

Welcome,

Reverend Caroline Vinson Dennis

& family



Our Journey to Caroline. . .

With excitement and confidence, the members of the Pastor Nominating Committee unanimously recommend the Reverend Caroline Vinson Dennis to be the next called pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church!

The task of discerning who God is calling to WPC has been a journey of surprises – delightful surprises! As we began, we listened to the dreams and visions of the congregation. We worked to describe for ourselves what we were hearing and what we expected to be true about God’s new pastor for WPC. What we discovered was that God had so much more planned for us than we could have dreamed or imagined.

We are thrilled to finally be able to share Caroline with you. Caroline’s Pastor Information Form (PIF) came to us, not through the Church Leadership Connection process, but by her own desire to seek a call geographically closer to family. After reading our Ministry Information Form (MIF), she found possibility in our expressions of who we are and who we want to be, and she submitted her PIF to us.

Intrigued by what we saw in her PIF - a former teacher with experience in children’s and family ministry, a storyteller, an articulate speaker, one with a passion for mission - we talked with her by Skype.

We were drawn to her warmth, her preparedness for our conversation, her ease at remembering and calling us by name, and even in this brief and distant encounter, we appreciated her forthright questioning and responding . . . we were drawn to her and wanted to get to know her. She sensed in us a church committed to being about God’s grace-filled work among ourselves, in our community, and in the world. It was time to meet face-to-face. When she accepted our invitation to visit, we anxiously awaited this chance for all of us to meet, to talk, to question, to share, and to get to know one another more frankly and more fully.

We were not disappointed. Warm and approachable, prepared and honest, a leader and a learner, visionary of the possibilities and perceptive of the realities, faithful and human -- this is who we came to know as Caroline Dennis. This is the Caroline we came to love and to eagerly desire to be our new pastor at Westminster. We believe God has indeed led us to this place, in this time, and to this pastor and her family, and we believe that you will love her, too!

Claire Kuhl, Co-Chair Flora Hobson, Co-Chair
Elizabeth Watkins Emily Kienker
Len Bornemann

“ Genuine compassion blended with courageous leadership ” Rev. Chris Henry, Senior Pastor

Before she knew us . . .

When asked in her PIF to describe the ministry to which God was calling her, Caroline wrote. . .

In seminary, I learned to be attentive to the small words, the “ands,” and “buts.” My favorite small word is “with.” God was “with the boy.” They ate “with glad and generous hearts.” They “disputed with one another.” May you, “bear with one another,” “live in harmony with one another.”

In the Latin roots of our English language, this togetherness is wrapped up in the prefix, “com.” As in community, communion, companion, commiserate, compassion. I am called to a ministry setting defined by its “with-ness.” Members of this community are pleased to be with one another. They break bread and shoulder burdens together. They vigorously engage with one another in respectful debate. They laugh, cry, dream, grow, learn, and serve... together.

This community delights in the diversity of their assembly, making space for each member to come with their full beautiful and broken selves to offer their beautiful and broken gifts. They welcome a breadth of thought, culture, experience, age, and self-definition.

This community seeks to be with God as we know God to be with humanity, in compassionate care and bold defense for the least among us. Members of this community take the gift of their time together with God and one another into their homes, schools and work. This community draws strength and direction from its connection with the PCUSA and is a blessing to the denomination and to their neighborhood as they live out the witness of their holy, sometimes messy, “withness.”



“ She is creative in teaching & programs. She is a great communicator & well-organized. ”

Dr. Lewis Galloway, Former Head of Staff & Colleague

Through Caroline’s leadership, Second Pres., Indianapolis developed and wrote a unique VBS curriculum. This initiative sparked renewed interest and participation by both children and adults.



Get to know Caroline & family. . .

