

Annual Business Meeting 2026

State of the Church

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

Speaker: Joel Greenwood

January 18, 2026

Every year for the last few years around this time, sometime in January, I like to take a Sunday morning and have what really is a family meeting or jokingly have called it kind of the state of the church address. This gives me the opportunity to really answer the question that everyone asks, "How are you doing?" Now, if you've ever walked into the church on Sunday morning as I'm standing out there and you shake my hand and you ask me, "How am I doing?" You know my answer is better than I deserve.

Now, that is a true answer. It's always true because of God's grace that He has given me His mercy in my life. I know that I deserve death because of my sins, but God has given me life. But for the next few minutes, let's assume that you are sitting in my living room on my couch, and you truly ask me, "How are things going at the church?" This is how I would answer that question. Right now is an exciting time at the church.

We have been blessed in so many different ways that I can honestly say God is good. But in order to truly answer the question, how is the church doing, we first would have to define what is the purpose of the church? Why do we exist? Why are we here? Now, many of you have heard me say over and over again that our purpose statement, our mission statement at Fairview Missionary Church is helping people take their next step toward Jesus.

Now again, you've heard me say that a million times, but it's more than just a mission or a purpose statement. It is our North Star. It is the question we ask about everything we do at the church. How is this event helping people take their next step toward Jesus? How does this meeting help people take their next step toward Jesus? How is it helping us as staff take our next step toward Jesus?

This is our number one goal, and I believe that Scripture is fairly clear as to what the purpose of the church is, why we exist, what we are supposed to do. It gives us some general guidelines. And I love the fact that the maybe particulars are left up to us so that we can program the best way that we can to help people grow in their relationship with Jesus. So our first example of this is in Acts chapter 2.

We have the early church, and so, of course, it would be good for us to model what the early church did. In Acts 2:42, we read that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer. We read that everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs that were performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common.

They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. And every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes, and they ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people, and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Here in the early church, we see some of the purpose for why they existed.

We see fellowship and the fact that they spent time together. They built relationships with each other. Scripture says they broke bread together. They ate together. They lived life together. We certainly see this idea of discipleship, that they were spending time studying the apostles' teaching, spending time in the Word trying to

grow in their understanding of who God was. We see this idea of ministry or service that they would sell possessions and they would give to the needy, they would give to the poor.

They saw part of their purpose for existence as in helping others, serving others, using their gifts to be a blessing. And of course, we also see this idea of evangelism, this idea of sharing the love of God that we have received with others. The Scripture says that the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. They were obviously going around and sharing about what Jesus had done in their lives.

Matthew chapter 28, Jesus' final words that He leaves to His apostles as He is being taken up into heaven, verse 18. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age." Again, more clear commands verified by Jesus that we are to go and to disciple others, to make disciples, followers of Jesus. We are to share the love of Jesus with how we live our lives and with how we love others. Matthew 22:37, Jesus replied when asked about the greatest commandment, said to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.

This is truly the definition of worship. This is why we exist as a church as well, that we would gather together and we would bring worship to our heavenly Father with every part of our being. And finally, Ephesians 2:10, the apostle Paul says, "For you and I, we are God's handiwork. Created in Christ Jesus, why?

To do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do?" One of our reasons for existence here on this planet is to serve and to minister to others, to use the gifts that we have been given to be a blessing. And so here we see in just these few verses of the New Testament the purpose for the church. Why do we exist?

We exist to worship, we exist for fellowship, to disciple others to help them take their next step toward Jesus, to evangelize, to share the love of Jesus with others, and to serve others. So what does this look like for us? Because that's truly how we would answer the question, how is the church doing? In order to answer that, we have to answer, how are we doing in all of these areas? How personally are we doing in those areas?

As you look at your own life and as I look at my life, are we modeling what God has told us to do? So I want to spend the next few minutes answering that question. How are we doing as a church? Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we come before You. We thank You that You want a personal relationship with us, that You allow us to be a part of Your plan in the lives of others.

And so we humbly come before You, sinners that have been saved by grace, no better than anybody else, but having experienced who you are, we desire to share that experience with others. And so may we be faithful with what You have given to us. And we ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

As you look at the life of the church, obviously one of our main things that we do is our Sunday morning service, our gathering where we come together, and in this time on Sunday morning, we do accomplish all five of these purposes. We obviously spend time in worship through song and study, not just singing, but even this time, when we're spending time in the Word of God, we are worshiping God with our minds.

