

# Northwest FOCUS

God at Work Through Northwest Independent Church Extension

OCTOBER 2024

## Serving ... Until Christ Returns!

At a Missions Conference, a young man recently asked, "What's the purpose and ministry of NICE?" The answer to that question has been powerfully illustrated by the life and ministry of NICE Missionaries Steve and Celeste DeFord. Responding to God's call to plant and establish churches, the DeFord's moved from Maryland to Columbus, Montana to plant the Stillwater Bible Church.



Steve & Celeste DeFord

Meanwhile, in a remote ranching community in eastern Montana, a small group of believers were looking for a pastor. The First Baptist Church of Ekalaka, had begun years previous with a group of new Christians who didn't know much about church but knew that the Lord had brought them out of emptiness. Their desire was to serve and worship Him. So, First Baptist Church began in 1949 with a hand-built podium and tin pie plates for the weekly offering! Then, in 1996, the small but established group of believers contacted the DeFords, asking if they would prayerfully consider being their pastor.

NICE's ministry is to serve and establish churches for the glory of God, and Steve and Celeste felt God leading them to do just that in Ekalaka! During the DeFord's 28 years serving First Baptist Church they have been used of God to begin AWANA Clubs which have brought many boys and girls to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as several of the parents. A Thursday Home Bible Study ministers to the church members and beyond. Each year the Vacation Bible School and "The Days Of '85 Gospel Sing" have been signally blessed of the Lord.

*"There have been building projects and additions during the years, but the church is much more than a building - building up the body of Christ is our greatest passion,"* declared Pastor Steve. He added that *"the Teen discipleship ministry, led by our son Jonathan and his wife Rachel, is going strong and reaching many*



*with the Gospel. They pair real life with in-depth Biblical training, using horse training, and biblical training in a ranch life-style family atmosphere."*

The church is passionate about missions, presently committed to help in the support of 15 individuals and organizations. The church also currently offers ministries for children, youth, families, seniors, men, women, and the community. In fact, Pastor Steve has served as the elected Mayor of the City of Ekalaka - all for the glory of God!

The church, which says it *"reflects the Montana cowboy culture in which they live"*, just celebrated 75 years of ministry in Ekalaka on September 14th and 15th with two days of *"Remembering and Reflecting"* on the Lord's faithfulness to First Baptist Church. What began as a small group, meeting in an old log structure that also served as the parsonage, now rejoices with over 200 people attending. During the time of celebration, Pastor Steve challenged the church body to HOLD FAST TO The Gospel, To Excellence, and To Biblical Authority UNTIL CHRIST RETURNS!



THANK YOU for your prayers and support of NICE! This is such a vital part of the on-going work of reaching people for Christ through the planting and establishing of churches...which is NICE's purpose and ministry!

**So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.** I Corinthians 3:7