

Introducing



The
Reverend
Doctor

Corey Nelson

**Submitted for candidacy as Senior Pastor of
First Presbyterian Church, Fort Collins, Colorado**

July 2016

What Was the PNC Process?

The Presbyterian Business of Calling a Pastor

When the Pastor Nominating Committee first met on March 12, 2015, our eyes were opened to a process that would include numerous steps. We were given Presbytery instructions from our regional Committee on Ministry to guide our work. Rev. Dr. Bob Bardeen and Rev. Eric Sunderland faithfully served as our COM liaisons, launching and directing us in the following steps:

- Studying FPC history and the current congregation to guide the contents of a Transitional Mission Study, the first required document on our pathway.
- Developing and distributing the Transitional Mission Study, which describes FPC history, organization, programs, and hopes for the future. This required tool was made available to all FPC congregants and pastor candidates.
- Completing the Mission Information Form, the form advertising the Senior Pastor position to potential applicants and summarizing the mission and goals of FPC, along with answers to narrative questions about our church.
- Acquiring approval of the Transitional Mission Study and the Mission Information Form from Session and COM.
- Reading, reviewing, and evaluating more than 150 Personal Information Forms (résumés) from pastors across the nation, including additional research and listening to sermons.
- Prioritizing and selecting the best-fit candidates for further consideration.
- Ongoing communication with all applicants to apprise them of their status in our search.
- Refining the pool of candidates with Skype interviews and reference checks.
- Coordinating with COM for background checks for each candidate advancing to a site visit.
- Inviting, scheduling, and conducting Fort Collins visits and interviews with finalists.
- Selecting and extending an offer to the chosen candidate and completing a Terms of Call to finalize the details of the call.
- Presenting the candidate to FPC membership for candidacy sermon and congregational vote.

Having completed this process, the PNC is pleased, happy, excited, *thrilled* to present its selection for candidacy for Senior Pastor of First Presbyterian Church Fort Collins. Read the following pages to learn about Corey Nelson and his wife Miriam—we're confident that God will show you what He showed the PNC about His selection to lead our church in its coming years.

Grant Sherwood Sharon Miller Pam Pierce Judy Robison-Bullard
Monte Peterson Marla Maxey Mike Rudd Allison Humphries

Who Is Pastor Corey?

Musician with a Call to the Pastorate

The Rev. Dr. Corey Nelson grew up the youngest of three in Michigan and Washington, playing the trumpet and serving as Drum Major in school. Intending to become a high school music director, he attended Whitworth University in Spokane because of its terrific Music Education program. During this education, God moved Corey from his Pentecostal origins to the Presbyterian church, where he was active in missions as a young adult. Through two years of service as a young adult volunteer in Northern Ireland and West Africa, God revealed to Corey the potential impact of the church in action around the world to bring healing, wholeness, joy, and abundance to diverse communities—and called him to full-time pastoral ministry.

Corey attended McCormick Theological Seminary on a MENSA academic scholarship, where he received awards for preaching and church history, as well as serving as Choral Director and interning at Second Presbyterian Church in Chicago. During and after his Master of Divinity, he also worked for PC(USA) in missions, theater, publications, and education. Officially ordained, Corey's first call as Rev. Nelson was at Community Presbyterian Church, a 650-member congregation in Clarendon Hills, Illinois, where he worked for two years with missions and outreach, Christian education, and worship, as well as serving in leadership roles for national church conferences.

During his next, nine-year call at First Presbyterian Church in Lake Forest, Illinois, Rev. Nelson took his next step to become Dr. Nelson, achieving his Doctor of Ministry through Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary as a member of an inaugural degree program partnered with Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Business. His dissertation focused on best practices for local churches to choose and engage in mission partnerships. As Associate Pastor for Missions at First Presbyterian Lake Forest, a 1,600-member church, Corey led the church's missions organization, its weekly Sunday-evening worship service, its stewardship team, many education offerings, several mission trips, and the entire staff and congregation as Senior Pastor/Head of Staff during a sabbatical term. He also continued to serve as a leader for national church conferences.

