

First Presbyterian Church of Athens

185 E. Hancock Avenue
Athens, GA 30601
firstpresathens.org

Introducing
The Rev. Whitney Booth Lockard



November 12, 2023

A Letter from the Associate Pastor Nominating Committee

Dear First Presbyterian Church Family,

It has been our privilege to serve as your Associate Pastor Nominating Committee over the past fifteen months. We have been on quite a journey to discern who God would lead to us as our new Associate Pastor. We started the process by educating ourselves about our mission through interviews and meetings with our general presbyter, our presbytery liaison, our pastors, chairs of the church commissions, multiple staff members, and other church leaders. With the knowledge the world has been changed by the pandemic, we further attempted to discern what qualities our church members wanted and needed in our Associate Pastor for times such as these. Those qualities included spiritual maturity, compassion, communication skills, and future vision. We looked for a worship leader with interpersonal engagement skills to be a bridge builder and motivator for our members and visitors.

We then drafted a comprehensive ministry information form for the Church Leadership Connection detailing our church and the position in anticipation of receiving applications, and we received a ton of them. Following months of reading and studying applications, interviews, watching sermons, and personal meetings, we are pleased to unanimously nominate Reverend Whitney Booth Lockard for election as the next Associate Pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Athens.

We anticipate your coming to love Whitney and her family as we do. We believe she epitomizes everything our church is looking for in a candidate. Having grown up in our presbytery, she is rich in Reformed theology with wisdom beyond her years. She has been described by references as exceptionally smart with great IQ (intelligence quotient) and EQ (emotional quotient). Upon meeting her, you feel as though you are talking to a friend you have known for years. She will be a great addition and collaborator for Ryan, our wonderful staff, and our members, as well as being a terrific representative of our church in the community.

We express our sincere thanks to you for trusting us with this responsibility. We felt all your prayers throughout this process and are confident God led Whitney to our church.

With peace and love,

Mike Morris, Chair
Jill Hopkins, Recording Secretary

Don Demaria Laura Toney Dick Ferguson Madeline VanDyck Jerry Rogers

Associate Pastor Nominating Committee Statement of Purpose:

The Associate Pastor Nominating Committee of First Presbyterian Church of Athens exists to discern God's will to find the person our church needs for such a time as this. The committee commits to do this work with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.

A Letter from Whitney

Dear friends,



I'm honored and grateful for the opportunity to introduce myself to you all in writing today as the nominated candidate to serve as the Associate Pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Athens. The stories comprising my journey to this point are too many to squeeze into one letter, but I am hopeful that this packet will offer a glimpse of where I've been and how I feel God has called me here. I'm absolutely confident that the journey and history of FPC wouldn't fit in the allotted space either (I've seen the bound book!). Even more, your personal stories and the ways God has moved in and through your lives, calling you to new experiences and opportunities to serve and share God's love in unexpected but wonderful ways – those are the stories I am eager to hear from you all. Hopefully, we'll have plenty of time for that!

This most recent chapter in our shared story is, on my end, a fairly brief one. The Associate Pastor Nominating Committee cannot say the same, as I know their hard work and faithful discernment began long before my name floated into anyone's inbox. Working in Commerce and living next door to my family as Mark and I became parents ourselves has been such a gift, and one we couldn't have predicted. Over the last year, I've been opening myself to consider a new call. I kept my eye on the CLC (Church Leadership Connection) website for ministry opportunities within and nearby our presbytery but didn't submit any materials or take official steps until this summer. Some helpful conversations with good friends, colleagues, and with my husband Mark led me to update my materials and self-refer my Pastor Discernment Profile to First Presbyterian Church of Athens.

Having grown up in this presbytery and knowing the strong reputation of this congregation, tossing my hat into the ring felt like a long shot, but I was intentional and active in discerning what my next steps would be. I was honored to be invited to one Zoom call and surprised to be asked for another! My eagerness and excitement grew as these conversations continued and I started letting myself consider and discern this possibility more seriously, asking myself the questions they were asking me, and answering both with as much honesty and vulnerability as I could.

