

A Message from Lead Minister Candidate Christopher Joiner

Grace to you, and peace. I am grateful for the opportunity to write to you.

My name is Christopher Joiner and I look forward to meeting you and Preaching for the Call at Grace in February.

I was first drawn to Grace a little over six months ago, through a Lead Minister ad I saw in Christian Century magazine. The ad detailed your work, your vision, and your mission and values. I was compelled to learn more. In your video, I heard many diverse voices sharing stories of faith, moments of humanity and wonder with your neighbours, and hopes for the future – along with your needs in a Lead Minister. I felt called to reach out in June 2023.

Since then, I have come to know your search committee members. We have had many discussions about Grace, including needs in the congregation and in the inner-city neighbourhood you serve, as well as your journey from the past to today. I watch Grace online worship, and my wife Kim and I were able to come to Calgary a few months ago for an in-person interview. We were welcomed by the search committee and others with such gracious hospitality. It was inspiring.

I have been a minister in the Presbyterian Church USA and am pleased to say I have been accepted as a minister into the Presbyterian Church in Canada. This was a process I underwent in the fall. Having experienced Grace from afar, I anticipate connecting with you in-person, to worship together and to discern together your Lead Minister Call.

Here is some of my story – I look forward to sharing more and learning yours when we connect at Grace in February.

Peace

Chris Joiner

Bio: The Rev. Dr. Christopher Joiner

Born in Florence, Alabama, Chris was a child of the church from infancy, baptized and nurtured all his life in the First Cumberland Presbyterian Church of Florence. His experience was of a warm, welcoming, and grace-filled church home, a place where he experienced the seeds of a call to pastoral ministry.

Chris left Alabama to attend the only Cumberland Presbyterian college in existence – Bethel College (now University) in McKenzie, Tennessee. Chris met Kim on his first day on campus and they became close friends for two years before they started dating. They were married the summer after graduation and will celebrate 35 years of marriage in the summer of 2024.

Chris enrolled in the Master of Divinity program at Vanderbilt University Divinity School in Nashville, Tennessee. He and Kim moved to Nashville, where he served as Youth Director and then Associate Pastor at West Nashville Cumberland Presbyterian Church. They had their first child, Samuel Caleb, while in Nashville.

A year after graduating divinity school, Chris accepted the call to be Pastor at Colonial Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Memphis, Tennessee. While serving that congregation, Chris and Kim welcomed their second child, Chandler Belle.

After three years in his first full-time call at Colonial, Chris accepted a call to be Pastor of Elliottsville Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Alabaster, Alabama (now First Presbyterian Church (Cumberland) of Alabaster), a suburban community outside Birmingham.

Chris served in Alabama for over six years, at which time he was called to return to Memphis to be the Executive Director of the denominational Commission on the Ministry, working out of the denominational headquarters.

It was while serving in the denominational setting outside parish ministry that Chris sensed the renewal of his calling to the weekly rhythms of congregational life; preaching, teaching, providing care, and leading in a local setting. During this time of discernment, Chris received a call to be Pastor and Head of Staff at First Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) in Franklin, Tennessee, a suburban community outside Nashville. So, after eighteen months in service in the Cumberland Presbyterian Center, Chris accepted the call to change denominations and serve in Franklin as part of the PCUSA. He has served the church in Franklin from 2004 to the present day. While serving in Franklin, Chris earned a Doctor of Ministry degree from Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas.

Chris considers every setting where he has served to have been centered in Christ, seeking to live out the church's calling to be bearers of the good news of God's peace, justice, and radical welcome to all, in word and deed. Each place was filled with grace, leaving a lasting positive impact on his life and the life of his family.

In addition to their two adult children, Chris and Kim have a daughter-in-law (Ryoko) and two granddaughters (Kotomi and Naomi). Our son Caleb and his family live in Tokyo, Japan, and our daughter Chandler lives in Bozeman, Montana.

In addition to serving the church, Chris finds joy in anything done alongside Kim, including walking, hiking, running, taking in music festivals, and enjoying nights out on the town. He loves any time he can get with his children and grandchildren as well. He is an avid reader in almost any genre, with mysteries being his go-to fun read. He is fed spiritually by poetry and tries writing it from time to time. He loves watching American football and the other football as well, especially the English Premier League.