

Jonathan West Biographical Sketch

I was born and raised in Lakeland, Florida, in a Southern Baptist family. We church hopped a lot, but always between Baptist churches. When I was in high school, we moved to a small town in southern Georgia, where my mother was born and raised. I finished high school there and went to college at Georgia Tech in Atlanta.

In college, a couple of my friends were involved with a college and young adult ministry at a church near campus called North Avenue Presbyterian Church. I didn't know what a Presbyterian church was, but I was open to finding out. I found that I really felt at home there. I appreciated the emphasis on loving God with your mind, as well as your heart, your soul, and your strength. That church also put a great emphasis on building Christian community. The idea that Christians were called to be in relationship with one another felt deeply and profoundly true to me.

During my last year in college, I was asked to do an internship in the college and young adult ministry at the church. I wasn't sure if I would be a good fit in ministry; I wasn't sure I would be very good at it. I certainly didn't think I would stay in ministry for longer than that year. But over the course of the internship, I felt God pulling on my heart and calling me to ministry. So I decided that I would not try to run from God. I enrolled in Columbia Seminary the next year and, over the next three years, felt God re-affirming my call to ministry time and time again.

After seminary, I served for a time as a youth pastor at Roswell Presbyterian Church in Roswell, Georgia. I headed up the high school ministry, with about 100 high school students. It was a time of transition in the youth ministry leadership at that church, and I was blessed to be a part of the students' lives and guide them through it.

In June, 2013 I started my first ordained call as a solo pastor in Saxonburg, Pennsylvania, a rural community just north of Pittsburgh. In my three years there, I grew a lot in my ministry, finding my voice as a preacher and gaining growing into my identity as a pastor. About a year into my call, I married my wife Becky, whom I met in that young adult ministry in Atlanta. She moved to Pennsylvania with me and has been an incredible source of strength and support.

Becky is originally from Johnston County, North Carolina. So when we started looking for ministry opportunities closer to home, we naturally focused our attention in that area. I was blessed to be asked by First Presbyterian Church in Fayetteville to be their Associate Pastor for Youth and Young Adults. It is a calling that I feel God has prepared me for and led me to. For my wife and I, it is a homecoming. For my ministry life, it is a return to the very roots from which God called me into his service. I feel incredibly blessed.

Jonathan West Statement of Faith

My faith is in the one God who created heaven and earth, who elected and guided the people of Israel, and who revealed himself in Jesus Christ. I believe that the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ is God's central action in history, an action whose effects reach backward and forward to cover the full expanse of time. The person of Jesus –as he is attested in Scripture – is the source of our salvation and the foundation upon which the Christian life rests. Christ is present to us in and through his body, the Church, which is sustained and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Our hope rests in the Triune God, though because of sin we are in constant need of forgiveness and restoration. Our assurance of pardon from sin gives us the freedom to participate in the ministry of reconciliation that we have been given by the Father, who redeems us through the Son and sustains and renews us through the Holy Spirit.

Christ is God's revelation of himself in the form of a human being. He is God's Word to us and Scripture in its entirety is the unique and authoritative witness of that Word. Christ is God's revelation to which we are called to respond in faith. This response of faith is only possible through the Holy Spirit, who allows us to receive God's revelation. The Holy Spirit, by revealing the knowledge of God to our minds and sealing it on our hearts, makes Christ known to us. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit acts within the visible Church on earth by rendering the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper both valid and effective. By empowering the people of God and leading them into lives of mission and discipleship, the Holy Spirit leads the visible Church towards its final reconciliation with the invisible Church. The people of God, though they do not know the day or the hour, live in hopeful expectation of the Day of the Lord, when all things will be made new.

Answers to Ordination Questions

Will you fulfill your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?

To be obedient to Jesus Christ is to place myself in submission to his calling on my life. When Jesus called the disciples, he simply stated, "Follow me." Christ's calling on each person's life reflects his wisdom, not our own. Being obedient to Christ's calling on my life is an acknowledgement of the superiority of his wisdom to mine; an acknowledgement that without the calling and the wisdom of Christ, my ministry is empty and hollow.

As the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ, Scripture is the most reliable explication of Christ's wisdom and will. The confessions of the church, while not authoritative in the way that Scripture is, bring clarity and focus to the message of Scripture. When my heart and mine are closely attuned to both, I am better able to discern what it means to be obedient to Christ's calling on my life.

Will you in our own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?

Of all the ordination questions, this has always elicited the strongest reaction from me. Every time I read it, without fail, I think it is charging me with the responsibility to accomplish the reconciliation of the world. That, of course, is not what it says. But it is a testament to my own human arrogance that I initially read it that way.

The truth is, God does not call me to accomplish complete and final reconciliation in the world. The Apostle Paul reminds us that, in Jesus Christ, God has already reconciled the world to himself. Yet in the process, God has also given us the ministry of reconciliation. I am not given the task of reconciling the world; I am given the task of working to advance the reconciliation that God started and will finish in Jesus Christ. In the midst of a broken world, God does not call me to be its savior, because it has already been given a Savior. God calls me to join Christ's Church in being a witness, in both word and deed, to the reconciliation that was inaugurated in the life, death and resurrection of Christ himself.