

Speak out!



Making a
BIG
Church Feel
Small

One of the joys of being part of a church like Eastbrook is that there are many different things going on and many opportunities to connect with a wide variety of people.

However, one of the challenges of being part of a church like Eastbrook is that there are so many different things going on and so many opportunities to connect with others that it can feel like a big community where a person could get lost, feel insignificant, or not know whether they are needed or important. Trust me. It can happen. I've talked to people who have felt that way.

What makes the difference is finding your place within that bigger community. We understand that in other places, but it also applies here. We need to find, in my words, a way to make a big community feel small. The best way to do that, I believe, is to find a smaller community or connection within Eastbrook that are "your people." As another pastor friend of mine from Milwaukee likes to say, you have to "get in where you fit in." Or, as a mentor in my life often points out, you have to find "the church of two or three" who is your closest community. That idea arises from Jesus' own words to His closest disciples:

"For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:20)

So, my friends, as your pastor let me encourage you to help this big church become small by listening to the Holy Spirit's leading about where your connection or community is in our midst. Start small. Turn to a neighbor after weekend services to say hello. Respond to an invitation issued in the weekly bulletin or E-News. Stop by a lobby booth to learn more about a ministry or event that piques your interest. Get in where you fit in, whether it's getting connected in a small group or finding a specific avenue to sacrificially serve others. Enter smaller community spaces where you can first be surrounded by fellow believers, working to truly know others and also be known by others.

All through this issue of *Speak Out* we explore what it looks like to make a big church feel small as we walk together as God's people. I hope you are as encouraged as I am by what you read here.



Matt Erickson
Senior Pastor, Eastbrook Church



Denise Fritz and Lydia Alfred serve at the Eastbrook Food Pantry in February 2025. Photo courtesy of Hunger Task Force.

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Making Eastbrook Your Home:

Trying to figure out where to start? At Eastbrook, we like to categorize opportunities under three actions: Connect, Grow, and Serve. You can usually find these listed in our seasonal brochure of the same name (find them out in the Church Lobby!), or on the Eastbrook website (navigate to "Next Steps" on the menu bar). In the meantime, here are some ideas of where to start:

CONNECT:

SMALL GROUP LAUNCH

Sunday, May 4 at 12:30 pm

Small Groups are weekly Bible studies of about ten people, often meeting in homes. This is a great way to walk out your faith together! Learn more at eastbrook.org/smallgrouplaunch.

GROW:

PRAYER WALKING WORKSHOPS

Sundays, April 27-May 18

Each session of this group workshop will include one week of teaching/discussion, followed by a week of reflection and conversation about your experience and takeaways.

SERVE:

MILWAUKEE RIVER CLEAN-UP

Saturday, April 26 at 9 am

We are called to care for creation, join us as we do so together right here at Eastbrook. Visit eastbrook.org/rivercleanup for details and to sign up.



SERVICES Sundays @ 8, 9:30 & 11 am
5353 N. Green Bay Ave. Milwaukee, WI 53209
OFFICE HOURS Monday-Friday, 8 am-4 pm
5385 N. Green Bay Ave. Milwaukee, WI 53209
414.228.5220 · eastbrook.org ·  



CREATED FOR PURPOSEFUL, PLAYFUL CONNECTION

by Jess Eckert

The chill of winter nips tiny fingers clutching tightly to “lovie” in one hand and a caregiver in the other, as the youngest Eastbrooks toddle through the main lobby doors on a Wednesday morning in February.

These are the children Eastbrook calls “Littles”: newborns up through four-year-olds who have just entered early Kindergarten. They’re here for the NextGen ministry’s Winter Playgroup.

Jackets, diaper bags, and sometimes shoes are unloaded on conveniently placed hooks. Upon entering the Orange Room, children come across materials available for more structured activities as well as favorite toys or items they may be familiar with from Sunday morning Nursery or Preschool. They are greeted by Courtney Bryan and her own little, wearing fireman hats and tutus. Bryan is Eastbrook’s Preschool and K4 Coordinator, who says it truly does take a village to raise children.