There's fellowship that takes place in the classrooms as people go to Sunday school classes, in the foyer, as people have conversation. We are fellowshipping with one another. Discipleship is taking place in the Sunday school classes that take place during both services. Discipleship is happening when we're presenting a message to you or a lesson to you as we get into the Word of God and ask the question, who is God and what does He desire of us?

There are service opportunities everywhere on Sunday morning for people to use their gifts to serve others, and evangelism is always at the front of our minds. You need to know that as a staff and as a church, that as we think about our Sunday morning time, we are thinking about those that may be coming into the church that don't have

a relationship with Jesus as we craft our messages, our lessons, our music, even the atmosphere, that those that maybe don't know Jesus would be able to come in on a Sunday morning and they would feel loved, they would feel welcomed, they would feel appreciated, and hopefully this would be a place where they can get the answers to their questions as we try to point them to Jesus.

We have observed tremendous growth in our reach, in our Sunday morning services, and in our classes, and it's been an exciting time for the family. We have new families and new individuals that are joining us every single week that we can minister to. And as a staff, we try to put a name with a face and we try to reach out and love on those individuals. We continue to grow in attendance both in person and online as people get connected.

Pastor Sam and Pastor Mark, along with the worship team, have done an excellent job in leading us before the throne to worship. Every Sunday, I need you to know that as the team is up here leading us in worship, they do not view that time as a performance. They do not see themselves as the worship leaders. They see themselves as the lead worshipers. And that's completely different. And so as they are worshiping up here, they are encouraging us to worship along with them, our Heavenly Father.

We have had 29 baptisms this year of individuals who have made the public proclamation to put their faith in Jesus Christ with even more who are ready to do so. On my desk, I have a list of 10 to 15 people who would like to get baptized, but I'm guessing they want to wait until it warms up outside, all right? I'm willing to do it, but it's going to be cold. We can obviously do it in here. It's a little warmer, but 10 to 15 more that are ready to make that public proclamation of their faith in Jesus Christ.

As a church, we are very blessed with individuals and families who serve at the church and in the community. Every Sunday, we have individuals that come early and stay late to be greeters, to welcome you on the way in, ushers to help you find a seat. We have offer encounters that come in on Monday and take care of all of that for us. We have safety team members to make sure we can gather knowing we're going to be safe, some of whom you see and others you don't see, and that's intentional.

We have many people who work with Fairview kids and Fairview students. We have volunteers every Sunday and Wednesday that serve in the toddler room and the nursery room. And I just want to tell you, if you serve in those areas, you're going to get an extra jewel in your crown, all right? Those are tough areas. We have Sunday school teachers, we have Wednesday night teachers, we have life group leaders, we have one gentleman that I'm not going to say his name so I don't steal his glory in heaven.

But every week throughout the summer, without pay, he comes and mows our entire property. That takes a long time. Sometimes he'll bring one of his boys with them with another mower and they'll do it together, and he does that all for free, takes care of our grass mowing, which takes a long time. We have men's ministry leaders, women's ministry leaders. We have hundreds of volunteers who serve in Bethlehem Marketplace every year so that we can provide that as an event to the community that hopefully helps people take their next step toward Jesus.

And since we always ask that question as we talk about BMP, as we dream about the future, I do want to share with you that as a leadership team, as a staff, that as we ask the question, are our events truly helping people take their next step toward Jesus? As we have prayed through Bethlehem Marketplace, 2026 is going to be our final year of BMP. I know, I knew I was going to hear the gasp, okay? We love doing it.

We're at a place where, yes, it is helping people take their next step toward Jesus, but when you think about the walls of the city, those of us that put up the walls and take them down every year, we're at a place where we would have to redo all of those walls. A lot of the props are in rough shape, and we just think after 35 years, we just want to put on one final big thing for the community. We will advertise that it's our final one, so I assume it will be bigger than what it has been in the past, but just looking for new opportunities to present Christ in the community.

And so we're always asking that question, we've done 35 years, isn't that crazy? 34 years, this will be our 35th year of doing Bethlehem Marketplace as a church, and I think about the thousands that have volunteered over the years to make that happen. We have elders, people that serve at elders in the church. We have our leadership team, which helps make decisions. I'll talk about a little more about that later. We have our cars ministry that is run for people in the church, for widows, and for maybe single mothers that can't afford to do upkeep on their car, and so we have men and women in the church that do that.

