**Lanse Evangelical Free Church exists to glorify God**

**by bringing people into a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ**

**through worship, instruction, fellowship, evangelism, and service.**

**The Annual Pastoral Report**

**Pastor Matt Mitchell**

**Year in Review: 2016**

Dear Church Family,

It is a joy to be your pastor. Thank you for giving me the privilege to serve as a shepherd among and alongside you these many years. I am grateful to be able to give an overview of the highlights of the last year from a pastor’s perspective.

If I had to sum up 2016 in a word, it would be “*missional*.” The overarching theme for 2016 was that we, as a church, are “Sent on a Mission.” In our first Sunday message of the year, we went back to the Great Commission to remind ourselves what we are all about as a church. Our message is the gospel, and our mission is to make disciples–people who have a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. We are *sent to be* disciples and *to make* disciples both here and around the world.

This theme of being sent pervaded our ministry this year. Our new Sunday School curriculum, “The Gospel Project,” calls us each week to make missional applications to our daily life. On Mother’s Day, my sermon was about “mission-minded moms” who *mother* disciples of all nations. We tried to envision how *all of our callings* in life feed into this mission. Our youth got a triple-dose of “missionalness” at the 2016 Challenge Conference where the theme was “Live Sent” and the mission was tied to our relationship with the Triune God. Because God is Father, Son, and Spirit, we are a family of servant missionaries. And on Christmas, the last Sunday of the year, we were reminded that *our* mission comes from *Jesus’* mission. Jesus was sent to us so that we might live in Him and love like Him.

And we didn’t just talk about it in 2016, we lived it out. We sent John Forcey and Roper Houston back to Oaxaca to minister to the people there. We reached out to our community with a (rebooted) Wild Game Dinner, Family Bible Week, and Good News Cruise. We sent people each week back into their workplaces, families, schools, and neighborhoods to be salt and light and snap up opportunities to make disciples of the people around them. We continued to offer week-to-week discipleship programs aimed at growing children, youth, and adults in a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. We had a dedicated group of prayer warriors that prayed each Wednesday and also at monthly Harvest Prayer Times, especially for lost people. And we sent thousands of dollars out to mobilize missions near and far–including two new missionary families, the Rosies and the Elias’s, whom our church adopted this year. Read the stories from our various ministries in the rest of this annual report to get a taste of all the ways in which God has been using us in His grand plan. We are learning together to live sent and stay on mission for Him.

As your pastor, I am grateful for each and every one of you, especially those folks who give of their time, treasure, and talents to serve the church in leadership roles. I’m thankful for every elected officer, appointed leader, staff person, and ministry volunteer who sacrifice a lot to see our church family succeed in our shared mission (their names are sprinkled throughout this report but some still succeed in hiding anonymously behind the curtain–you know who you are!). In particular, I’m thankful for our 2016 Elder Team (Bob Gisewhite, John Forcey, Cody Crumrine, Keith Folmar, Curtis Quick, and Rick Sipe) for their investment of heart and soul in leadership, for Marilynn Kristofits with her tireless devotion to “administry,” and to our second year intern, Hunter Galley, who learned a lot of new things about leadership and service last Summer.

It was a joy to have Hunter back for a second year as an intern, especially as it culminated in Hunter preaching his first public sermon. Hunter also led the youth to the Challenge Conference and facilitated a great deal of the work for Family Bible Week. I’m excited to see how the Lord will use Hunter in the years to come.

Our church took on seven new members this year–Mary Shimmel, Cindy Michaels, Joel & Misty Michaels, Don & Linda Carlson, and Rob Kephart. I’m sure the Lord will use them in special ways in the coming days. In spite of our membership growth, our average attendance at worship on Sundays dropped to 139 people (down from 143 the previous year). The highest attended gathering was Resurrection Sunday with 253 people worshiping our Risen Lord.

***Pastoral Ministry***

Here are some of the highlights from the three main areas of my pastoral ministry in 2016:

*Preach the Word*

We finished Romans! After my surgery, it seemed like it might never happen, but we completed our 37 message series on the letter to the Romans in February. In March, we focused on the Cross of Christ with a short series called “Jesus Paid It All.” For the remainder of the year, we returned to our long-term trek through the Big Story of the Bible finding the Lord Jesus Christ in “The King of Kings in the Books of Kings” which I expect we’ll complete sometime early this year. During Advent, we meditated on the prediction of the Messiah in Isaiah 11 and got to contemplate Jesus as “The Root and Shoot of Jesse.” It’s a great privilege to teach and preach the Word of God to you.

In the course of the year, I also got to share God’s Word with the West Branch Fellowship of Christian Athletes, the Time-Out Student Ministry at UP-Johnstown, Hope Church in Spencer Iowa, the West Branch Lenten Luncheon group, the 75th annual conference of CLC USA, the Father & Son Retreat at Miracle Mountain Ranch, and the Deep & Wide Conference at Faith Evangelical Free Church in Deep Creek, Maryland.

