

Presenting Rev. Jared Ayers as Nominee for Senior Pastor
A Report from the PNC - First Presbyterian Church in North Palm Beach
June 1, 2020

Fourteen months ago, the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) was formed by vote of the Session and the congregation to pursue God's choice for the next senior pastor of our church. We met almost every week (sometimes more) during that time to review multiple candidates to determine the one that stood above the rest. We believe we have found this person – Rev. Jared Ayers. Before introducing our nominee, we want to share about our process.

Our Process

We knew that a good orderly process was critical to ensure that each applicant was properly vetted and that the nine members of the PNC could come together to agree on our final nominee. This process allowed, and called for, open sharing of differing opinions and open questioning of each other while creating a group exploration of each viable candidate. Our agreements and disagreements served to lead us together towards our common goal. It was an enlivening and exciting process. We began by determining the four foundational qualifications that must be met for a candidate to be considered.

Qualifications

1. A Master of Divinity degree from an accredited seminary
2. Committed to Christian Reformed Theology and ECO Essential Tenets and Confessional Standards
3. Ordained by ECO or eligible for ECO Ordination
4. 5 years of successful experience as a senior or associate pastor in a multi-staffed church

We then created a three-phase process through which we could thoroughly evaluate each qualified candidate.

Phases of Review

1. Phase 1 – Review of resume, cover letter, commitment to ECO Essential Tenets and Confessional Standards, and written responses to three key questions
 - Their faith journey, their call to pastoral ministry, and their vision for the church they will lead as senior pastor
2. Phase 2 – Review of sermons, references, educational transcripts, and an interview with the PNC via Zoom
3. Phase 3 –
 - a. Part one – Candidate completed the ProScan personality assessment to determine the level of match with PNC's JobScan review of the personality requirements of the position. A second Zoom interview was held with the PNC based on learning and questions from this assessment.
 - b. Part two – Candidate completed an ECO Psychological Assessment to determine the level of his/her mental, emotional, and relational health. Candidate also completed a criminal background check.
 - c. Part three – The candidate and spouse visited with the PNC, Lucky & Penny, and Ron & Catherine in North Palm Beach for extensive interviews.

At each of these steps, decision points were reached where a candidate moved forward in the process or was no longer considered. At the end of this extensive process, three candidates emerged at the top of our list. The PNC then conducted a comparison of each of the candidates based on the senior pastor profile we developed.

Senior Pastor Profile

The profile (or job description) was developed in two parts. First, we determined **What** the senior pastor was expected to do. Then we considered **How** the senior pastor was expected to fulfill these duties. As we reviewed each candidate, we considered the unique qualities outlined in this profile.

Job Description – the What	Job Description – the How
<p>Preaching/Worship</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ 2. Coordinates Sunday & special services with Assoc. Pastor & Dir. of Music Ministry 3. Conducts ceremonies (weddings, funerals) 4. Administers the Sacraments 	<p>Compelling Biblical Preaching</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Biblically rooted 2. Puts the Bible into historical context 3. Dynamic/inspirational/relevant (not dry) 4. Challenging listeners with the truth 5. Delivered with humility (I or we vs. you)
<p>Leadership Vision</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strategic direction & planning (pastors, staff, session) 2. Vision casting & implementation 3. Leading teams to move toward the vision 4. Responsible for establishing a healthy, vibrant organizational culture 	<p>Visionary Team Leader</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A visionary leader who works through people and teams to move the entire church forward 2. Ability to envision & implement change 3. Wisdom to know when change is appropriate 4. A collaborative servant leader approach 5. Imaginative thinker/visionary
<p>Teaching/Adult Education</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teaches classes 2. Mentors/disciples others 3. Models what is taught 4. Personal development/study leave 	<p>Facilitator Teacher/Learner</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engages learners in collaborative learning 2. Humble, listens to others, & learns from others 3. Prepared, knowledgeable, & insightful 4. Encouraging while coaching others to grow 5. Creates memorable “hooks” for learning 6. A life-long learner
<p>Administration/Management</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Management of pastors, staff, Session, & committees 2. Moderator of the Session 3. Ex-officio member of all committees 4. Serves the ECO denomination & presbytery 	<p>Delegating Trusting Manager</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to plan, organize, & prioritize 2. Strength focused – sees the gifts of others 3. Aware of the health of the staff & their relationships 4. Able to manage conflict constructively 5. Able to establish positive accountability
<p>Pastoral Care</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participates in congregational care 2. Visitations to hospitals & nursing homes 3. Ministers to people in critical & grief situations 4. Relates well to the congregation 	<p>People-oriented Presence</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Comforting & compassionate 2. Human, vulnerable, & transparent 3. Warm, empathetic, & encouraging 4. Reliable & consistent 5. Good listener 6. Other oriented (not self-focused)
<p>Community Outreach/Service</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Serves as face of FPC to the community 2. Champions outreach to the community (evangelism initiatives) 3. Serves & leads in the community 4. Involved in select community events 	<p>Community Outreach Oriented</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Heart for service & reaching the lost 2. Demonstrates a humble love of Christ 3. Comfortable with non-believers 4. A good neighbor

