

# Annual "Blessing" of the Church Address - 2023 / 2024

by Pastor Tim Dodson  
at JF Believers Church  
in Menomonie, Wis  
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This coming Easter, we will be celebrating the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our church fellowship. Wow. 35 years of turning the world upside down. I look around this room and I see some of you who have begun to come around over this past year or so, and if that's you, I welcome you to this community. However I want you to also realize that there are folks that are beside you that have graced this family with their presence for 10...20...in some cases 30 years! To those individuals, I especially offer up my thanks for your support and backing over all of these past years. We ministered together. We fought the fight side by side.

Throughout those years, we were never seeker-friendly, any more than the Navy Seals are to the rest of the military. That is not to say there is no other legitimate way of "doing church." But from the beginning we knew who we were and what we were called to be. And generally, we knew what we were called to *do*. We never went with the flow or rolled with the crowd. We have always taken the road less traveled and sought to be more than a once-a-week-Sunday-morning meeting. We are an intentional Christian community. We're family.

There have been many over those 35 years who have come into our midst and attempted to absorb our vibe without investment and commitment. Those who wanted to tap into the energy that they see is a reality here but still stand on the outside and fail to materially invest. These folks failed to understand that the energy they desire to absorb exists *because* of the investment, the commitment, the service and prioritizing of the body of believers here. That "vibe" is a by-product of mutual care and involvement. It's because we practice an "everyone-into-the-pool" style of church. Those who stay here do not come to church to get...to *receive* as much as they come to *give* and to *participate*. They have "skin in the game." It is what makes us special. There are plenty of churches around where you can go to church on Sunday occasionally and punch out on your way out the door. This isn't one of them, though some have tried to make it so. They're not here anymore. Because in this fellowship, it is not about *you*. It's about *us*. The body. The community. The *family*. The organic **church**. All to glorify the one true Redeemer and Lord. And in 2024 there are a lot of people who will hate you for it. We have attempted to "afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted."

Few years in our history compare to the one we just passed through. Indeed God has continued to rain down his blessings upon us. I am especially thankful for the pastoral and ministerial community here, for they are the warriors...they are the guys who run *into* burning buildings and most of them would take a bullet for me so I am a rich man having the privilege to serve along side them. The other pastors are the most fired up staff that I have ever served with...Jason, Ben, Jonah... are the unsung heros around here as far as I am concerned. But they are not alone...our community life counseling ministers Jason Haugley and Faye Gilbert making themselves available to you as needed. The church board that hashes out all the decisions we must make. The Ministry leaders and service heads prioritize this family and the kingdom of God in general. How rich we are to have them! Most churches would sacrifice an arm to have just one!

Matt and Susan over the One Life Couples ministry, Pastor Jason and Faye leading the couples ministry, and Ben and Sasha Morrison guiding Street Level...which is definitely no easy task in the current university environment. These ministries were extremely active this past year...doing their own retreats and even missions trips. All of them are busy but always prioritizing people over projects. We baptized 5 people...and dedicated 2, (with more to come) we conducted Ministry classes, disciple classes, and Believers classes each week to keep all of us learning and growing into God's unique calling for each of us as well as the community at large.

The Campus Church under Pastor Ben has really come into its own...holding services every week at our Church House/disciples house. The house serves as our Campus Hub for Street level Ministries, as does the coffeehouse both here and River Falls campus and coffeehouse. We have this year begun a church plant in River Falls under the care of Pastor Jonah and Jess Johnson...Believers church River Falls, and have plans to bring Jonah on paid staff half time in 2024. This will allow Jonah and Jess more time to focus on the ministry over there...church and campus. Thanks also to Shiloh...our intern...for all the time she has dedicated over there and here on our campus.

It's nice to have Brittany and Laura home after 7 years in the mission field. Time to recoup and seek God's calling for future ministries. Pastor Jesse and Chelsey Moss...out of our Duluth fellowship...have gone to the Philippines in a full-time capacity to both oversee and continue to build Street Level campus ministry and also ...for the first time in our church missions history...to plant a church in another country. "Believers Church Cebu." Currently...this past weekend, Street Level Philippines took their first ever missions trip to Bohol to work on and minister at a church there. A significant step to move these young university students out of the bubble of self and into a true and faithful service to King and kingdom.

Our work in India this past year revolved around completion of the translation project ...the Oriya language version of Chuck Smiths Old Testament and New Testament Bible Commentaries, As I speak this morning, the initial printing of 2100 editions are in process. In the next few months we will be making delivery into the state of Orissa, 2000 copies for 2000 pastors! Once that is completed, we will begin again on the next translation project. We are also making major investments in two different churches...finishing one we financed construction on already but needs some real finishing and another one for the same church fellowship in a nearby village. Through all of these foreign church constructions, translation projects, ministry training classes for pastors, university student investments, new foreign church planting, youth summits, extensive radio and TV, know this...your participation in missions is moving the world for Christ. You guys are true players, and I believe that such is one of the reasons God has always blessed us corporately as a church and individually as families that make it up.