Formal Education

- * Master of Divinity, 2008, Columbia Theological Seminary, Atlanta, GA
- * Master of Arts in Early Childhood Education, 1996, Oglethorpe University, Atlanta, GA
- * Bachelor of Arts in Religion, 1987, Davidson College, Davidson, NC

Work Experiences

- * Associate Pastor for Children and Family Ministry, Second Presbyterian, Indianapolis, IN
- * Clinical Pastoral Education, Atlanta, GA
- * Elementary School Teacher, Atlanta and Stone Mountain, GA
- * Child Development Center Director, Atlanta, GA



- * Married to Phillip Dennis, also a PC(USA) pastor and Davidson alum
- * Mother to three children, grown daughters Helen and Hannah, and son, Jacob
Helen, graduate of Presbyterian College, resides in Columbia, SC
Hannah, graduate of American University, resides in Washington, DC
Jacob, rising high school freshman, band member and wrestler
- * Enthusiastic storyteller
- * Advocate and leader for child inclusive worship
- * Fan of Montreat and ministry in multiple settings
- * Committed not only to mission outreach, but to mission immersion



Hello Church!

Here we are at the beginning of something new, and yet in the middle of something ancient and trust worthy. God is calling and we are following. God is inviting and we are saying, "yes!" God is promising and we are leaning into the promise. "Beloved! Come with me. I will be with you."

Isn't it fun (and a bit scary) to imagine what God will do with us next? We look back and remember that we have stepped out in faith before, like Sarai and Abram, Moses and Miriam. Like those famous "Sons of Thunder," James and John who stepped out of their fishing boat and onto the road of discipleship. Like the folks who stepped out in faith to plant a new church on Cokesbury Road, and the folks who a generation later boldly and tenaciously held on to her. We look back and remember, that when we have followed, when we have said, "yes," when we have gone where God is going, we have been transformed. We have not only been blessed, but we have been a blessing.

With trembling trust and curious faith, I look forward to the stories we will tell about this time that God called and we followed. God invited, and we said, "yes." God promised and we believed enough to take the next step, to be the church together, blessed and blessing, transformed and transforming, ancient and new.



Caroline's intentional teaching of the meaning and role of the sacraments and sacred practices of our Christian faith are at the core of who she is and how she shares the faith with all ages.

Yours in Christ,

Caroline

“Collaborative spirit, deep integrity, and devoted to the PC(USA)”

Rev. Chris Henry, Senior Pastor

Caroline's Faith Journey...

There has always been church. Gathering us in. Growing us up. Sending us out.

In 1964, my Episcopalian father married my Southern Baptist mother when he was a 38 year-old bachelor and she was a 26-year-old divorced mother of two young girls. After a short attempt to worship together in the Southern Baptist Church, my parents decided to find a church that would be a meeting place between their traditions. They began and finished their church shopping at the church closest to their home, Mt. Vernon Presbyterian Church in Sandy Springs, GA.

This is the church where I was baptized. Where I played with buttons at my mother's knee while she crafted with ladies on Wednesday mornings. Where Milt Hibbard, my fourth grade Sunday School teacher sat us around a Seder Plate loaded with ritual foods and told us the story of the Passover. Where Asa, our pastor, took time to listen to a teen with questions, and ideas. Where the pastor who married us, Carol, introduced us to Jeremiah 29:11, "I know the plans I have for you." Where two of my 3 children were baptized. Where my husband was ordained into pastoral ministry. Where I preached my first really bad sermon... and my first good sermon.

This is the church that sent me to Montreat Youth Retreats and sent care packages to college. The church that asked a young couple to light candles and teach Sunday School.

The church that was a tangible witness to the love and faithfulness of God and a foundation for my own faith, witness and service.

This is also the church that in my childhood wrestled over pastoral leadership. The church where I served on a Pastor Nominating Committee and the Personnel Committee and where I first learned about healthy and sometimes uncomfortable debate among faithful members with differing opinions.

The church that gathers us in and grows us up, also sends us out. As a teenager, I began to feel a call to ordained ministry, but while studying religion at Davidson College (1987), I came face to face with some tough questions of faith, including the breadth of human salvation and the nature of God in the face of a world history that included the Holocaust and a present that included apartheid. I felt that I was ill equipped to answer those questions for myself, let alone for a congregation. So after college, rather than going to seminary, I served as the Child Care Director at Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta.

In 1999, our family moved to Columbia Theological Seminary, so that Phillip could pursue his call to ministry. While there, I was able to be a full-time mom and to audit classes at the seminary. I learned that seminary was a good place to address tough questions of faith, to study how others had wrestled with them over the centuries, and to ultimately leave the working out of salvation in the loving hands of God.