That’s the purpose of events like this Playgroup: fellowship, connection, and support. Where there is a need, someone can offer up help. God made man and woman and child this way – to crave community! And Eastbrook structured its Littles ministry to provide for just that. They shine a ray of hope through creating inviting and engaging spaces on Sunday mornings, promoting relational growth and development through events like the Playgroup as well as Eastbrook Littles Family Gatherings.

On this particular morning, moms and dads and other caregivers exchange pleasantries and discuss personal and parenting woes and victories amidst attending to the occasional, “I have to go potty!” and “Can I have a snack?” It is beautiful to be able to have a weekly, free activity — and to feel surrounded by others in a similar stage of family life. It’s a small reminder during what can be a challenging time: you are not alone!

Nastassja Bates marvels while watching her son explore and play with other kids his age. She is in awe of him. She is so thankful for the playgroup which provides her son, an only child, time to enjoy fellowship with other tiny humans.

Jouri Frank loves the opportunity for her youngest to have more time to acclimate to the Sunday School space. It can be a hard transition on Sunday mornings, but she knows the more time he spends in the room creating positive memories and meeting and engaging with other safe children and adults, the more likely he will be to stay and play during service. He can build relationships with some of his “classmates” while mom is not too far away.

Kari and JJ Stenitzer have enjoyed meeting entire family units who are in a similar stage of life. Kari said these opportunities have led her to people she has become blessed to know. She exclaimed that one of her daughters’ favorite toys is in the Orange Room and she loves getting to come to play with it.

Once everyone has settled in, giggling reverberates off the walls of a four-foot-tall, red and white striped tent as dozens of dancing toes bounce around, poking each other and peeking out. Moments of silence are followed by unrecognizable babbling and laughter—leading nearby caregivers to turn to each other in their own bouts of laughter, questioning what is going on in that tiny space. New relationships blossom.

Beyond introducing the Littles to the church and kickstarting their journey to knowing God, the hope is that this programming helps families form new connections that can be carried beyond church walls and into each other’s hearts and homes. One Eastbrook mom began a relationship with a fellow mom here at this playgroup event, which led to their own playdates. It is amazing what God can do when people are brought together. Parents can support one another through listening, praying, hosting playdates, or babysitting for one another. Children can learn from each other, have opportunities to practice interpersonal skills, and see the value their parents place on connection. God sees parents and caregivers in close proximity, being pushed to their limits, and still choosing to press into others and community.

It is in these mundane moments of parenting littles that our creative God is on display painting a picture of play, community, and joy! I imagine the smile on God’s face seeing His children, big and small, being together—what joy! ■

various decisions, pushing the brakes when necessary, and stepping into crisis situations as needed.

Their task also calls for them to individually cultivate their own life with God through spiritual growth and self-care, as well as praying for the church and ministry on their own, after services, and in their areas of ministry service.

Each year, the group sets its list of priorities. In the coming year, that includes not only prayer, but also fasting — a spiritual discipline the Council itself has dedicated to practice, and will extend an invitation to the congregation, staff, and elders to join in as well. Another priority is to support the senior staff as everyone continues to reflect on Pastor Matt's recent sabbatical; Council members will consider how to act on the reflections and observations he has shared from that experience. Additional priorities continue from previous years, such as continued support of Eastbrook ministries as well as facilities and church operations. The group also hopes to make themselves more visible and understood by the congregation.

WHERE and WHEN does the Council meet? What happens during those meetings — what discussions happen, or what kinds of decisions are made?

The Church Council meets the second Monday of every month for a few hours in the evening. Those meetings involve the following elements:

- Prayer and some form of spiritual encouragement
- Regular reporting from the Senior Pastor and our committees: Personnel Committee, Finance Committee, and Campus Development Committee, plus a report from the Eastbrook Academy Board liaison
- Focused discussions around upcoming areas of ministry or points of concern
- Occasional reports from our staff Ministry Directors to keep us in touch with what is happening in individual ministry areas

At certain times of the year, the Council has regular actions. In January, we have a daylong retreat to prepare for the year, pray, and set priorities together. In June, we approve the annual budget for the church, as our ministry and fiscal year runs August through July. September is when we begin the process for nominating new Council members.