When this review process was complete, we went through a final decision-making review that led us confidently and unanimously to nominate Rev. Jared Ayers to be our next Senior Pastor.

Introducing Reverend Jared Ayers

Jared grew up in a small town in New Jersey. His father was a pastor and Jared told us that he can remember, as a kid, running around and playing with friends on the church grounds. This is where Jared learned that God loves him and based on this and the teaching of his father, he accepted Jesus as his Savior.

As a college student at Lancaster Bible College, Jared gathered with friends and organically and naturally discussed issues of faith, meaning, and life. He was encouraged by a friend of the family and member of his church at the time to look into ministry as his vocation. It clicked for him shortly after realizing that his passion was to share the truth of Christ, for proclamation, and for mission.

Jared graduated in 2003 with a degree in Bible & Pastoral Ministry and began one month later as the Student Ministries Director in North Carolina at Calvary Church, which had 2,000 members at the time. He served there for two years and then moved to Michigan to serve as the Director of the Next Generation Ministries Team at Central Wesleyan, a church of 3,000 members. Three years later, Jared and his wife Monica founded Liberti Church in Philadelphia, a congregation within the Reformed Church of America. Over the next 11 years Liberti church grew into two campuses, with multiple staff and pastors, and a weekly average attendance between 400 and 500 (out of a pool of 800-900 regular attenders).

Jared is 38 years old and was originally ordained in the Reformed Church of America. Recently, he applied to join the ECO denomination and was approved by the ECO Florida Presbytery to serve as an ECO pastor. Jared and Lucky had conversations around his theology and beliefs and Lucky shared with us that Jared is a uniquely talented writer, theologian, and preacher. We consider this a strong affirmation.

Under Jared's leadership, Liberti Church raised \$6.3 million to renovate an old downtown Philadelphia church to house their main church campus. In 2016, he earned his Master of Divinity degree from Western Theological Seminary located in Holland, Michigan.

In the summer of 2019, after serving Liberti Church for 11 years, Jared decided to go on sabbatical and travel with his family. While away, he and Monica determined that it was time to leave Liberti Church to pursue the next chapter of ministry. Since September of 2019, Jared has served as an Executive Consultant for the American Bible Society. We spoke to several people at Liberti church to affirm that Jared's departure was of God's leading and that he was loved and valued by the people he led and served with at Liberti for so many years. We are confident that this was a strong, God-led move that opened up the opportunity for Jared to be considered for our church.

Jared is a consistent and authentic person. He is the same "Jared" whether he's in the office, at the pulpit, or with his kids and this is how he came across to us. He is a gifted preacher, theologian, writer, and relational leader. Jared loves and appreciates all music and at Liberti Church they use both traditional music and hymns as well as more contemporary approaches as we do here at First Presbyterian.

Introducing Jared's Family

Jared and Monica met in their middle school youth group and started dating in college. They have been married for 15 years and have three children. Monica has a degree in Bible and the Arts and is a professional photographer. She has a website and blog with beautiful pictures.

Their oldest son, Brennan, is 12 and going into 7th grade. He is named after Brennan Manning, one of the first authors that Monica and Jared read together in college. Their second son, Kuyper, is 10 (almost 11) and going into 6th grade. He is named after the theologian Abraham Kuyper. Their daughter, Rae Ann, is 8 and going into the 3rd grade. She is named after Jared's mother, who passed away from cancer while Jared was in college. He wrote an article this past Mother's Day about his mom, and in it you learn more about her as well as Jared's skills as a writer.