Corey is a relational, humble, intelligent, active, caring individual who loves spending time outdoors, who bakes cookies and breaks bread in hospitality, who uses laughter to build community, who enjoys meeting new people and exploring new terrain, and who is excited to join the FPC Fort Collins family in worship of and service to our Lord.



What Makes Corey Our Choice?

God, Worship and Missions, Relationship

“I rely on God for my security, my identity, and my future.”

The first thing the PNC learned about Corey was his dedication to prayer and to God’s will in his life. When we requested a first interview with Corey, his immediate response was to spend a few days in prayer before getting back to us. We were anxious to move forward—but were humbled by his priority to seek the movement of the Holy Spirit. And once we were able to interview Corey, we saw Christ’s presence very clearly coursing through him. Corey wholly loves our Creator and Savior; consistently communicates with the Lord for guidance; seeks a deeper and broader understanding of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and listens and watches for the Spirit’s movement in his life and in the lives of others.

“Worship is the heart of the Christian community.”

Looking at Dr. Nelson’s education and career history, it’s obvious he’s serious about quality worship. He’s passionate about music, liturgy, and preaching that stirs the Spirit within a congregation; and he understands worship to be critical in bringing together community for renewal, proclamation, prayer, transformation, and commitment.

Corey’s experience, training, and skills in the area of worship are impressive. In addition to achieving his Bachelor of Arts in Music Education and, during his Master of Divinity, winning a preaching award and serving as Choral Director, Corey has also coordinated and led worship at NEXT and PC(USA) conferences and seminars, as well as leading alternate worship styles, such as Taizé, a *Longest Night* service at Advent, drama, and global music. Of these, the PNC is most struck by a popular Sunday-night worship service initiated, organized, and led by Corey in creative collaboration with other musicians and laypeople.

As for preaching, Corey has a personal philosophy for sermon scriptures and topics that allows him to present relevant application of ancient text. The PNC considers his preaching to be authentic, Biblically based, academic, contextual, well-developed, and well-prepared.

“We’re not here for good programs. Yes, we should have good programs, but that’s not *why* we’re here. Our primary orientation *has* to be about encountering God and then going out to be the salt and light in our homes, workplaces, and community.”

Corey is dedicated to leading a church to deeper relationship with the Lord such that the congregation is fueled by the Holy Spirit to engage in serving others. In this effort, he holds a strong commitment to meaningful and effective Christian education that forms Biblically literate and theologically articulate individuals—while at the same time being committed to open, intergenerational education. In his years as an associate pastor, Corey has taught adult education forums; organized and led men’s ministry studies and retreats; and provided leadership for grade-school and confirmation education.

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The second part of this equipping effort—serving others—is one of the many places where Corey proves to be a true standout for the PNC. Long before the PNC met Corey in person, it became clear from his application materials that he does not consider missions something *we do* as Christians—it’s who *we are*. So naturally, his missions background is extensive and meaningful. In Northern Ireland, he taught music and tutored in a community seeking reconciliation, returning there recently with the Lake Forest Sanctuary Choir on a mission-themed music tour. In Ghana, he studied culturally relevant ministry and earned a certificate in Cross-Cultural Ministry. In Tanzania, he led three teams working at a school for disabled children.

And as Associate Pastor for Missions, Dr. Nelson has coordinated more than 50 local, global, and national partnerships and managed more than \$600,000 in annual distributions. He also led the reorganization and restructure of all church missions work to achieve efficiency and centralization, including recruiting and training new leadership, implementing new programs for missions education, and initiating an annual missions conference.

“Leadership is like being a jazz band director.”

When it comes to the leadership style of a senior pastor, the PNC heard one word a lot: *collaborative*. Corey, however, gave us a creative image of a jazz ensemble—a team shares core beliefs, and the leader composes within a broad yet clear framework; direction and guidance exist while allowing for new ideas and experimentation; team members are called upon to share individual gifts that create harmony within a larger purpose; and the ensemble succeeds with communication, cooperation, and practice.

Upon investigation, this description holds up. Corey relies on the Apostle Paul’s description of the church body in 1 Corinthians, considering and honoring each person’s gifts and role within the larger framework to accomplish common goals. He prioritizes clear, direct, honest communication and believes in *earning* leadership through a willingness to work, listen, and invest.