Under the guidance of professors Chuck Campbell and Stan Saunders, and urban missionaries Ed Loring and Murphy Davis, our family stepped out of our comfort zone to volunteer among the homeless at the Open Door in downtown Atlanta. That weekly morning mission shaped our family and broadened our understanding of discipleship. Over the years, I have participated in home-building mission in Mexico, medical mission in the Dominican Republic and co-led a ministry that brought racially and economically diverse children together for a week of camp. Each of these experiences, along with the daily work of pastoral care and teaching have stretched me and shaped my faith and my reliance on God.

Gathered in by the Monticello Presbyterian Church, where Phillip served as pastor, my gifts for pastoral ministry were affirmed and I answered God's call with my "yes" (2008). Two weeks into my first seminary class, we learned that we were expecting our third child. Jacob was born the day after I completed my final exams in May, turning a typical 3-year seminary experience into a four-year, young child enhanced spiritual journey. What a great gift Jacob has been! He is now a thirteen-year-old, drum playing, wrestler. His big sister, Helen lives in Columbia, South Carolina, is a member of Shandon Presbyterian Church, and works for the University of South Carolina. Hannah, our middle child, graduated last year from American University and continues to live in Washington, DC working in the Foreign Service Institute. Phillip is the pastor at Corydon Presbyterian Church in Corydon, Indiana.

In 2009 our family was sent out again. This time to Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, where the church gathered us in and welcomed our ministry. In this church, I have told the story with children at my knee. I have poured the water, broken the bread and served the wine. In this church, I have sat by the bedsides and moderated the meetings. In this church, I have invited and connected, listened and learned, imagined and wondered, equipped and sent, buried and blessed. In this church, I have grown, as a disciple and as a pastor.

And now, I hear God calling again, "Step out. I have prepared a place for you. A place where you will be blessed... and where you will be a blessing. A place where you will lead and serve a people who are gathering in, growing up, and going out in my name."

For me, there has always been and will always be church, witnessing to the God who gathers us in, grows us up, and sends us out.



“Caroline has a heart for service & inspires others. She would exceed with the opportunity to grow further & wider in ministry.”

Mr. Steve Johnson, Church Member

She Believes. . .

I believe in one triune God, both great and good. Great beyond our knowing, and good beyond our deserving.

I believe that God spoke into unordered darkness, calling forth light, and establishing a bounded order in which living things might flourish in interdependent harmony. I believe God generously invites the creation to collaborate in the joyful work of creating, redeeming and sustaining life.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's Word made flesh, by whom we have been redeemed and in whose image we are being formed. In Christ's life we come to know God's compassion for sinners and care for the marginalized. By his death we have come to know the extent of God's mercy and love. In Christ's resurrection we have come to know the power of God over sin and death.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the sustainer of life, by whom we are bound to one another, assured of God's eternal presence and favor, and encouraged for our living as the body of Christ in the world.

Holy Scripture is the inspired word of God. It is, through the Holy Spirit, an authoritative witness to Jesus Christ. It is God's word to me and to the church.

I believe humanity to be formed by God's hand and enlivened by God's spirit. God called a covenant people to be recipients and stewards of divine blessing. The church, a community of sainted sinners, is ordained by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be Christ's body in the world, to show forth the kingdom of God, and to proclaim the good news in word and deed.

Sin separates us from God and neighbor. Sin allows us to think too highly of ourselves. We imagine that we do not need God, or one another. Sin allows us to think too much about ourselves. We do not love God or neighbor. And, sin allows us to think too little of ourselves. We forget the divine image in which we have been created, the sacrificial, redeeming love of Christ, and the breath of the Spirit which sustains our common life.

In baptism, we proclaim that by the gracious mercy of God, we have been claimed as God's beloved children. By the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have been washed free from sin. And, by the Holy Spirit we have been empowered to be Christ's body in the world. While baptism is celebrated once, it is remembered often and defines Christian identity for the individual and the church.

At the Lord's Table, we remember God's provision for all creation and we remember God's saving acts. We remember the many meals Christ shared with his friends and their last meal before his crucifixion. We remember Christ's presence in the breaking of the bread, and we remember Christ's promise that we will be present with multitudes at the kingdom table. At the Lord's Table we are united with God and with one another in common hope and mission.

All of these, creation, written word, the church and her sacraments bear witness to the goodness and glory of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.



WESTMINSTER

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