



Elim Evangelical Free Church

9421 128th Street East, Puyallup, Washington, 98374

ANNUAL REPORT

2023

2023 Pastor's Annual Report

By Lead Pastor Ryan White

“How priceless Your faithful love is, God! People take refuge in the shadow of Your wings. They are filled from the abundance of Your house. You let them drink from Your refreshing stream. For the wellspring of life is with You. By means of Your light, we see light.” (Psalm 36:7-9)

2023 was fulfilling year, only my second full year as Elim's lead pastor. I continue to be grateful that God has knit us together in gospel partnership. Our love for you is genuine. Brianna, the kids, and I deeply enjoy to being part of this spiritual family and it is my honor to serve this congregation as one of Christ's shepherds.

We began 2023 with three words for the new year: REST, REENGAGE, and RECONCILE. We committed together to rest in God's love, provision, and working; to reengage with the tasks and callings of the Christian life within Christian community; and to reconcile with one another when past hurts and new conflicts inevitably rear their ugly heads. I believe we succeeded. It was a full year, but not an activist one. We ministered to one another and to our community from a place of refreshment, confident that God's Spirit was working His will and way through His church.

It was also a year rich with kindness and goodness. There are so many flashbulb memories: Linda Smarr leading us back into intimate connection with one another through F.E.A.S.T. (Friends Eating and Sharing Together), the Sunday where we welcomed a class of ten individuals into covenant membership, Jenn Severns helping us experiment with how we might convert our Oasis House into an emergency cold weather shelter on snowy nights, the commissioning of Timothy Chase into his overseas YWAM mission, Samantha Kasper and our youth leaders hosting an eye-opening Passover seder for students, the incredible transformation of our sanctuary into a mountain railway station for VBS, and the creative and sacrificial service of Pat Davidson, Shauna Essman, Bill Parsons, and a team of faithful men who began to transform our dream of our new playground area into reality.

On the teaching front, we spent much of the year in the Gospel of Luke, where we wrestled with Jesus' example, learning from Him directly our way, truth, and life. From there, we feasted in the Old Testament book of Ruth, marveling at God's *hesed*, a Hebrew word that speaks to God's extraordinary loyalty and gracious devotion to those He calls His own. We ended the year exploring the various doors in the life of faith, a unique and memorable journey of discovery.

In retrospect, 2023 was a year in which we rekindled our relationships with Christ's international church and our participation in the Lord's global mission. We kicked off the year with a Giveaway Sunday, raising over \$10,000 for the ministries of the Hispanic and Marshallese congregations that weekly share our building. In May, we welcomed dear friends from Iran's underground church who shared with us miraculous stories of God's love and power and gave witness to the radical faithfulness and joyful witness of everyday believers in that closed Muslim country. In June, we celebrated our own Claire Kranik's reports from her medical mission in the West African nation of Togo. In September, we

cherished a visit from our long-time Congolese ministry partner and spiritual brother, Pastor Nubako Selenga. Finally, our Manger Offering on Christmas Eve raised over \$5,000 for missions projects in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mexico. May God continue to bless and bring forth fruit from Elim's God-mirroring generosity!

Some final notes:

- In 2023, we welcomed fifteen into covenant membership: Paul and Linda Busic, Ryan and Janelle Crawford, Karen Cowen, Veronica Jaloba, Aaron and Jenelle Kulaas, Rob and Crystal Miller, Greg and Abby Olsen, Deborah Sikes, and Yuriy and Brittany Tkachenko
- We mourned the passing of our long-time member and beloved sister in Christ, Delores "Dee" Barrett.
- We baptized Zach Brownell, Scott Davidson, Annabelle Finch, Hannah Mitschow, Katie Mitschow, and Miles White. Praise God for new life!

"Trust in the Lord and do what is good. Dwell in the land and live securely. Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you your heart's desires. Commit your way to the Lord. Trust in Him and He will act, making your righteousness shine like the dawn, your justice like the noonday." (Psalm 37:3-6)

2023 Elders Report

By Lars Passic, Elder Board Chairman

With the 2022 elder board feeling a bit lean (Ryan, Jeff, Gregg, Dan, Lars) and with Dan Amos having reached the end of his six-year elder term, for 2023 we welcomed two first-time elders, Willie Houze and Josh White, and one returning elder, Bill Parsons, back onto the shepherding team. It was great that these men answered the call to serve as part of the leadership of Elim.

