds came a community Bible study of like-minded believers. This group met in the homes of its members until it grew larger than any one's home could accommodate and they rented the Fort Langley Community Hall for regular Sunday services. Acknowledging the faith of this small band of Christians, the church was appropriately named *Faith Evangelical Free Church* because it represented the feelings of the people involved. The connection to the Evangelical Free Church came about because several of the pioneers had previously been connected to the Langley Evangelical Free church. There was no pastor, no property, and no money, but the believers had an indomitable desire to see their fledgling ministry flourish.

**Several consistent themes keep emerging:** the sacrificial giving and service of its members; a caring community; a desire to reach out to the surrounding community and beyond; and, stable leadership by both pastors and lay leaders. The stories below illustrate these themes.

**Sacrificial giving:** **Reverend Stanley Nelson** came as the first pastor [1973] and immediately began knocking on every door in Fort Langley to invite people to the church. As the numbers grew, the Community Hall was no longer large enough; therefore, the church board decided on faith to purchase some property through a loan of \$4,000 by one of its members and the remainder signing for a loan of \$54,000. Through several astute land deals, subdivides, and swaps the current property on Glover Road was acquired without any debt. The property was located between Simpson Manor (a care facility) and Fort Langley Elementary School. Although the church engaged outside contractors to do some of the work on the original building in 1979, much of the work and all of the finishing work was done by members themselves who freely and sacrificially gave of their time and talents so that the work could be completed as good stewards of the minimal resources entrusted to them. It was with much gratitude and praise to God that the mortgage on the original building was burned in 1996. The name was changed to Fort Langley Evangelical Free Church to identify with the local community in 1987.

**Stable leadership:** The church has enjoyed remarkably stable pastoral leadership over the years: first by **Pastor Nelson (1973-1976)**. As our first pastor Stan Nelson was a tender-hearted gentleman who was the perfect salesman in reaching out to the residents of Fort Langley and making the presence of the church known in the community. **Pastor Bill Meier (1976-1983)** followed him and with his abundance of energy was determined to see the church grow and prosper. Taking the good news to the community was deliberately planned and executed. **Pastor Dave Russell (1985-1988)** came for a short period, followed by **Pastor Jamey McDonald (1988-1998)**. He loved the church and the people loved him. A second Sunday morning service and a Saturday evening service were added and **Ken Ratcliffe** joined as Jamey's associate to lead

worship, work with the Sunday school and shepherd mid-week home groups. Pastor Jamey had a strong preaching presence and reached out to Trinity Western University Students who, because of his talks in chapel, filled our pews and assisted in teaching Sunday School and helping out with worship. He also brought interns from ACTS Seminaries as part of his deliberate plan for mentoring for ministry. Pastor Jamey also began a memorable Saturday Night Service to reach younger families in the community and to draw them in a less formal worship style into the ministry of the church.

**Pastor Ken Ratcliffe (1998-2010)**, the longest serving Lead Pastor, brought a remarkable caring presence to the congregation for twelve years, although he had been an associate for several years previously. It was not overlooked by the church that they were located next to long term health care facility, Simpson Manor, which called for a special kind of ministry outreach. From the earliest days, Pioneer Girls visited the patients, but during Pastor Ken's ministry, he along with Barbara Tucker led hymn singing for the next door residents, and even today the children's ministries and families make regular trips to the Manor. Ken's family brought an encouraging example of a Christian family to our congregation for fifteen years.

Even when we had no pastoral leadership, countless Sundays were filled very ably by men of the faith in the congregation or who came to preach. Finally, we must add that the church has always been blessed by a group of strong lay leaders, far too numerous to mention. While the first chairman of the elder board was done by drawing a name out of a hat, thereafter there was a very deliberate effort to select and affirm strong leaders. The church is built upon these countless volunteers.