We have a ministry called the Caring Closet, which is down in our pole barn, down in the lower-level lot that we kind of just started, we adopted the ministry, that in an area of that barn, we have clothing and toys and materials for families that are in need and hurting. We have people that help out with funeral dinners. We have people that take pictures at events. The team who puts together fun things for our college students so they have a snack to take out during finals.

There are so many different gifts that God has given people in our community to help make Fairview and our community what it is. And this is fulfilling one of the purposes of the church, serving others. And this is just in the church. As I think about things outside of the church that people of Fairview serve in, and they do it for God's glory. We have people that serve on the Steuben County Community Foundation, people that serve with Project Help.

We have the Vine Child Care Center here in town that is teaching children about God. We have those that serve on the Cameron Health Board, people that serve at Trine University, Compassion Pregnancy Center, the TLC House, people that serve at Casa, Ford County Transitional Living, Turning Point. We have Gideon's. We have people in our congregation that serve with this new ministry life-wise. We have people that have been doing our Club B ministry, which takes a bus to the elementary schools so that during lunch, if kids want to hear a lesson about the Bible, they can.

We have people that have been doing that for years and years. We even have things in our community that are spearheaded by people here in our church. One of the great events that takes place around July 4th every year, balloons aloft. You need to know that the majority of the people that run that event are from Fairview Missionary Church. And so I tell you all of that to say as your pastor and as part of your family, I am proud of you. I am proud of you for representing Christ in our community to others, for loving others well.

And maybe if you're here today and you're part of our family and you are not using your gifts to serve our community and to love others well, then can I encourage you to jump in because it's one of the reasons we exist. We are the church and we are called to serve. One of the areas that we want to improve in 2026 is to be more intentional in this idea of discipleship and truly helping people take their next step toward Jesus.

We are excited to strategically put together what we are going to call an engagement pathway that can help answer the specific question, what is my next step in my faith journey? You see, we're all in a different spot in our journey, and so there are different things that maybe we need to grow in or work on. And so we want to create ways to be able to answer that question very specifically, so that if we hear about somebody's spiritual journey and they say, "Pastor, what is my next step?" We can look at that and say, "You know what?

This would be a good area for you to plug in. This would be a great way for you to get involved. We want to serve you better. This will include offering more classes and group options for you to join at different times, hopefully to fit into everyone's schedule, which is nearly impossible, I know. But we're going to do our best to create different times where these things can take place. It will include maybe a time of question and answer with a pastor or a group of pastors where you can come with questions that are personal to you.

Maybe you meet with us individually or even in a group setting to answer your questions. We're currently working through this as a staff and as a leadership team, but we are excited. Due to our growth, we're still

planning on making the necessary changes to allow you to get in and out of the building as easy as possible. I talked about the parking lot. We still plan on doing that.

We missed our window in the fall because winter came too quick, but in the spring we'll be breaking ground on that and we'll be adding parking spaces because I know that getting in and out can be difficult on a Sunday morning, so we want to take that hindrance away and we can't make the parking spots any smaller. Amen to that, we have pretty small-- Yeah, thank you. We have pretty small parking spots as it is. And so we need to add more space. It's just for a convenience, all right? We understand that's how it works.

Obviously, on Sunday mornings, you guys are inviting people to come to church. You are living out evangelism because every single Sunday we have new individuals that are here joining us in worship, and can I just tell you, the best evangelism we can do is through individuals loving other individuals how Jesus modeled. That's the best way we can invite people into a relationship with Jesus is by having a relationship with them, loving them, caring for them, getting invested in their life.

And then you have the freedom when they ask questions to say, "You know what? Can I just share with you a very important part of my life?" Probably the most important part of my life, and that's this person, Jesus. Let me just share with you what that means for me, and you guys are doing that. Many of you already know, but Pastor Sam is going to be moving into, is currently in the role of executive pastor at the church, and he's going to help us in a lot of these things with the engagement pathway and all of the responsibilities that will come.

And so because of that, as a church, we are looking to hire a new worship pastor. I would ask that you would pray for that with us, that you would pray that God would bring the right person to the church that would lead us before the throne of God in our worship. One of the things that I have always loved about Fairview over the last 21 years is how diverse we are in age, church background, and even certain theological bents where people interpret Scripture may be a little different.