I’m thankful that whenever I was out of the pulpit, we had good men it. Keith Maurer, Dave Learish, Henoc Lucien, Chris Grella, Tim McGill, Hunter Galley, Tim McIntosh, Mark Brenner, Donnie Rosie, Jeff Powell, and Ramy Elias faithfully shared God’s message with us on Sundays in 2016.

*Equip the Saints*

A big part of my job is meeting with church leaders to help them do their ministry. It’s not very glamorous activity–attending meetings, listening to concerns, coordinating communications–but the church *is* people, so it’s incredibly important. I’m thankful that I don’t *do* all of the ministry; I help *the church family do* the ministry.

In 2016, I started meeting with a new cohort of church leaders (1 elder, 2 facilities team members) for spiritual leadership training. We are learning together about sound doctrine and biblical counseling principles. I’m excited about the closer working relationship that is developing between the Elders and the Facilities Team and enjoyed attending a good number of the Facilities Team meetings in 2016. And I taught my first preaching class with three eager students.

I also got to equip folks beyond our local church, especially through EFCA-related district and national ministries. In 2016, I continued to chair the Allegheny District Constitutions and Credentials Board, coordinate the Stay Sharp theology conference, and attend a regional pastors’ group. I continued to serve as the book review coordinator for *EFCA Now* for whom I also wrote a book review article on preaching (which referenced Hunter’s sermon). Our own Schenley Pilgram also wrote a book review for *EFCA Now* that I got to coordinate and promote. I continued to serve as a member of the EFCA Spiritual Heritage Committee and attend the EFCA Theology Conference last January in Iowa. Thank you for encouraging me to have a broader ministry on both regional and national levels.

I’m also encouraged that my book, *Resisting Gossip*, continues to be used in ministry internationally, as well. It was already out in English, Spanish, and French, and in 2016, it was translated into Russian and Korean to be made available very soon to readers in Belarus and Korea.

*Shepherd the Flock*

My favorite part of pastoral ministry is walking side by side with people in personal relationships. It’s a great privilege to come alongside you in the good times and in the bad.

In 2016, I had the opportunity to spend personal time with just about every family in the church–whether it be counseling, discipleship, or visitation. My favorite kind of pastoral visit is getting to meet a newborn in the hospital, and we had a big bunch this year including Ellie Quick, Emmory Modzel, Whittaker Crumrine, Luke Negaard, Bentley Lake, Grayson Quick, and Brigan Quick.

It’s not as fun, but it’s just as significant to walk alongside grieving families like those of Aiden Collar, Ed Rinehart, Clair Hampton, Tom Owens, Ray Sankey, and Lois Belko.

In 2016, I also got to officiate at the wedding of Lucas and Ashley Kristofits and baptize both Hunter Galley and Aspen Galley on Resurrection Sunday. What a privilege it is to be a people-shepherd!

***Thank You for Your Prayers***

Thank you for praying for me and for my family and walking alongside us. This year, Heather was diagnosed with fibromyalgia, and we appreciate all of your support and prayers for us as we adjust to these new realities. We’re thankful, especially, for the Pastoral Prayer Team who receive regular email updates and intercede for us at the throne of grace. It’s a joy to be your pastor!

***Vision for 2017***

This year, we are celebrating 125 years of God’s faithfulness to us as a church. Our congregation was founded on February 13, 1892, and we are going to mark this milestone throughout the year.

In February, we’ll eat cake to celebrate our 125th birthday, and then in October we’ll have a special weekend to observe the special anniversary more extensively. President Kevin Kompelien and his wife Becky are going to visit us and bring a special message from the EFCA national office. We will have an open house and some special meetings planned by our church historian and her team. I look forward to a time of remembrance with some of the people who have made us who we are today.

The best way to honor those on whose shoulders we stand is to recommit to the fundamental values that have formed and shaped us as a church for a century and a quarter. I call those values our “Gospel Roots” and plan to preach an episodic sermon series that revisits our spiritual DNA throughout 2017. My hope is that we not only look backward in gratitude but also understand better who we are today and look forward to a gospel-centered missional future.

The first and most central of our Gospel Roots is the person and work of Jesus Christ. In 2017, we are making the same commitment as did the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:2–“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” Whether in upcoming big events such as the Louisiana Missions Trip (March 12-18), Wild Game Dinner with Zeke Pipher (March 18-19), Family Bible Week (July 10-13, 16), and Good News Cruise (August 20) or in the ongoing weekly ministries, in all that we do, we want Jesus Christ to be known and get the glory He deserves.

In His Grip,

Pastor Matt