2023 was sort of an apprentice year for me as elder chair, in partnership with vice chair Jeff Foerster. I appreciate the leadership that Jeff showed in helping me learn the chairman role and giving me insight in several difficult situations. Thank you, Jeff, for your encouragement, gentle prodding invitations, words of wisdom, and willingness to teach me.

In 2023, the elder board performed Ryan's first annual review and modernized the pastoral review process. Jeff helped me to set the guiding principles of the review, and we discerned what was important to evaluate in a pastoral review. We settled on a set of questions and a scope of who would be requested to provide feedback about Pastor Ryan. After gathering and compiling the feedback, I was happy to deliver a very positive review to our lead pastor, Ryan White.

The elder board made changes to how policy is established, revised, or modified by the Elim elder board. The elder board used these policy changes to update the Kids' Ministry and Student Ministry Volunteer Workers Policy. We took input from the Kids' Ministry Director and discussed the changes extensively. Changes included clarifying wording and changing policies to make children safer and making reporting requirements clearer so we are better equipped to protect children and workers.

In December, we updated one part of the Elim Statement of Faith to match the Statement of Faith that the EFCA voted to update in 2019. The elders had previously voted to approve this change some years ago, so bringing this change to a vote of the Elim congregation brought this decision full-circle.

2023 Kids' Ministry Report

By Beth White, Kids' Ministry Director

*"Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful. The Lord preserves the simple."
(Psalm 116:5-6)*

In Elim's Kids' Ministry, the one thing that we want to make sure the kids are learning is that the Lord loves and cares for his children. We give our lives to him in full confidence, knowing that he is wise, powerful, and loving. He is worthy of our praise and our trust! We have been spending the year finding out exactly why he is worthy, and examples of the right way to respond.

In the Lilies, which is what we call the nursery, the little ones have been consistently reading and singing about the fruits of the Spirit. They are learning that church is a friendly, fun, and wonderful place to be, and the seeds of God's truth are being planted in their hearts.

The Lights (pre-k through 2nd grade) started out the year reading through Exodus. We took our time, and learned all about how God, through the obedience of his friend and servant Moses, led his sheep to freedom. The kids learned what the tabernacle and all its parts were like, and how God took such great care in giving perfect instructions to his children. We also celebrated Sukkot and talked about why it's important to trust God by keeping his commands of remembrance.

The Garden (3rd through 6th grade) methodically worked through the Torchlighters curriculum, learning each month about a different "hero of the faith." It's very important for kids to see people living lives of what we might call radical faith, and to begin to understand that the more completely we give our life to Christ, the more power he has for good in us and through us.

We had an excellent VBS in July, as well as our second annual Hootenanny in October. Both were not only fun but also opened our doors to guests from the community. The kids performed a couple of different songs throughout the year, and we continued our practice of kids' moments once per month with the congregation.

One other wonderful thing that is happening is that through God's grace, our new playground is almost finished! The whole process is an outstanding testament to the Lord's provision, as we looked to him for help and guidance, and he gave everything we needed. I am talking about ideas, money, able and willing helpers, the right weather conditions... the list could go on and on. At every step we prayed, and as we trusted the Lord, the way opened. We are so thankful for everyone who has made it possible. Praise God!

2023 Student Ministries Report

By John Reynolds, Student Ministry Director

In 2023, Samantha Kasper, Elim's Student Ministry Director, sensed God calling her into a new mission field and assignment. She would serve the Lord as one of His everyday missionaries in our local elementary schools, loving on students and shining the light of Christ on her campus as a full-time teacher. To this end, Samantha transitioned out of her staff position in the fall of 2023. She has continued to invest in students as one of Elim's amazing youth volunteers. In November 2023, Army Captain John Reynolds was brought in to act as Elim's Student Ministry Director on a trial basis. In January 2024, after much prayer and discernment, we formally hired John in the role, his wife Alexia, and their four boys into our spiritual family. We are thrilled that God has brought us together in gospel partnership. Below is his report.

