



# First Presbyterian Church

Columbia, Tennessee

PNC Report – October 17, 2010

After considering more than 200 candidates and through much study, discussion and, most importantly, prayer, the PNC has felt led to issue a call. The process has been an incredible experience. We have felt the working of the Holy Spirit leading us to places we were not even looking, moving mountains to help us achieve more than we thought possible in a given amount of time and providing us with a peace in the decisions made that surpasses our understanding.

**The Pastor Nominating Committee is pleased to nominate:**

**The Reverend Joseph Belton Evans  
“Joe”**

**Pastor and Head of Staff  
Columbia, Tennessee**

## About Joe

- Received his Master of Divinity at Columbia Theological Seminary
- Was nominated for the prestigious David H.C. Read Preacher/Scholar Award
- Served as Interim Pastor/Head of Staff and Associate Pastor for Mission and Outreach at Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church in Lilburn, GA
- Led congregation from a \$200,000 budget deficit to \$85,000 surplus
- Led outreach efforts at Good Shepherd resulting in 54 new members in 2009



“Serving a great church is a work taken on despite considerable intimidation. I consider the opportunity to serve you as your Senior Pastor a grave honor, and I look forward to getting to be a part of your lives as one of the great privileges of mine.”

— Joe

# An Introduction to Joe – In His Own Words

I am a native son of Atlanta, baptized at Morningside Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, confirmed and nurtured by First Presbyterian Church of Marietta. Though I dabbled in other traditions, dedicating myself to Christ in at least six altar calls, I rediscovered the Reformed faith and made it my own, realizing that salvation is God's work and not mine.

Before I left Marietta for Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina, I was invited into the Senior Pastor's office at the church. Dr. Speed looked me in the eye and said, "So Joe, you're thinking of becoming a minister."

"Yes sir," I said, thinking my aspirations would make him proud.

He responded with what I heard as a warning: "I want you to take this decision very seriously. As a pastor, you're talking about being a part of every person's most important relationship — the relationship between them and their God."

In that moment I decided I would teach history or something. Anything but become a pastor. I still went on to Presbyterian College. And, despite realizing just how right Dr. Speed was, I still declared Religion as my major.

The summer after my sophomore year in college, I heard God's call again. I traveled with a group on a mission trip to New York City. I couldn't help but be overcome by the sheer size of the homeless population and their dismal to non-existent opportunities for getting off the street and turning their lives around.

While I sat on a subway car by myself, I felt hopeless and powerless. Then a man entered the car. I looked up, and he said, "So what's happening?"

"Well...nothing," I responded.

I gave this answer because I felt like nothing was getting any better. More people are becoming homeless every day and more children are hungry. The subway came to a stop and the man stood up. He looked me in the eye and said, "Well, make it happen."

As a pastor, I believe that we, the Church, "make it happen" by participating in what God is doing, not through "making it happen" ourselves. In Exodus 17 Moses strikes a rock and water comes streaming forth. Moses didn't put the water there, but he had the faith to believe that something as strange as water coming out of a rock was possible.

I believe that water does stream out of rocks: I've seen a church recover from a huge deficit; I've seen men and women recover from life-threatening illness; I've seen convicted felons believe in redemption; I've seen distant fathers embrace obstinate sons.

I didn't do any of that, but I did keep on believing that God could "make it happen." And I still do.



*The Evans Family – Sara, Joe & Lily Evans*

I met my wife, Sara, during our third year at college. We were both Religion Majors (Sara majored in Sociology as well as Religion) and were trudging through one of the required classes for which we shared mutual disdain. I knew I liked her right away, but it took a good bit of charming for her to feel the same way!

We studied together a lot, becoming close friends, before she would ever let me officially take her on a date. We were married the November after graduation; two of our professors presided. I was working as a lawn maintenance man, earning \$7.50 an hour, so starting off on our own took some convincing for both our parents.

I started seminary and Sara started school for her Masters in Social Work. It was a long time before either of us was making any money, so we were married for six years before our beautiful daughter Lily was born. She's now 17 months old, can walk forward and backward, and has recently learned to wash her hands all by herself.

# More About Joe

## What Joe Desires in a Church

An Excerpt from Joe's Personal Information Form

"Our world is not full of truth, so I want to serve a church who speaks the truth. Our world is not full of acceptance so I want to serve a church who models the acceptance of Jesus. Our world is not full of love, so I want to serve a church who loves people the way God loves people. Our world so often pulls people apart, so I want to serve a church who knits people together in a family of faith."

