

## Gustafson, family excited about Gothenburg

Written by Austin Benson

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The Evangelical Free Church has undergone major changes in recent months and those improvements continue with the addition of Rev. Nathaniel Gustafson.

As lead pastor, Gustafson said his main responsibility is to shepherd and present the word of God to the Gothenburg community. To do that, he said he must care for and encourage people.

“I must lead and empower individuals to do the ministry of the church,” Gustafson said.

Since Jan. 1, when Gustafson took over pastoral duties at

E-Free, he said he sought to lead the church in steps of change while continuing its strengths.

“Prior to my arrival we, as the church, didn’t function together,” Gustafson said. “We didn’t deal with relational things and seeing those changes is exciting along with opening the door for a more natural ministry.”

He strives to continue good Bible teaching along with improving areas of youth ministry and helping members of the church to serve and contribute their religious practice to the public.

So far, Gustafson and other church officials and members at E-Free have felt a sense of anticipation stronger than it has been for decades, he said.

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That feeling, in correlation with people in Gothenburg accepting an individual with no ties to the area has had a positive impact on Gustafson and his family, he said.

In accepting the position, Gustafson said he was impressed with the people here, inside and outside the church.

“There was a sense of camaraderie and civic pride in how people treated each other and within the school system,” he said.

Despite being a pastor’s son, and now a pastor himself, Gustafson said he hasn’t always known what direction he was destined for.

Gustafson grew up in Myrtle Creek, OR, and attended Seattle Pacific University.

After receiving a degree in psychology, he spent three years getting his master’s degree in divinity from Western Seminary in Portland.

He spent nine years as a youth and associate pastor at churches in Seattle, WA and Castle Rock, CO.

In 2012, he returned to Oregon to be with his father during a battle with cancer.

After nearly 2 years as a stay-at-home dad, he arrived in Gothenburg.

“I am familiar with the feel of a small town and old buildings,” he said, but noted that his initial reaction was “cornfields.”

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He said it's been an adjustment for his family but there is a connection with the scenery of the area and its people.

After he was named to the job, Gustafson, his wife Tammy and their three children—Samuel 4, Grace 2 and Evan 4-months old—drove from Oregon to Nebraska.

Gustafson said upon arrival Tammy said the relationships of people were a necessity and he has been on a mission to build relationships.

"I want to know everyone now," Gustafson said. "I know there is a learning curve but I want to get there."

His home will be open to visitors or church members for study or just the opportunity to share life with he and his family, he said.

"Getting to know people and hearing stories about them gives me an energy that I really like," he said.

Gustafson can be reached at the E-Free Church Sunday through Thursday 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

[abenson@qwestoffice.net](mailto:abenson@qwestoffice.net)

308-537-3636