WHY does a church like Eastbrook need a "governing body" like this?

The church needs a governing body biblically to keep us on track with God's truth and purposes for our church, to support staff and keep staff accountable to calling, and also to ensure we are faithful with the resources entrusted to us as a church.

HOW does the action the Council takes impact the different ministries of Eastbrook?

The Council seeks to support the staff in setting ministry direction, but also raises points of attention that we need to address. There is dialogue between the Council and Directors of ministry to provide guidance for the church on certain topics, for example Eastbrook's specific focus on discipleship for the past few years.

The Council also guides the budget direction for the church, which impacts decisions related to ministry priorities, staffing, and resources for our facility.

Eastbrook Academy is a ministry of Eastbrook Church, and therefore held accountable by the Council to the overall mission and vision objectives of the Church. However, as an educational institution, the Academy is a distinct 501(c)(3) organization governed primarily by its own School Board.

Along with our Mission, Vision and Statement of Faith, Eastbrook's Church Council is often guided in their work by the calling outlined in passages including 1 Peter 5:1-4. Please join us in praying over this group of leaders in our community. May they be unified in pursuing God's will for our church, now and in the years to come! ■

MEET THE CHURCH COUNCIL:



WALLY JOHNSON
Council President



MICHELLE BUCK
Council Vice President



GARY SWICK
Council Treasurer



MIKE WEITZER
Council Secretary
& EBA Liaison



BEN DOUGLAS
Council Member



BRIAN DREGER
Council Member



MARTHA HAILE
Council Member



GLENDA MEYER
Council Member



ROBIN TRULEN
Council Member

returning to my apartment building, I was welcomed by several people, including my next door neighbor, Carol. She beckoned me to come sit with her on a couch, and said she needed me to pray. She had just received word from her doctor that a recent test showed a hole in her heart. I took her hand and prayed a prayer of peace, healing and hope — hope that the hole would disappear. She thanked me, without loosening her tight grip on my hand.

We sat for awhile until another resident, a nice-looking lady of Russian descent, rolled by in her wheelchair. Rose engaged me in friendly chatter, eventually commenting on the weather. I said I wasn't looking forward to going up to my room, because I had no air-conditioning.

"Why don't you have an air-conditioner?" she asked.

"Because I can't afford one," I answered.

She abruptly turned her wheelchair around and said, "Follow me!"

Rose led me to a storage room which was empty except for an air conditioner sitting

in the middle of the floor. She explained that a couple who had left the building two years prior had left it there for whoever might want it. Like an angelic messenger, Rose had come along in God's perfect timing. I tried testing the weight and couldn't even move it, but was sure it had been waiting there just for me.

The next morning was Sunday. As people filled up the Eastbrook's lobby, I spied the tallest and strongest-looking man in the crowd, approached him, and told him my "damsel in distress" story: I needed two strong men to carry an air conditioner up a flight of stairs and down a hall to my apartment. He said he had a buddy that could help, and in less than an hour they had the air conditioner installed and running.

That should have been the end of the story, but the unit wasn't doing its job of cooling the apartment. I called the only air-conditioning expert I knew: Jim. He came with an assistant and took the air conditioner to his shop for an overhaul. Two days later, they returned with the now perfectly performing air conditioner. I asked how much I owed him. "Nothing! Just happy to help."

After they had gone, I noticed something under a drinking glass on my kitchen counter. Not only did he not charge me, but Jim had left me five twenty dollar bills.

Two weeks later, I saw Carol in the atrium. She couldn't wait to tell me something.

"Karen, guess what? The hole in my heart has disappeared!"

DO I NEED TO POINT OUT WHO THE UNSEEN, BEHIND-THE-SCENE CHARACTER WAS IN THIS STORY?