As we reflect on the past year, it's been a journey filled with growth, learning, and memorable moments. Our focus on deepening our understanding of Jesus while fostering a sense of community and joy has been at the forefront of our activities.

Monthly Learning Sessions:

Each month, we dedicate time to dive deeper into the teachings of Jesus. Through interactive discussions, Bible studies, and guest speakers, we explored various aspects of faith, compassion, and service. These sessions have not only enriched our understanding but also strengthened our bonds as a community.

Monthly Fun Events:

Alongside our learning endeavors, we made sure to infuse fun and excitement into our ministry. From game nights to outdoor adventures and service projects, there was never a dull moment. These events provided opportunities for fellowship, laughter, and creating lasting memories.

Highlights:

- Our winter retreat was a profound experience of spiritual renewal and connection. Through worship, reflection, and team-building activities, we deepened our commitment to following Jesus.
- The outreach initiatives undertaken by our youth have made a tangible impact in our community. From volunteering to help in every part of group, and inviting friends so they might experience the amazing love of Jesus. I am super proud of our group of students.
- Our regular Sunday night group consisting of games, themed events, fellowship, and sharing the Gospel have become a place for inclusion and a chance for the students to have fun while learning about Jesus.

We remain committed to nurturing a vibrant and dynamic youth ministry that empowers young people to live out their faith with passion and purpose. Thank you to all who have

contributed to making this past year a success. Your dedication, enthusiasm, and faithfulness have truly made a difference in the lives of our youth and our community.

2023 Worship Ministry Report

By Jenelle Kulaas, Worship Ministry Director

I'm happy to report that Team Worship is doing great! In Team Worship, we bring together our individual skills and talents to serve our ministry's shared mission: to worship Jesus and take others with us!

Allow me to share our team's regular prayer:

"Gracious loving Father, we are truly grateful for the opportunity to serve you. This is a get-to and not a have-to. Thank you for the passion, time, health, and talent you have given us to be here in this moment. We know that worship isn't about us. It's all about you, so we humbly give it all back to you and pray that you alone would be glorified through our praises.

Help us focus on the words we are singing and what they mean. Holy Spirit, come! We cast away any distractions, in Jesus' name. Help us to be fully present as we express ourselves to you with freedom and feel your presence.

We pray for each person in this room; every heart, soul, and mind to draw closer to you. May your will be done in your people as we take time to thank you through songs of worship. Our worship is contagious. May it spread like wildfire in this place right now. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen."

We often remind ourselves why we put Team in front of Worship. In Matthew 5:23-24, God clearly tells us to put our unity ahead even of giving him our gifts of praise and worship. Having unity also means sustaining our community through prayer and communication. We support each other by using Jesus as our example. We care about each other and what's going on in our spiritual journeys as we live life together.

The year had many memorable moments:

- In consultation with the elders, we decided in February to replace our aging sanctuary speakers and subwoofers. In July, we invested in a new and improved drum booth to help with sound and volume control.
- On August 13th, we were thrilled to host South Hill's second annual Worship in the Park with Celebration Church. What an honor to help facilitate this multi-church team of musicians and vocalists! It was a sweet moment of gospel partnership. Friendships were forged and our work together for Christ's kingdom continues.
- In December, we especially celebrate that our youth did a fantastic Christmas pageant, which included two songs and twelve students participating! Olivia Kulaas, my daughter, co-wrote and co-directed with me. Many shared that it was their favorite part

of Advent season—glory to God!! We all had a blast serving the Lord together through the creative arts. I expect this will become a new rhythm for us here at Elim. Plans are already in the works for future plays involving the kids!

Thank you for your prayers as we look forward to all that God has in store in 2024.

2023 Discipleship Ministry Report

By Julie Brannon, Discipleship Ministry Deacon

We have continued to have a diverse and significant number of discipleship group offerings for interested participants. We currently have three women's groups, two men's groups, and five co-ed groups. One of those groups is focused on recovery. With our 10 groups available, it's nice to have constellation diversity along with various days and meeting times to help accommodate busy schedules. Some groups have seen an increase in the number of group participants this past year, particularly witnessed within the men's groups!