The PNC also finds Dr. Nelson’s leadership in the arena of financial management to be sound. He is intelligent, grounded, rational, and orderly, while at the same time being capable of evaluating new circumstances and changing course. The success of Corey’s leadership style and financial management skills is evidenced by his certificate in Nonprofit Management from Northwestern University, his effective management of a large missions operation, his role on two director boards for mission organizations, his growing Sunday-evening worship service, and the important time he spent acting as Head of Staff/Senior Pastor for a large staff and congregation during a sabbatical term.

What Makes Corey Our Choice?

God, Worship and Missions, Relationship

“FPC has a diverse set of beliefs—that’s exciting.”

Because of a diverse denominational experience in Corey’s personal history, he is naturally comfortable among people who feel differently from each other on any given topic and inherently respects others’ perspectives and journeys. A church history of diverse opinions actually *resonates* with him—he views diversity as an opportunity to show the world how we treat one another. Just as the PNC determined for itself very early in its search process, Corey finds value not in resolve, but rather in modeling dialogue for our children and for our community.

“You can’t lead people *off* the map until they trust you *on* the map.”

Change management is always up for discussion in a senior pastor transition. In PNC discussions with Dr. Nelson on this topic, he never failed to bring the conversation back to relationship. He stresses the importance of appreciating what came before, listening to who and where people are, finding common values at the heart of the matter, and moving from there with willingness to assess and try something else in joy. Importantly, Corey also sets realistic goals and expectations that take into account human and financial resources, unexpected problems, and time constraints.

An area where this relationship-first mentality flourished was in Corey’s effort to rethink stewardship. He was recently invited to serve as the stewardship committee’s pastor liaison in order to enact changes to infuse more individual meaning into communications and strategy, knowing that it doesn’t work to speak the same way to everyone about stewardship and that relationship must be developed within financial communication.

“My job is to know and be known by children and youth.”

Corey is exceedingly present with youth and children in the church. He may not be in the specialized position of youth pastor or youth director, but he makes sure to show up for them, to play with them, to laugh with them, to include them, and to know them. He also believes firmly that one of his responsibilities as a pastor is to be a model for church youth and children, to have them watch what following Christ looks like by watching their pastor. As Associate Pastor for Missions, Corey’s recent involvement with youth has revolved around making youth aware of and participatory in church missions work, and he will assuredly bring his high level of presence to the youth and children of FPC.



Who Is Miriam?

Vibrant wife, teacher, runner, foodie, and Christ-follower

Dr. Nelson's other half, Miriam Nelson, grew up the daughter of a Presbyterian pastor in Louisville, Kentucky. She attended Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee, where she attained her undergraduate degree in Religious Studies and Political Science. After several years working as a teacher, Miriam went to Dublin, Ireland for her master's education. She has since continued working as a teacher in San Francisco and Chicago, most recently teaching high school AP History in Lake Forest, Illinois. Alongside her career as a teacher, Miriam has also worked full-time in nonprofit organizations and local churches.

As a life-long Presbyterian, Miriam spent much of her youth and young adult years in youth leadership roles in congregations, as well as leadership roles in the denomination regionally and nationally. She has remained active in the life of her church, participating in Bible studies and fellowship events, working with missions, serving on a Pastor Nominating Committee, and sitting on a General Assembly commission to study and discern the future of the PC(USA) structure.

Upon meeting, Miriam and Corey immediately shared a love of the outdoors, macaroni and cheese, traveling, and laughing in fellowship. They were married at Christmas-time at a historic community center in the Park District of Chicago, surrounded by friends and family drinking hot chocolate and decorating cookies. Their recent travels have taken them snorkeling in St. Croix, watching the Eiffel Tower twinkle in the new year, and hiking the Narrows at Zion National Park.

Miriam is kind, engaging, bright, and active (she even asked the PNC for a break in the interview schedule to train for a triathlon!). Like Corey, Miriam looks forward to walking with both FPC and the Fort Collins community into our coming years worshipping and serving God.





**CANDIDATING SUNDAY &
CONGREGATIONAL MEETING
JULY 24, AT 10 AM
- ONE WORSHIP SERVICE -**



First
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Church

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