Here are the "if's." If Carol hadn't knocked on my door... if I hadn't offered to pray for her... if she hadn't asked me for prayer the second time... if she hadn't kept me on the couch until Rose arrived... if I hadn't talked with Jim to find out he had an air conditioning business... If one tells a story and leaves out the main character, it's not the same story.

I'm grateful for the people who cross my path and for the One who sends them. Praise God, from whom all blessings flow! ■

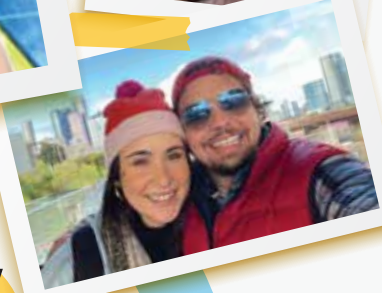
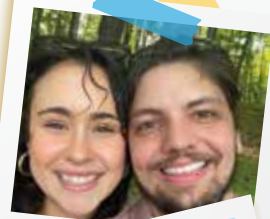
IS IT TIME TO WRITE YOUR GOD STORY?

Every follower of Jesus has a story. Some appear more dramatic and sudden, while others appear more basic and gradual. Regardless, every one of us has a meaningful and important story of our journey with the Lord. Did you know...Eastbrook has a resource to help you pen your own God Story?

The Eastbrook App offers a dedicated space for users to jot down thoughts about their walk with God. If you haven't yet, download the app (visit eastbrook.org/app if you need help!), and click on the "myEBC" tab on the bottom menu. Next, scroll down to the button titled "my God Story." Here, you'll find tips for sharing your account, a few simple questions to get you started, as well as areas to type out your notes!

If, after you've finished, you think you have something to share — let us know! *Speak Out!* is a great place to share your testimony with your wider church family. Or, start smaller: the app itself includes a "Share" button for you to send your story to friends and family.





GET TO KNOW AN EASTBROOKER: Joanna Jotterand

Making a big church feel smaller is literally in Joanna “Jo” Jotterand’s job description. The newest member of our staff took over as Eastbrook’s Small Groups Coordinator at the outset of 2025, and says she is already learning a lot about how God is moving in our community. Let’s meet her!

Welcome to Eastbrook, Jo! Tell us a bit about yourself.

I am originally from Australia — I did most of my growing up in Sydney and my adult life was spent in Melbourne. I moved to America in 2021 to work on my Masters of Divinity through TEDS [Trinity Evangelical Divinity School], where I am in my final semester. I just got married in January! My husband is at the University of Wisconsin Law School, he is Swiss-American and has lived all over the country. The rest of my family live in Adelaide, Australia. We’re all spread out. And my husband’s family is from Switzerland, so we have a very multicultural marriage! Our wedding was really fun watching the three cultures intermingling.

Describe your personal walk with the Lord.

I grew up a Christian. My walk with God has been less a dramatic turnaround and more of Him showing up faithfully, over and over again. It has been learning to trust and just wait on Him. Moving around a lot is not easy, and the way He’s been close through all of that has been a big part of my life. It’s less “I was lost and now I’m found,” but more “I’ve felt lost, but I was always found.”

How did you end up at Eastbrook?

I first came here as a Teaching Assistant for a TEDS class that was hosted by Eastbrook. I had never been to Milwaukee before, and the first night I came was really snowy, after a big storm — I couldn’t even see the lines on the road! I hadn’t had much engagement with Eastbrook after that until I saw this job posted, and thought, I could do that! It felt like a good fit. It helped us discern whether to move to Milwaukee and settle our lives here.

What have you enjoyed most about joining this church community?

I’ve really enjoyed the multicultural element of Eastbrook. Someone is constantly reminding me that I have an accent — some days that’s fun, other days it can be frustrating. And now

being in a multicultural marriage, that is something I hold very close. Being at a church that is so affirming of multiculturalism has been very encouraging. Here, there are a lot of people with different accents and backgrounds, which is really cool. We’ve also enjoyed that Eastbrook tends to have robust teaching, and that’s something that’s really important to me and my husband.