**Caring Community of believers:** From the outset, the believers functioned as a caring community. The instances are too numerous to chronicle, but these did include helping a farmer with clean up when loss of electrical power to his barn resulting in the suffocation of thousands of chickens; gifting an unemployed member so his family could be looked after; sandbagging Pastor Jamey's house when the Fraser River flooded; putting a new roof on a house and, caring for the Thompson brothers following the passing of their parents. Much of this caring ministry stemmed from the fellowship engendered by events such as the annual Sunday School picnics, the women's prayer ministry, the brown bag lunches that Pastors Jamey and Ken had with the seniors, the over forty group, family camps and retreats, marriage seminars, softball and soccer teams that played in local leagues, annual Hoedowns at Aldor Acres, and men's game nights.

**Intergenerational ministry:** The church always represented a multigenerational diversity in its activities and worship. Children and youth were nurtured through a variety of ministries including, in the early days, Pioneer Girls and Boys Brigade and more recently, through the inspiration and leadership of Chad and Krista Friesen, the AWANA ministry. This emphasis on ministry to children led to the calling of Karen Barkowsky to become the first employed part time Children's Ministry Director (2003-2009), and later by Lindy Jankowiak (2009 to the present), under whose leadership children's ministry has grown and flourished as a very creative part of the church. Indeed, several families came to the church because of the quality of spiritual nurturing represented by this children's ministry. Youth Ministry has also been a focus of the

church, at first through guidance of a number of part time interns and more recently under the direction of full time youth Pastors, Matt Castle, Jason Lavergne (2002-2008) and Mike Olynyk (2008-09). More recently, the youth work has been under the direction of our Associate Pastor Randy Taylor (2009-2014) and since then under our two Associate Pastors, Jason Lavergne and Jon Reesor.

**Outreach to the world:** The church also had an outreach component to the community. We note here only a few of the programs. Many more personal relationships and contacts took place whose impact will be seen in eternity. Pastor Jason reached out to the students at Walnut Grove Secondary School who were encouraged to come to church. He also took many of the youth sponsors and youth group to help aboriginal youth at Rough Acres Bible Camp. During the summer months, some of our teens were hired to lead outreach to neighbourhood children through crafts, sports, and the always well attended Vacation Bible School.

More recently during the ministry of Pastor Ken, our outreach included over a thousand hot dogs being served annually to the community by our church family on “May Day”. Wind and Tide, a Christian based pre-school, renting the facility, has introduced many of the neighbourhood people to the church. Community people showing an interest in learning more about Christianity were encouraged to join an Alpha Group that the church sponsored for several years in the nineties. Whether it was on Sunday morning or through these many outreach activities, the church sought to provide a welcoming atmosphere where seekers could be encouraged to find solace and salvation in worshipping God. On more than one occasion, Pastor Ken initiated prayer walks around and for the residents of Fort Langley. Groups also went out street carolling at Christmas time. Led by our pastors, members were encouraged to participate with those from other local churches in the Easter celebrations represented by the Stations of the Cross walk and the Evangelical Ministerial service.

We have also assisted in planting the Grace Community Church in Pitt Meadows through the work of our EFC District Superintendent, Austin Stouffer, and later Pastor Jamey and our members who went across the Fraser River to launch this church. With the encouraging of Pastor Ken and Allen Kotanen, we also supported the planting of the first Korean Evangelical Free Church in the Langley area. Pastor Ken was instrumental in persuading Pastor Namgyu and Heejoung Lee to begin the Church of the Sent for Life Proclamation as the first Canadian Korean church in the Evangelical Free Church at Fort Langley. After several years of successful ministry at FLEFC, the Koreans moved into Langley City to be closer to their parishioners and have flourished. More recently, another Korean congregation (Jubilee Chapel) has come to use our facilities in 2018.

**FLEFC has always been known for its global, missionary outreach.** Many young people have been encouraged and supported in short term missions. We also provide support for many domestic and foreign missionaries and have participated in a number of relief projects including refugee support, and the annual Christmas Shoe boxes distributed through Samaritans’ Purse. In 2018 we adopted a refugee family from Somalia. A major focus has been our Mexican Teams who for sixteen years have travelled to Mexico for several weeks each summer to build houses for poor families. Thanks to the visionary and dedicated work of Wendy Ratcliffe, Ron Philipchalk,

Craig and Mary Skinner as well as many others, both teens and adults have given meaningful service to these Mexican families. Very encouraging has been the funding provided by the church members and the local business community that have enabled at first one and later three homes per trip to be built by these volunteers. The sense of fellowship and ministry felt by these annual treks to Mexico has inspired the entire church that celebrates their accomplishments at the annual Mexican Fiesta fund raising night. Especially encouraging has been the spiritual impact of these ventures on our teens and their subsequent vision for ministry beyond our church. For information on the missionaries supported by the church, see the Annual Reports.