I wish that you could stand where I do on a Sunday morning and look out and see what I see. On any given Sunday, you will see 19-year-olds sitting next to 80-year-olds. You will see people who are raised Catholic sitting next to people who are raised Baptists. And that's a big deal. Trust me. And it's great to see as I know your stories. You will see those that would call themselves the Reformed Theology sitting next to those that would have a Wesleyan theology.

And if you don't know what that means, it's probably better that way. But you sit together and you worship together. It is beautiful to me, even though it can make it messy at times, but it is for that reason that if you have been at the church for any period of time, you have heard me use the phrase unity over preference. Now, I know that I say that phrase and I need to clarify, this does not mean that we don't have absolute truths.

There are things that are foundational to our faith that we have to agree on. Things that are foundational to biblical truth. Things like Jesus' perfection, the resurrection, the virgin birth. These would be core beliefs that we have from Scripture, but it does mean that there are many things that you and I probably disagree on that are simply preferences. Things like worship style, decorations in the church, times of the services, types of clothes that we wear.

Those are all things that we don't have biblical mandates for. We have freedom. And so we choose to agree on the essentials, and then we choose love and unity instead of preference on the non-essentials. That's why we preach this, because we are a melting pot of our society. Now let me do a little business because this is kind of our business meeting, and I talked about elders and the leadership team, and then I want to share just some personal stuff over the last year that God has blessed me with.

But since this is our business meeting and I can't get any of you to come on a Sunday night in the middle of winter, I do it now, okay? Just so you know, especially during football playoffs. I know you're not coming tonight, okay? Got some Chicago Bears fans here. So what we need to do, per our bylaws, one of the things that we need

to vote on is those that do serve in our elder roles and leadership team roles. Now, just so you know, those that are elders, how they are defined in our bylaws as we view our elders, these would be the individuals that really are the spiritual fence posts of our faith.

Meaning, these individuals that serve as elders have the authority and the responsibility to keep in check everything that I would say from the stage, anything a teacher would say, anything that our church would say to make sure that it stays in line with Scripture. Does that make sense? It's a checks and balance system to make sure that if we get off the rails or we do anything, that they know the Word of God, that they are studying the Word of God, and they can make sure we are staying within the guardrails of our faith.

So those are the elders. They deal with the spiritual matters of the church. And then the leadership team, along with the elders, make more of the kind of behind-the-scenes decisions, just decisions we have to make, if they're financial decisions, things like that, another system of checks and balances with the church staff. And so, these are the positions. It's one of very few positions at the church that you actually need to be a member, an official member of the church, to serve in those capacities, all right?

So what we need to do now, I'm going to have those that currently serve on the leadership team and the elders, if you would stand up, just so you can be seen. All right, Brian Thomas, Chris El Paso is here. Shelly Miller is back there. Looks like we have three of them. There was more in First Service. I didn't make them come to both services. The only change that we're making this year, Tyler Rugsiger, who was a head elder over the last year, had served two, three-year terms, and that's all you can serve per our bylaws, then you have to take a year off.

So he had served those two terms, and so we needed to fill a position for an elder. And so Jim Myers, who is not here, because he's serving down in North Carolina with Good Samaritan's Purse, he is going to move from a worship representative to an elder, and we're going to replace that position. So that's the only change that's taking place. Jim has been on the board for probably longer than me, all right? So he's been there for a long time. So we have some consistency there. And Chris, where was Chris? Chris is right there.

Chris is now our new head elder. And the reason why I have them stand is so you can see them, because these are also representatives that if you have, I don't want to just say a problem with the church, if you have something you need to share, something you would like to talk with them about, they are always available, they're meant to be around, and if you share something with them, it will get brought to everybody else. That's the whole point of it, all right? And so I want them to be more visible, so next time we do communion, and for a few times throughout the year when we do communion, they're going to help me serve communion, all right? Again, just so you can see them and you know who they are.

So all of that to say, we need to have an official vote with members. So if you're a member, you can answer the question yay or nay, okay, as to whether or not we're going to approve them. If you're not a member, you just get to join us. And if you want to say it, you can too. That's fine. If you want to feel like part of it, all right? So we need to have an official kind of approval of those that are serving on the leadership team and the elders. So if you are a member here, all those that are in favor say aye. All those oppose the same. We didn't have any first service either. OK, good.