What feels right about working in Small Groups ministry?

I had a background in prison ministry before I came to America. My role was quite administrative, and I longed for the days I would go to the prison or have a prisoner’s relative call me looking for prayer. I wasn’t fully using everything that God was calling me to. That was part of my decision to enter my masters’ program: I felt like God was asking me to do more. This role is a good way to combine my administrative skills with my pastoral skills to be a resource for Small Groups and their leaders.

In your first few months on the job, what have you learned as you’ve been connecting with Small Group members and leaders?

It has been cool to hear ways people see strength in the ministry, ways they hope to see it grow and develop. I see that as really healthy — if people don’t have ideas for change that’s often a sign of stagnation. It’s encouraging that Eastbrookers are engaging with Groups and willing to try things. I’ve also been talking to a couple of our Small Group Coaches about the ways they’ve enjoyed caring for Group leaders, and the ways that they want to see Small Groups get stronger.

As you’re gathering this feedback, have you found any consensus about what existing Small Groups would consider short- or long-term goals for the ministry?

I’m definitely still figuring things out. I think it’s really important to observe and that takes time. I would love to see more groups forming — maybe even some social groups. Sometimes people are stuck in difficult and busy seasons leaving them tired, and they just need connection, not more input. I love that Eastbrook places a really high value on multigenerational, multicultural groups. Groups that are launched are often very diverse; the beauty of that is you are not in a bubble or echo chamber, you’re really experiencing the full body of Christ in your Small Group. So I’m working through, how can we maintain that really good value while also creating new spaces for people to rest?

Similarly, I’ve talked to a few coaches about being new parents — how do you have a Small Group and maintain connection when you’ve just had a baby? I’ve walked the loneliness of that life stage with friends — it is isolating, it’s tough. God doesn’t call us to be a community until we have a baby, and then you’re on your own, and then you come back to the community after the baby is ‘old enough’. It’s the same with people who have medium term drama at work and can’t come home to be in an intensive study — leaving the community until the season is over won’t support long term discipleship.

So in general, I’m thinking through, how can we have some groups that meet the needs of people who don’t have the capacity to have a bible study at night or during the week? They’re two different reasons people maybe can’t maintain an intellectual study, two big needs I’ve seen and am curious to explore. ■

STORY

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

by Karen Cameron-Brook



My “God Story” consists of many chapters, most of them small stories with unexpected characters who cross paths — sometimes briefly, other times repeatedly. God plays the role of the protagonist behind the scenes, bestowing His blessings on each of us.

CAROL

I was just getting used to living by myself in a government-subsidized apartment building in Milwaukee. Most of the residents were poor, elderly, African-American men and women, along with a few Russian Jews. It was three in the morning when I was awakened by a tapping on my door. Talk about scary! I pulled the covers over my head and tried to go back to sleep, but the tapping continued. I tiptoed to the door and peeked through to see a small, fragile woman standing outside my door in her nightgown. I had not met this woman before. Without opening the door, I asked what she wanted.

She was terribly frightened — something was wrong, she said, and she hoped she could talk to me. I opened the door and led her to my recliner. She was shaking. I brought her a glass of water and listened to her description of pain, dizziness, and several other symptoms. I asked permission to pray for her and prayed for peace, comfort, and healing. I offered to look up her symptoms on my laptop. She had never had a computer, and was

amazed I could do that! The internet told me her symptoms were a perfect match to a medication she was taking — common reactions, not dangerous. She was greatly relieved and left to return to her own apartment, a calm and entirely different woman than the one who had knocked on the door.

I too was different. I returned to bed with a sense of peace knowing I had had a “God moment,” an opportunity to help someone in need.

JIM

I am a jazz musician. When I first arrived in town, I looked for performances in restaurants where I could “sit in” with the band. One night at Milwaukee’s Packing House, a keyboardist named Jeff Stoll asked me to sing a couple songs. Next, a trumpet player named Jim joined in. He sounded great! Afterwards, he sought me out, and we talked and talked.