## References' Observations

### Joe...

- Has the natural gifts needed to be a pastor.
- Has a strong bond with the congregation he serves and is very warm and caring.
- Loves and accepts people as they are.
- Is an exceptional person with integrity.
- Has a heart for mission.
- Relates and connects with all ages from children to the elderly.
- Has great energy and enthusiasm.
- Is knowledgeable about the Word and Presbyterian denomination.
- Is scholarly and wise beyond his years.
- Is an excellent listener.
- Is open to learning and not afraid to ask questions.
- Approaches situations and issues thoughtfully and calmly.
- Is capable and experienced in handling adversity.
- Connects the sermon message to real life in words that people can understand and take home.
- Loves God, his family and all God's people.

## PNC Observations

Through our evaluation process, the PNC has discovered:

- We felt a strong connection to Joe in our many discussions, watching/reading his sermons, participating in worship at his current church and interacting in a Bible Study with the PNC, when Joe opened a challenging scripture passage for and with us.
- Joe's strengths closely match the position description the PNC derived from Focus Group input.
- Joe's experiences have prepared him to shepherd our church in both good and challenging times. For example, Joe was able to bring the congregation of his present church back together after a very difficult time AND increase membership and reverse a budget deficit.

### Joe is ...

- Deeply faithful and Christ-centered.
- Rooted in the Presbyterian tradition.
- Warm, approachable and genuine with a good sense of humor and a wonderful smile.
- A storyteller, giving captivating and uplifting sermons, while challenging the congregation to follow Christ's example.
- Committed to getting to know the congregation and understand our needs.
- Not musically-inclined but believes music is a valuable part of worship.
- Committed to open communication and transparency.
- An effective leader who will nurture, teach, challenge and guide us.

### *Members of the Pastor Nominating Committee*

**James Fleming (Chair)**  
**Tonja Potts (Vice Chair)**  
**Megan Bruch (Secretary)**  
**Ed Lancaster (Session Appointee)**  
**Wilmoth Foreman (Diaconate Appointee)**  
**Don Crichton**  
**John Satterwhite**

# Statement of Faith

Rev. Joe Evans

I believe that the Triune God who created this earth has been and is still present in the workings of this earth today. I believe that God's desire to be present in this earth and for God's created people is best evidenced in the fully human, fully God, Jesus Christ who died for my sins and for the sins of all people. To use the words of John Calvin: by the power of the Holy Spirit, we have been "effectually united" to Jesus Christ, and we may therefore look forward to the glory of life eternal.

I believe that the Bible testifies to the truth of our God, the one who delivered the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt, made them a covenant people and brought them into the land. We are heirs to this covenant, and when we turned away our God called us back by speaking through the prophets. This same God fulfilled the covenant through the incarnation of Christ, his death and resurrection. He is the sure sign that the God of creation has redeemed us and sustains us still by the mighty workings of the Holy Spirit.

As a member of the Reformed Tradition, I believe that it is God, present to us by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is working towards the Kingdom. It is only God who can make the promise of the Kingdom a reality.

It has become a tradition among Reformed theologians to offer two essential characteristics of God. James Cone offers "freedom and righteousness," and Shirley Guthrie offers "freedom and love."

The claim that God is always free and always loving is especially important for my personal faith. I have always heard that "God so loved the world that he gave his only son," but to interpret that claim in the light of Guthrie's two essential characteristics helps me to understand that the mighty work of salvation made real through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a gift freely given out of love. This sacrifice was not an obligation, but, above all else, an act of love.

Because God is free God was able to live among us in the person of Jesus Christ, and because God is love, I can know that God wanted to live among us in the person of Jesus Christ. This truth is the most powerful piece of knowledge that is in my head and in my heart, and while this radical freedom and radical love still defies my understanding and remains to some degree a mystery, the truth that Jesus Christ lived and died among us shows God's free love for us and deepest desire that we be reconciled and saved.

I believe that we, the Church, created in the image of God, redeemed by Jesus Christ, and sustained by the Holy Spirit, are called to model this kind of freedom and love through our words and deeds. We testify to the truth of the Gospel when we live the life God has called us to, serving each other, lifting each other up, forgiving each other, seeing each other as blessed children of God, and by modeling our lives, not according to the standards of the world, but by the standards of the Kingdom of God.