We also celebrate the associate pastoral staff that God has brought to us. Cyndi McCarthy (2001-2010) came on part time to provide continuity and new vigour to the worship ministry. Karen Barkowsky (2003-2009) took over the children's ministry and gave new direction and cohesion to our Sunday School. Teenagers and young adults benefitted from the full time youth pastoring of Matt Castle and Jason Lavergne. Eryn Moore (2006–2008) had special responsibilities for home groups and outreach; and as a result our ongoing commitment to home groups led to greater spiritual maturity while enjoying the always present close fellowship of the groups. When Cyndi's husband accepted a pastoral position at another church, she was replaced as Worship Leader by Rebekah MacEwan (2010-15), a talented musician and Worship Leader at TWU who had grown up in the church. Our current Worship Leader is the daughter of one of our missionary families and another TWU grad, Brittany Martin.

Our governance has changed with the various stages of our life. Under the elder-led model of church governance, it became increasingly difficult for elders to provide leadership for all the ministries. A shift to biblically based team ministry in 2002 allowed for wider leadership involvement and freed the elders to focus on shepherding the congregants. All the while, Pastor Ken's warm pastoral ministry continued to bless the many lives he touched until he transitioned out in 2009. Just before this, Eryn Moore and Mike Olynyk felt called to other ministries leaving a significant deficit in our pastoral staff.

With Pastor Ken's leaving we engaged Dr. Daryl Busby from the ACTS Seminaries to be our part time transitional pastor for two years while we took an in-depth look at who we were and where we wanted to go as a church leading to a search for a new Lead Pastor. This process took longer than expected as we examined 85 applicants before extending the call to Pastor Lorin Bergen in 2012. In the meantime, we had a large number of youth that needed guidance so the Executive Team, with the approval of the congregation, took the unusual step of hiring a Youth Pastor, Randy Taylor, without a Senior Pastor in place.

**Pastor Lorin Bergen (2012-2018)**, came to us from 17 years of church ministry at Living Hope Christian Fellowship in neighbouring Surrey. As a church planter, Lorin brought an enthusiasm for outreach into the community through planned events like the Grey Cup Parties and Fall Kick-off outdoor worship opportunities, participating in the Clean-Up Langley campaign, provided a Christmas themed play, Christmas in the Community, for the annual lighting of the Christmas tree at the Fort Langley Community Centre, and initiating a monthly meeting of the pastors of the five churches in Fort Langley. We also became more connected to the local

ministry of Wagner Farms for recovering addicts. Lay leadership development was a priority for Lorin and several leadership development programs for those under 40 were initiated in conjunction with Bethel Mennonite Church.

With the departure of Randy Taylor in 2014, we initiated a search for another Associate Pastor who would also have responsibility for youth work. It was the intention of the Board to hire just one Associate but the outstanding qualities of the two leading candidates who were members of the congregation and the best of the recent graduates of the EFCC seminary, the congregation was persuaded by Lorin to hire both. In 2014 Jason Lavergne came on board as the Associate Pastor of Community Outreach with additional responsibilities for Junior High Youth and Young Adults and Jon Reesor as Associate Pastor of Community Life was responsible for assimilation of new people into the church, the Senior High Group, and technology. Under the guidance of the Lead Pastor this pastoral team planned and undertook many significant new adventures, such as experiments with two service venues that our pastoral staff could direct, introducing bi-annual weekend equipping sessions for congregants on such topics as Evangelism, Estate Planning, Holy Sexuality, and Child Discipline. We also greatly increased our visibility in the community through meeting some needs in the school next door. Perhaps the best illustration of the extent of our involvement in the community is seen in the recent program of 12 Days of Serving our community which involved a large number of the congregants showing Christ's love through:

- 1) One night of manning the Salvation Army Christmas Kettles;
- 2) Providing a meal and craft activities for recently immigrated families living in the New Hope Community;
- 3) Collecting donations for the local food bank;
- 4) Blessing the teachers at Fort Langley Elementary and local merchants by giving them coffee and Christmas baking;
- 5) Wrapping presents, singing carols and spending time with the residents of Elim Village;
- 6) Offering an evening of free childcare for 50 Fort Langley Elementary School children so their parents could have a night out for shopping;
- 7) Wrapping gifts for needy kids from 7 inner city schools;
- 8) Preparing a meal for the homeless, struggling and at-risk residents of Gateway of Hope (a Salvation Army ministry);
- 9) Serving a Christmas meal at the Gateway of Hope;
- 10) Adopting 12 grandparents at Fort Langley Seniors Community who will not be visited by family during this Christmas season by visiting them and providing gifts;
- 11) A Giving Tree to provide personal gifts for a needy family in Fort Langley Elementary School;
- 12) A Kids Christmas Party for sharing Christ with the friends of our AWANA and Sunday School students.

The full extent of our outreach initiatives can be seen in the church's annual reports.

In 2017 our much beloved Lead Pastor began experiencing health challenges that eventually led to a three-month sabbatical. Pastor Lorin returned to his duties at the beginning of 2018 but

sadly his condition did not improve which led to his resignation in April. His pastoral responsibilities were ably taken over by our two associate pastors. We also began a series of Encounter Nights in the Fall of 2017 and the Spring of 2018 to discern through much examination of the Word and prayer, God's leading for us as individuals and corporately. The Board then appointed a Ministry Directions Committee (MDC) led by our Head Elder and Dean of the EFCC Seminary, John Auxier, to seek input over the summer from the congregants and staff to determine our strengths and areas needing attention that would lead to recruitment of a new Lead Pastor. Because of the extent of this Committee's work and the importance thereof for the future of the church, a section of its report to the Board is worth quoting here.

The MDC was asked to answer the following questions: What are we doing well currently? What could be done better? What do we need to thrive in the future that we are not doing? What's on the horizon for us?

The committee reviewed the input from the congregational meeting, conversations, emails, and extensive interviews, to answer this question. It was our conviction that the process of considering the main questions needed to be anchored in what would be best for the congregation moving forward. Here is a concise summary:

**As far as possible, preserve and build upon our strengths and resources:**

- + We place a high value on expository Bible preaching
- + Pastoral care is valued and important to us.
- + Two trusted, talented, and well-liked associate pastors are already in place
- + Good relationships in our total staff team—all are appreciated
- + We meet our annual budget regularly.
- + Prayer ministry, and authentic/deepening connection with the Lord are important to us
- + Outreach to our community is a strong desire, e.g. cooperation with local schools, and the adoption of a refugee family
- + Dedicated children's ministry with two part time staff
- + Missionary support stable and consistent
- + Demographic and ministry group strengths: Junior High, Young Adults and Seniors
- + We are a welcoming, friendly congregation with a continuing stream of new visitors and attracting new members
- + A prolonged transition process would be seen as unhelpful by most of the congregation.

**Major areas to address in our next phase at FLEFC**

- \*A *comprehensive Discipleship strategy* for every level of ministry at FLEFC is needed.
- \**Youth Ministry* has been in maintenance mode and needs serious attention for our future.
- \**Children's ministry* numbers are in decline and potentially needs to embrace change
- \*A *comprehensive system of small groups* is needed for enfolding newcomers, ongoing member care and discipleship growth.
- \**Improve leadership development opportunities and communication* at all levels,
- \**More responsive and accountable supervision of staff,*
- \**Strengthen and empower lay leaders*

\*Improve *board communication* with the congregation

\**Elders* need better organization

\**Worship* is an area that needs more intentional pastoral vision and supervision, and improved quality.

Upon receipt of the MDC report, the Board asked the congregation to approve the establishment of a Search Team for a new Lead Pastor.