So that passes, so Brian's taking notes. He's our secretary, so he is serving in that role. Thank you for that. And thank you for those that serve. They give a lot of time and energy to this, and again, we are who we are because of the people who serve in those positions. So, we are very blessed. One final thing. One of the ways that God has blessed me personally and the church over the last couple of years that has been totally of God is the increased number of trying and college students that are here.

This has opened more doors and opportunities and possibilities for me personally and for the church to minister to college students than I ever thought possible. I cannot tell you how much life this has breathed into me as well

as into our church, and I truly believe that there is something special and different about this generation of students. I truly believe that.

I have had the privilege of doing premarital counseling with numerous engaged couples from Trine because they have come to me and in their own words have said, "They want to start off on the right foot and place Jesus at the center of their marriage." How often do you hear that today? Yeah, you should give them around. Some of them have honestly said, "Pastor, you know I don't want to make the same mistakes my parents made.

They're divorced and life is kind of messy, and I want to start off on the right foot. I want to do things right. I want Christ to be at the center. And so I've had the privilege to walk through premarital counseling with them. And can I just tell you as a pastor, premarital counseling is so much more rewarding and fun than post-marriage counseling, all right? This is the way to do it, and they're doing it right, and so it has been a blessing. During the winter, I also have the privilege and opportunity to go and run at the Ark on Trine's campus. It's their indoor track every day.

And many of the track athletes from Trine attend on Sunday mornings, and it is great being able to say them and just say hi and for them and their commitment to not laugh at me as I try to run. So I appreciate that, all right? Trying students. They just let me do my own thing and they just, you know, they don't ignore me, they're nice, but they just run around me, okay? As I go slower. But it's good. And by the way, for those of you that don't know, the track program at Trine is excellent. They're very good, all right? Some of them probably already ran this morning. Did anybody run this morning?

Yep, see, look at all those guys. Already ran this morning in this cold weather outside, right? Outside, okay? They're very good. They've won national championships over the last few years, and so it is just a privilege to be a part of that and to see them train. This last fall, I had the privilege of baptizing one of the baseball players at Crooked Lake here in town. He came back from summer and he came back to school in the fall, and he said, "Pastor, I need to get baptized." I said, "Well, let's make it happen." So he talked to some of his friends, and we went out on a Sunday evening to Crooked Lake, and 10 of his teammates showed up to support him in this.

So imagine 10 baseball players that are out there, I got to baptize them and cheer them on, and as we were talking, they said, "Yeah, we have a weekly Bible study that's led by the players. The players do this for any player that wants to be involved." And so they do their Bible study, and I just said, "Hey guys, can I come visit one of these Bible studies?" And I kind of bribed them. I said, "I'll take you to Culver's. I'll buy you some ice cream." All right? Shocker, I took them to Culver's, right? So they said, sure, absolutely. So I show up on a weeknight in Culver's.

There's over 20 guys sitting in Culverts. I buy them concrete mixers, and right there in the middle of the restaurant, we have a Bible study with over 20 baseball players from trying. Yeah, it was awesome. And I didn't lead this Bible study. They led it on their own. I just sat there and listened, and there was a gentleman at the restaurant that was so excited about what he saw that he walked up with \$100 bill, and he got ready to give it to the guy that was leading the Bible study, and we hadn't gotten our ice cream yet, and he said, "Hey, here, this is to buy you ice cream." And he was like, "Oh, actually, that guy already did buy us ice cream." And I said, "Well, go ahead and take it and you can use that the next time," right?

But that guy was so excited to see these young men who were pursuing God. And then after the Bible study, all of the guys went out in the parking lot and we put our arms around each other and shared prayer requests and prayed for each other. It's crazy stuff, I'm just telling you. I wish somebody had a picture to take of that, but it has been awesome. We have many ladies here from our women's basketball team. I know we have a couple that are represented, seven in a row, right? Wins, seven wins in a row for the women's basketball team. They're doing very well. I know we have guys from Trine's hockey team, at least the boys team.

I don't know if we have any female hockey players that come. You guys need to work on them, okay? We'll get them here. You know, but just a ton of trying athletes that are here, and it has been amazing. Now let me just

share with you the craziest blessing this last year for me personally. It has been an honor, it has been a blessing, it has been a privilege to be able to serve as the character coach for Trines Men's Basketball Teams through an organization called Nations of Coaches.