To assist with group awareness to encourage new member participation, we continued in 2023 providing individual group snippets called In-Focus Offerings placed in the Elim newsletter. Discipleship group information has been shared at new member classes.

After the service on September 10, a discipleship group connection event was held. Tables with information about each group were manned by group leaders or their designees along with providing signup sheets. This PR event was held to let people know about the groups and have a chance to sign. Some new members did join groups through this outreach event.

Group leaders held bi-monthly meetings. During these meetings we discuss articles which are shared about twice a month with all kinds of information and suggestions regarding small groups. We also discuss future plans and ideas for our discipleship groups to keep them vibrant moving forward. A favorite discussion is how the particular studies groups are embarking on is going.

A strong focus for the coming year will be the developing of group apprentices, with the hope to eventually become group leaders so more groups can be developed, along with assisting in the leadership of current groups while apprenticing occurs.

Leaders thought it might be a good idea to ascertain how many people were currently participating in discipleship groups, so, group leaders shared how many participants were involved in their groups. This information was shared with group leaders and church elders. We were pleased to find that a total of 77 Elim attendees are involved in groups. But the good news is, there's room for more!

Our discipleship groups hope to continue to be a strong ministry and service not only for the people of Elim, but also as a tool for outreach within the community.

2023 Leadership Core Report

By Larry Short, Leadership Core Deacon

Throughout 2022 and beyond, Cindy Waple, together with Pastor Ryan, laid a great foundation for Elim's group of deacons/ministry leaders known as "Leadership Core." Toward the end of 2023, following the Waples' move out of the area, Pastor Ryan asked me to take up the reins and continue to provide leadership to our great group of deacons. My primary role is fourfold: 1) to champion for our congregation what the deacons are doing in their areas of ministry, 2) to help ensure they have the resources they need to accomplish their goals, 3) to facilitate good communication between the deacons that helps break down ministry silos, and 4) to serve as a liaison between the Leadership Core and the Elders.

The Leadership Core currently includes:

- Ryan White, Lead Pastor
- Lori Cantu, Administrator
- Becca Finch, Social Media Assistant
- Beth White, Director of Kids' Ministry
- John Reynolds, Director of Youth Ministry
- Jenelle Kulaas, Worship Director
- Rachel Hoffman, Ministry to Women
- Becca Passic, Ministry to Women
- Dave Lingenfelter, Men's Ministry & WAM Assistant
- Claire Kranik, Student Ministry
- Julie Brannon, Deacon of Discipleship Groups
- Darlene Short, Deacon of Congregational Care
- Linda Smarr, Deacon of Congregational Fellowship
- Corrie Chase, Deacon of Environments
- Paul Busic, Deacon of Facilities & Grounds
- Janine Lawrence, Deacon of Outreach Hospitality
- Frances Amos, Community Needs Outreach (CareNet)
- Jenn Severns, Community Needs Outreach (Women's Shelter)
- Cam Severns, Community Needs Outreach (Overcoming Addiction)

In late 2023, we transitioned from a bimonthly Core Team meeting to a quarterly meeting but added an online tool to aid us in keeping more frequently in good communication.

The Leadership Core represents where the "rubber meets the road" when it comes to Elim's ministry service to our congregation and community. Your prayers that God would develop us into effective leaders who learn how to follow Jesus more closely, serve more selflessly and listen more generously, would be greatly appreciated in the months ahead!

WELCOME & ASSIMILATION MINISTRY (WAM)

By Larry Short, Deacon of Welcome & Assimilation

We are grateful that during 2023:

- We were able to raise up, train and coordinate the efforts of 13 Lead Greeters and Security Greeters to assist Elim in the task of helping Sunday service participants experience God's welcome in a greater way.
- We launched our first Elim 101 class (a welcome luncheon for visitors and new attendees, providing a high level overview of what Elim is all about)
- We launched our first Elim 201 class (two sessions for those interested in doing a "deeper dive" and exploring the benefits of membership at Elim)
- We launched our first Elim 301 class (four sessions to help people committed to Elim understand how to get and stay connected within our Body, specifically in regard to using their gifts and skills in ministry to our congregation and community)

Our goals for 2024:

- Continue to be the hands and feet of Jesus, greeting Elim newcomers and attendees, and helping our family to develop an ever-more-welcoming presence.
- Continue training and coordinating the efforts of security greeters to help keep Elim and its children safe.
- Repeat and refine Elim 101 / 201 / 301 classes at least once or as often as needed, as we seek to welcome newcomers and new members and equip Elimites for more effective ministry to our congregation and community.