Over the past couple of years we have worked to establish a network of outreach Bible study groups in surrounding towns, even beginning a new one in Durand just this last week. 2024 will see us push to utilize these mid-week groups to minister for the kingdom in even a greater degree. We believe in and have invested in this dialogue model for midweek ministry, seeing the crucial need for small groups and discussion based study in order to mature individually as well as a church.

Each service ministry in this community has played a part in both evangelism and discipleship oriented ministry in the past year. Suzie Haugley and her entourage with Word on The Street Magazine...here in Menomonie, River Falls Campus, our Duluth campus ministries, The Philippines, Amsterdam Netherlands, and India too...contributing to and benefiting from that magazine. A truly global reach. One we hope to see continue to grow.

Our radio Station...101.7fm radio operated by Street Level campus ministry and overseen by Carrie O'gara and staff, reach throughout our county and online throughout the world. We hear from countries world wide and know from the stats that even more than we hear, that they are listening. It's a massive amount of work...music, teaching, commercial spots, Christian news, tech and licensing, local perspectives and international, even my daily radio devotions all have to be constantly updated and prep'd. I thank all of you who are involved in that ministry!

Our Creative Ministry is a bunch of artistic folks and they literally have their fingers in every ministry this church has...every ad...every poster...every billboard...every commercial. Andy Dyer heads up that ministry with a bunch of talented individuals. Crucial to all we do.

There is tech ministry with Josh and the volunteers there to keep everything around here ticking and that's harder than it sounds because this church is a high tech operation.

Eric Pederstuen and the video ministry...is there every week producing 2 weekly TV shows, digital media video, online services, as well as making all the weekly Sunday video presentations operate and have correct content.

Our coffeehouse...as always seems to play the hub of all we do around here, creating both fellowship traffic and wider community traffic. Ryan O'gara seems to have been born for the task, and is our full time manager...baking, organizing, overseeing, ministering...indeed it is a major ministry for us to reach out to the campus and city! We continue to operate as a non-profit coffeehouse, where through the sales of coffee, bakery, elite second hand items in the store and leather bags from india, the money raised has drilled 4 fresh water community wells in India so far. Ryan also took over our faith-based addictions gatherings that take place every Thursday evening in the coffeehouse conference room wherein Ryan introduces to the attendees "THE higher power." Over the next year, the radio station will be moved downstairs in order to create a seamless connection between Street Levels presence behind the coffeehouse with that of their presence behind the radio station.

That work...like all the "heavy lifting" around here, will be done by our Nehemiah ministry. Each week these guys come and quietly serve to make everything keep operating. Painting, building, repairing...whatever is needed to keep the infrastructure operating so the rest of us can serve and worship. Thank you to you guys and especially Jason Haugley for the karma that you bring to the group.

Speaking of quiet ministry, Gary and Ang Bowlin have overseen the crew and the work that keeps this church clean and they have done it without complaint for literally *years*. I cannot thank you enough, and please don't ever die because no one else knows how to do it.

Erik and Tiffany have faithfully ministered to our home school group as well as the parents in this fellowship at large. Sarah Huhmann has overseen our childrens church ministry, and has weaved and maneuvered through all of the seemingly constant changes down there.

There are more...each taking their place to see this church move forward...the sound ministry, the worship musicians, the office staff, and more as I have no doubt forgot someone.

We have at least one ...probably more, domestic mission scheduled for this year. Probably 4 or 5 Philippines missions teams travelling to hold Ministerial Training for pastors, summits for youth and for Street Level, service on our radio ministry there and 4 TV stations. Thank you to my wife Sharon for all of the work that she does on booking, airline tickets, travel plans and health issues. We have to keep all ropes and sharp objects out of her reach when she is in full planning mode.

All of this is presented...as a glimpse inside...to the heart and passion of what makes this church what it is. It is absolutely a group effort. Thank you for allowing me to shepherd over the best sheep in the world. Ultimately, the king has blessed us and used us and has guided our steps. May we never grow comfortable...never become satisfied with where we are and what we are doing. Let us continue to turn the world upside down and run the race to the finish. We all can gather on the other side someday and cast our crowns at the feet of Jesus. For He is our 'mo'...and He has allowed us to play in the major leagues when we are in truth just pee wee league players.

God has been good to us. And all of you have made Believers Church a very part of the hand of God. Because you have been faithful and committed...loving and sacrificial. From a simple bible study in a hotel conference room, to all of this. Let us run the race. Let us never quit.