And this organization has the goal to have somebody that can be a character coach for every D1, D2, D3 basketball program in the country. Just to be there to love on these guys and encourage them and to be there with the coaches, it's a long, hard season and they put in so much time and so they just want to love on these individuals. One of the blessings for me is that Coach Van der Waal, who is here, his family is here, I won't point him out or make him stand up, but he asked if I would do this.

He contacted nations of coaches, if I would do this. And Coach Van der Waal, the other coaches, the guys, I cannot tell you how welcoming and loving they have been to me. As a pastor that is coming in and allowing me to be a part of their lives, it has been a breath of fresh air for me. I love the opportunities that I have to go to practices, to pray before games. He lets me pray with them before the game and to lead a weekly Bible study with all of those that want to join.

It's optional, they don't have to. It's completely optional, but our group continues to grow. And these guys have been amazing to me. Just a couple of weeks ago, we had our Bible study and some of them invited other friends or guys that used to play basketball, and there's over 20, 25 guys that are optionally coming on a Monday night to go through the Gospel of John with me, and I'm trying to go faster than I'm taking you guys, all right? I don't have five years with them. But we're going through the Gospel of John.

They have asked some awesome questions, we have had some great conversations, and again, these guys are great. These are guys that are just living life. They could be doing anything else. They truly have been amazing to me. They even let me make a fool of myself, and I get to join in on some sprints and weightlifting with them. So thanks for letting me do that, guys. It truly is a great group, and I wish I could do this with all of the teams at Trium, but of course I don't have time for that.

And I know this might be a little weird, but here's what I want you to, I want to ask you guys to do this as a church. I want you to pray for the teams at Trine. Now, specifically, I'm most involved with the basketball team, so if you only have a little bit of time, pray for them first. I'm sorry everybody else. Pray for the basketball team. This is what I want you to pray. I want you to pray that they would be successful, and that all of these trine students that are trying to make sure that God receives the glory, that I want you to pray that they would win national championships.

That's what I want you to pray. All right? I know it's weird, I know it might be awkward, but here's the truth. God cares about each one of these players and each coach. Every single one of them. And we have such a great opportunity to love on them and care for them. Again, they're long seasons. They put in so much time, it's hard to imagine, and trying as NCAA Division III, which means officially they don't get any scholarships for doing this. And so just invest in them. Coach, thank you so much for letting me be a part of that.

It truly is a blessing. So let me close. How am I doing? If you want to know how I am doing, the honest answer is better than I deserve. It truly is better than I deserve. God has blessed us in so many ways. As I look over the last year, I see God's fingerprints all over the place. And I know that I am blessed to be a part of this family of believers as we are part of the larger family of Christ. And I am proud of you.

I am proud to be your pastor. And so I ask you the question, "How are you doing? What has God taught you over the last year as you take time to reflect? What trials have you gone through? What difficulties have you gone through where God once again proved Himself faithful even if it wasn't with the answer you wanted? Some deeper questions you might want to ask, have you been accomplishing what God has gifted and called you to do? What are your gifts?

How are you using those to serve others? How have you grown in your relationship with Jesus? One of the things that I was thinking about as I was preparing this lesson, I'm going to close with this. One of the things they don't prepare you for, and I know I've said this before in ministry school, is that when you stay somewhere long-term, you will end up doing the funerals of those who helped raise you.

And so over the last 21 years, as my wife and I have grown up at the church, as my kids are now growing up at the church, these faithful men and women who welcomed us in 21 years ago, many of them we've lost. And as I do their funerals, I consider it a privilege, I consider it an honor, because we are who we are today because of them, because of their faithfulness.

And so I didn't think of it until it was too late, but starting, you guys remind me, starting in 2027, when I do this in January, what I want to do is from that year, all of the faithful saints that we lose amongst us, I just want to have a short slideshow of their pictures and their names on the screen, so that it's not just me that gets to honor them, but we all get to honor them. So that we can show gratitude. Many of their families still attend, so we can show gratitude to them because we are who we are because of people like them.

And so over this last year, we've also lost many faithful saints, that's for sure. Let me close in prayer. Heavenly Father, You have been so good to us. And I'm not a prophet, I can't see into the future, but there's one thing that I know for certain. 2026 is going to contain things that we had no idea were coming. There's going to be difficult times, there's going to be difficult seasons, there's going to be hard things that we have to face.

But just as we sang the words in that song, you have been faithful through generations. Why would you fail us now? You won't. And so we thank you that you love us and that you walk with us and that you want a relationship with us. We continue to be faithful. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.