When Jared and Monica visited us, we all were still dealing with COVID restrictions, so we could not do all of the social gathering we originally planned. However, Becca and Eddie Nabhan offered to host the Ayers for a "socially distanced" dinner before they met the PNC for the initial face-to-face interview. Here is how Becca shared about their visit together.

While the Ayers were here for their visit, Eddie and I got to have dinner with them on our back porch. One of the things that stood out to us was how comfortable it was to be with them. They asked about us and genuinely wanted to know about our family. And they also connected with our children and, if any of you know our oldest daughter, that can be a tough thing to do. She is introverted and yet she engaged with them easily. Watching her interaction with them made an impact on me. Our conversation flowed easily, and we wished we had had more time with them. Lucky & Penny and Ron & Catherine also had individual time with the Ayers and on listening to their reflections of that time, they also felt an instant camaraderie and warmth. The time went quickly.

The Ayers desire a church that will provide a place for their children and their family to grow. They are hospitable and love having people in their home. They have a desire to build friendships with non-Christians and Christians. They shared with us that they have an intergenerational small group in their home that includes both an older couple, who have become like adopted grandparents to their children, as well as some young college students. Their children are sometimes included in this small group time. At the end of the evening, their two boys walk the older couple home. What struck us upon hearing this was that the Ayers family's values line up with the values that we have set forth here at First Presbyterian: Intergenerational relationships, relationships with people inside and outside the church, and teaching our children the value of both.

From all of this we determined that Jared was certainly qualified, and that Monica and the family are wonderful, but we needed to know if he can do the job in the way we envisioned within the Pastor Profile. After developing the profile, we ranked the six key categories to determine what we considered most important. Though all of them are essential, two of the categories rose to the top – 1) Compelling Biblical Preaching and 2) Visionary Team Leader. We asked the Session to rank these as well with the same results.

Jared as a Compelling Biblical Preacher

In our search, we were introduced to many pastors who can preach and some who preach very well, but Jared is an exceptional communicator. Dr. Tim Brown, President of Western Theological Seminary, shared the following: "I just can't articulate how high I am on Jared ... I have not trained a better preacher than Jared." When reviewing his sermons, we found a man who clearly understands how to dig deeply into Scripture and how to relate it to real life and the culture in which we live. He puts the biblical passage into historical context, allowing us to learn and to apply the teaching. His well-crafted sermons spoke to both our minds and our hearts and we knew that he would ably fill the pulpit at First Pres.

Jared as a Visionary Team Leader

We reviewed this critical category through interviews, key references, and the ProScan/JobScan personality assessment to determine if Jared was the kind of leader that would fit at First Pres. and would not hesitate to lead us forward into the future God has for us.

From our interviews and Jared's references, we discovered a shepherd leader who understands the dynamics of servant leadership and working through teams. Jared is not afraid of change, but he is also appreciative of tradition and the strong culture we have at First Pres. He is a leader who relates well to others, exudes warmth, and knows that relationship must precede trust before leadership can be successful.

Jared's ProScan is a very high match at 82% to our JobScan assessment. He is a self-starter as evidenced by the fact that he started a church 11 years ago in Philadelphia and grew it into a strong congregation with a building, two campuses, and effective programs. Jared's ProScan assessment states that he is one who is "exciting, enthusiastic, and a forcefully persuasive influencer. He enjoys exploring new possibilities and situations. Devotes most of his time and energy to services and products that are people related. Uses an unconventional approach to accomplish goals and uses empathy and enthusiasm to accomplish them." In addition, Jared is "outgoing, friendly, team oriented, and in control through influence and social skills."

We followed up this assessment report with our own interview questions affirming that Jared is the kind of leader who will work with and through others, who likes to collaborate through teams, and who is a visionary, able to see the future and help guide the church toward that vision.

Other Responsibilities from the Pastor Profile

In addition to his strong gifts in preaching and leadership, Jared also meets our other key categories of the senior pastor role.

Facilitator Teacher/Learner

From his writings and his preaching, Jared comes across as someone who is always learning and growing. He has a strong teaching presence that we believe will relate well to all ages.

