

Annual report from Pastor Jake Elliott April 8, 2024

Dear church family,

When people ask how things at FMCSB are going, or how my job is going, my default answer has been “this has been my favorite season of ministry at the church so far.” I am grateful for what Jesus is doing amongst us, and feel that the Holy Spirit has been poured out on us when we gather in His name. I am very grateful for our team of pastors, staff, and lay-leaders who have really grown to be like a family through the shepherding of Pastor Colleen. We work well together, encouraging and affirming one another; we do not always agree on everything, but are united in Christ and have learned to communicate well with each other, and even engage healthily in conflict with each other, always striving to find resolution, often compromise, and always a deeper understanding of each other; we are each gifted differently, and this helps us to rely on one another well.

The ministries I oversee are worship, college, and evangelism, as well as being part of the pastoral care team, CDCC chapel ministry, and a small group leader. In this report I will focus on the first 3 areas:

1. **Worship:** much like the excitement and gratitude I have for our pastoral and staff team, I am deeply grateful for and excited about our worship leadership team. Currently 9 worship leaders work together to select and lead the music used for ministry in music, typically working in pairs each given week. Each leader has his/her own flavor of music which they bring to the table in tandem with another leader, in order to create a well-balanced and vibrant worship culture at FMC. We have sought to bring prayer and scripture to the forefront of this ministry, weekly seeking the Holy Spirit’s guidance and asking for His freedom and ministry among our people when we gather for worship. Though we strive for musical excellence, our first priority is opening our hearts to God in honesty, and cultivating gratitude for who He is and what He has done. Our second is reflecting the healthy family that our whole church aims to be, in all areas, and reflecting the fellowship and team-service that Christ commanded of his disciples. And of course we could not make this ministry happen without such a faithful group of musicians and singers, many of whom play at least once—if not twice—a month. We also welcomed 6 new musicians/vocalists to the team in the last year!
 - a. Some highlights from the past year have been 5 original songs written and shared by our own teammates; performances by the Phileo Choir for Advent, Good Friday, and Easter; a young adult worship night, and a service of lament. I also had the privilege of sharing about our church and its worship in a Westmont College worship ministry course taught by our own Dr. Zig Reichwald, and had a hymn arrangement featured in a Westmont Chamber Singers concert.

As a reminder to the church, worship through music is not something that the worship team does, but something the whole church participates in, and brings to God, in both heart and voice. It is a ministry that the Holy Spirit leads and we join in, bringing our utmost, whatever that may mean to the individual. I am grateful to God for how his Spirit is leading us as a worshipping community.

2. **College:** God bless our college students! The focus of this ministry has been making students feel connected at our church. Knowing that the college years are short and sweet (at times), my hope is for students to know the value of being part of a church, and one that values them as part of the church, not just an attender. This plays out in one-on-one coffees, organizing rides for the carless, periodic check-ins, and the occasional college gathering—this spring 14 of us enjoyed tacos and batting cages together. There was also recently a little surf expedition with 6 of us. This is a relational, rather than programmatic, ministry. This is my second academic year in this ministry, and I feel there is much still for me to grow into its organization and mission. But for now, it has been a fulfilling ministry of creating deeper connections between the church and the student.

3. **Evangelism:** This is a strategic plan item proposed by Pastor Colleen and myself, and affirmed by the LBOA. Last spring and fall, a team of 6-7 people met at my house to discuss what specific efforts the church could put forth to begin a specifically evangelistic ministry. While we have several outlets for outreach already, including senior lunch, Fall Family Festival, and invitations to our special services throughout the Christian year, Pastor Colleen and I have discerned a call from God to have a more specifically outreaching and consistent arm of the church for sharing the gospel. The two team gatherings showed that, rather than a flashy new idea, the initiative needed prayer and patience. Pastor Dennis Leon in Costa Rica described church growth to me once as a tomato plant, for which you add one rung of the ladder at a time as the tomato vine grows and needs it – patience, then diligence when the growth requires it. So I decided to start with my own life. How can I lead an evangelism ministry without first having shared the gospel with the people around me who do not know Jesus? So I have been getting to know my next door neighbors on every side, striving for deeper conversation with my barber and the cashier at a restaurant around the corner from my house, and making time to listen those who are vulnerable or without home in my neighborhood, or those who come into the sanctuary from time to time, offering to pray for them. With each of these groups I look for opportunities to share something about Jesus, and do my best to do so when they come. I know that many of you seek out these opportunities as well, that is part of who we are as followers of Jesus. As I learn and grow from these times, I hope to glean new insight for how we might do this together. If you have a heart for evangelism, please come and talk to me. The fact that this ministry is in such early stages gives me such hope, excitement, and a thirst for what God wants to teach us in the area of evangelism.

God bless you, church. I write this from Glasgow, Scotland, where I am half-vacationing with my family, half-working alongside my other church family of refugees who are mourning the death of their lead pastor. This is story for another time, so please come and ask me how you can help and pray for them. I end with this to show just how connected we are in Christ. We are part of a global and beautiful church, which is the bride of Christ.

- Jake