In addition to our 13 volunteer greeters and security specialists, special thanks goes to my partner in ministry, Dr. Dave Lingenfelter, who gave great assistance in particular with the 301 classes; and also to our staff and elders, as well as Deacon of Discipleship Groups Julie Brannon, who rendered wonderful assistance in pulling off the 101 and 201 classes.

2023 Ministry to Women Annual Report

By Becca Passic, Co-Leader of Ministry to Women Team (MtoW)

Members: Rachel Hofmann (co-lead), Julie Brannon, Lori Cantu, Shuana Essman, Janine Lawrence

2023 was a year filled with new beginnings and growth for MtoW and we thank the Lord for this!

We held our first “Parents Night Out” in February, the fund we raised for that event went to our benevolence fund at Elim. It was such a success we will continue to host this event in 2024.

Throughout the summer months we held *Simple Evening - Women's Gatherings* where once a month we gathered at a home and played yard games, shared a time of prayer, worship and short devotional. We hope to be able to continue in 2024.

Julie Brannon launched our *Cultivate! Women's Workshops*. These quarterly workshops deal with a host of topics from the practical such as women's health to the spiritual growth in God's word.

In the fall Becky Vanderhoff, Becca Finch and Linda Busic help launch MtoW's first post-pandemic outreach ministry called Embrace Grace. This program is geared for pregnant single mothers in need of community and the gospel. From EmbraceGrace.com, “When you join this support group, you will: meet weekly for 12 weeks, be encouraged by women who have walked in your shoes, make new friends, and receive a baby shower in your honor.” Our Embrace Grace team went through the 12-week program, and with the blessed help of many volunteers provided meals, childcare, and an amazing baby shower. It was a blessing to see God provide for their ministry. We are hopeful that the seeds planted for the young mothers involved in Embrace Grace to seek and know Lord and thrive as mothers.

During the Advent season we partnered with Linda Smarr to host an “Elim Family Meal”. Many families gathered and enjoyed games, carols, delicious soups and desserts. We also created gift bags for Care Net, with assistance from Fran Amos.

We provided over a dozen Meal Trains this year, as an effective way to show practical application to being the hands and feet of Jesus to those at Elim. Janine Lawrence along with Lori Cantu organize these.

Julie Brannon continues to be our ministry lead over our women's discipleship groups. They continue to flourish.

We continued with attending the Women's Retreat at Black Lake Bible Camp in October, and we held both a Bunco and game night in the spring.

This summer Shauna Essman stepped down from our team. We are so thankful for her involvement over the last several years. Shauna faithfully persevered and led our team during the covid pandemic. She found creative and God honoring ways of maintaining our ministry. The Lord blessed her efforts and during that time God grew our ministry to what it is today.

2023 Financial Report

By Willie Houze, Treasurer

As Treasurer and a member of the Elim Stewardship Team, we give thanks to God for your continued faithful giving in 2023. Through His never-ending grace we started and ended the year strong and again were able to meet all our financial obligations, including all local and international ministries, and several capital improvements to include starting the working on replacing the worn-out playground equipment!

For 2023, Elim's members approved an operating budget of \$325,838, and giving was \$566 over budget! We also saw an overall increase in giving to the Benevolence Fund and ended the year with a total giving of \$3,414. We met our commitment to Denominational Support for the EFCA as well as provided support to our Holistic Outreach Ministries at home and around the globe.

Unfortunately, we did not have all of the financial worksheets available at the time of this report so we are unable to provide those pages, but they can be made available at a later date.

Thank you again for your giving to the ministry work here at Elim.