Delegating Trusting Manager

Jared possesses a gentle shepherd presence with a strength of vision that will allow him to bring both leadership and management to our staff, Session, and other leaders. He wants to work through others while providing guidance, motivation, and accountability.

People-oriented Presence

Jared is relational, warm, authentic, transparent, and desires to listen and learn. Both Jared and Monica speak warmly of their gift of hospitality and desire to reach out to build relationships to share the gospel and build the Kingdom. When asked how he handles tough conversations and confrontations, he clearly demonstrated that he leads with listening.

Jared and Monica are highly relational. They asked us about each of our own personal backgrounds and First Pres's impressive history before we asked the first questions of them. This trait is the first step in building long term relationships. In regard to pastoral care, Jared believes a senior pastor should take the lead with member visitation to hospitals and nursing homes. It is during these times of illness that families become open to the gospel.

Community Outreach Oriented

Jared desires to get to know our local culture and to be involved in the fabric of our community. He believes the senior pastor should be the lead missionary in the context of the community, creating opportunities to show hospitality, and developing partnerships and connections as a presence to neighbors.

Jared and the Staff at First Pres

Jared has an exceptional, visionary presence as a leader. He is incredibly articulate but, most importantly, he has a nurturing, shepherd presence. He is extremely gifted, yet he is humble and real. He is sensitive to the longevity of our staff at First Pres. He is aware of our history of relational ministry and we believe he will seek to develop a unified staff culture, so that discipleship happens first with staff and flows outward. He will be sensitive to and deal well with the different personalities of the staff. He is a compassionate, engaging listener but also confident to challenge staff in constructive ways that honor the Lord. He desires to know the First Pres staff, staff culture, and their families. He is aware that he is entering a story that is ongoing and expressed a desire to be a shepherd to those who shepherd others via regular one-on-one meetings with direct reports, quarterly check in goals, and evaluations in place to align staff, promote teamwork, and create unity.

Devotional and Prayer Life

Both Jared and Monica are committed to prayer and personal and family devotional time. They come across to us as people of God who were willing to leave the comforts of home and travel to a new place to start a church where none existed. They were successful in that effort and now they are open to coming to an established church to guide us into our next phase as a church. They know that such an effort can only be accomplished through deep prayer, attention to their marriage and family, and a strong supportive church.

Quotes from Key References

"His teaching is remarkable, captivating, and practical ... he connects with all ages. He has a heart for meeting new people, inviting." -- Elder Barbara Delp, Liberti Church

"A gifted leader ... visionary...he speaks to the broader cultural narrative ... great at developing young leaders." -- Pastor Scott Jennings, Liberti Church

"I just can't articulate how high I am on Jared. He has the savvy to connect with the post-Christian world ... you will see your church grow as Jared and his family connect with neighbors and the community. I have not trained a better preacher than Jared." -- Dr. Tim Brown, President, Western Theological Seminary

"In addition to being a truly gifted speaker, Jared has a way of making people feel special. He was amazing at spotting the new folks in the crowd and making them feel welcome. His friendships run deep, and a couple of his friends have followed him into ministry, serving alongside him at various times. Jared is also a devoted father of three young children and a loving husband who never takes his wife for granted as a partner in ministry." -- Elder Barbara Delp, Liberti Church

"I personally consider knowing Jared Ayers as a friend to be one of the greatest honors of my entire life. He has a unique oratory gift that allows him to weave together Scripture passages and theological texts from centuries ago and present it in context that the modern person can understand. But above all else, the Ayers love people the way they were meant to be loved, the way that Christ loves us. And there is no higher compliment I can give." – Matt Soldano, a congregant at Liberti Church

Conclusion

And finally, the most important part of our process was to depend on God to show us the way. Prayer was an integral part of this whole process as we opened and closed each of our meetings in prayer believing in God's sovereignty and leading, knowing that He would guide the nine of us clearly to His choice for our church. We present our nominee, The Reverend Jared Ayers with excitement and in unanimous agreement to be our next senior pastor.

Respectfully submitted,

Pastor Nominating Committee
First Presbyterian Church in North Palm Beach

Shirley Alley
John Carey
Nick Crisafi
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Bob Johnson
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If you have questions or comments, please feel free to contact us at pnc@firstpresnpb.org