He told me he was making a comeback after years of having retired his trumpet. His “day gig” as owner of an air-conditioning company had consumed all of his time until a serious heart condition stopped him in his tracks. Suddenly, he had time on his hands, time to reflect upon his life. In order to stave off depression and helplessness, he needed a plan. What was missing in his life? He missed music, playing the trumpet that had once been a joy and passion. During

doctor appointments he was directed to blow into a plastic device that would help increase his lung capacity. The idea struck him he could be blowing into the mouthpiece of his trumpet instead! By playing a few long notes in short sessions, Jim recovered his passion for playing. He was happily on the road to recovering his health. I was happy for him.

Jim asked about my life. I told him my story, beginning with my husband dying of cancer and ending with a troubled second marriage that left me with debts impossible to pay. I shared the good news of a former high school classmate and his wife who had offered me a room in their Milwaukee home, the three part-time jobs I was able to cobble together, and my path toward getting my own apartment and recovering my losses.

On what could have been another lonely day, I was blessed to meet a kind musician, willing to swap stories.

I also chose to believe that Jim enjoyed my sympathetic ear and encouraging compliments.

ROSE

That summer, Milwaukee experienced an extreme hot spell, and I was without an air conditioner. I spent sleepless nights in bed, holding two cold Coke cans from the refrigerator to stay cool, escaping the heat during the day by shopping in an air-conditioned grocery store. Upon



WISE COUNSEL

An Interview With Pastor Matt Erickson & Council President Wally Johnson

Every good story follows the “5Ws” guideline.

Whether in conversation with a friend, reading a *Speak Out!* article, or watching the latest blockbuster hit, listeners, readers, and viewers will want to investigate and answer the questions **WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN** and **WHY**.

The story of Eastbrook is best told through accounts of the people who make up its body, including many who have used their God-given talents to propel our community forward, guided by the Holy Spirit, for almost 45 years. One key collection of those leaders is the Church Council. This group of church members, elected by our congregation, serve to keep us on God’s vision, support our staff, and pray for our church.

You may have heard of the Council before, but perhaps you’re curious to know more...and who doesn’t love a bit of “behind-the-scenes” fun?!

We asked Council President Wally Johnson and Senior Pastor Matt Erickson to help us answer the “5Ws” about this group of leaders, to help us get to know...well...**WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN** and **WHY** they do what they do.

WHO makes up the Council? How do they get there, and how long do they serve?

The Council is made up of nine Eastbrook members who are actively involved in ministry, serving alongside the Senior Pastor. These members are nominated by the existing Council, then voted on by the church on an annual basis. Each Council member serves a three-year term that can be renewed once for a total of six years. Members serve staggered terms so that roughly three Council members change per year.

As Council President, Wally Johnson says he approaches his role as a collaborator.

“Council members represent a microcosm of Eastbrook in that we all have been or continue to be involved in leadership levels of various ministries,” he shares. “This practical and in-depth understanding of the needs of the church body as a whole, as well as individuals in the church body is essential.”

Of the group with which he serves, Johnson says he is blessed to work with people who love the Lord, love people, are servant-minded, and humble.

“In the midst of our meetings and interactions, we learn of each other’s battles, victories, and concerns,” he says. “We pray for, over and with each other. We need each other.”

Alongside the sitting president, Eastbrook’s Senior Pastor leads the Council, bringing overall direction as set by the staff Directors team, and facilitating the dialogue between Council and staff.

Eastbrook is also served by group known as Elders who provide additional insight and direction. The Elders consist of former Council members who have served the maximum possible term, continue in good standing, and are actively involved in ministry at Eastbrook. This group meets anywhere from one to three times per year to provide advice and guidance to the Church Council.

WHAT are the Council’s primary responsibilities?

In short, the Council is charged with the spiritual guidance and administrative oversight of the church. That means providing regular encouragement and wise counsel for staff and church on