When the APNC and I were still in those earlier phases of conversation, Mike Morris asked if we had ever worshiped here and encouraged us to do so. This was going to be tricky for me, as I work on Sunday mornings! But one day in September, Mark, Josie, and I snuck onto the back pew at the 8:45 service to worship in your beautiful sanctuary. With Josie standing between us, Mark and I looked at one another during one of the hymns and shared a smiling, teary-eyed nod, as if to say, "Yep." When I was a high school junior making college visits and walking the campus tours with my mom, people kept saying that I would "know" about a school by just setting foot on campus. Worshiping God at FPC felt like that moment for us. However, it was more like a culmination, an experience accompanied by many rich and honest conversations with members of the APNC, the warm welcome we received as visitors, the time we've all spent in prayerful discernment that we would be listening for God's voice in this process above all others, and lots of time reading and learning about the ministries of the church (while feeling increasingly hopeful and excited that I might be a part of them one day). It is far more than a "good feeling" that I have about First Presbyterian Church of Athens – it is, I believe, God's Holy Spirit moving among us and calling us together so that we can do wonderful things in the way of sharing God's great love with each other and with our neighbors.

If the way be clear, I am so looking forward to joining you in this wonderful and challenging work of being and serving God's children in the world together. First Presbyterian Church of Athens may have a 203 years head start on us, but I'm hopeful that Mark, Josie, and I will fit right in. We're excited to be a part of this community that is responding to God's grace, seeking the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, rejoicing in worship, and going forth to share Christ's love with Athens and the whole world. Thanks be to God!

Grace and peace to you,



Whitney

APNC Members Share Thoughts about Whitney

"From our first introduction to Whitney, we immediately knew we were talking to an exceptional candidate who was a great fit for our congregation. The more interaction we had with her, the clearer the call became. Whitney will be a wonderful gift to our church, our members, and the Athens community."

– Mike Morris, Chair

"Whitney is mature beyond her years, yet she easily relates well to every age group. She immediately captured the hearts of every APNC member with her infectious personality and positive outlook. She brings many talents to us, but I am particularly excited because I believe she will be a fabulous connector of people for our congregation and a bridge builder in our community."

– Jill Hopkins, Recording Secretary

"Throughout the entire process of seeking a new Associate Pastor, the committee was focused on finding the best candidate who would help lead our church in this next phase of our history. Whitney Booth Lockard is this person. She brings an array of experiences and a deep spiritual grounding to our congregation. More importantly, she understands our community and the important role our church can play in Athens."

– Don DeMaria

"I have loved the process and getting to know the other members of our committee. I am excited about the future for our church and know that our newest member to the team will be a perfect fit. Whitney is energetic, enthusiastic, and very easy to be around. She will be a great gift to our church."

– Dick Ferguson

"I was impressed by Whitney's gathering direct information about our church and its mission before accepting our call. She contacted each of us and initiated long conversations in emails, phone calls, and in-person meetings regarding her questions and requests for detailed information about a variety of subjects."

– Jerry Rogers

"What stood out to me during the process was Whitney's ability to quickly and easily build connection and relationship. To me, our interviews felt more like coffee house conversations with theology, community and God's love mixed in."

– Laura Toney

"What was evident from the start, something that captured my heart immediately, was Whitney's natural regard, even deep respect, for our probing questions and where the discussions might go and enlighten us all. She truly seemed to delight in the challenge."

– Madeline Van Dyck

What Others Say about Whitney

"Whitney's spiritual grounding, the church that raised her up, the mentors along the way, but in particular her parents, Joe and Susan, were all incredible supports in her formation. Her knowledge of the scripture and theology in general is strong and she is known for seeking the best way to engage in conversation that lets all parties be deeply heard and issues reverently approached."

– Rev. Claire Harris Kramer, MDiv, LMSW, at the Nashville Collaborative Center, Nashville, Tennessee

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"Whitney is incredibly confident and you would love to have her as a colleague on staff. She's wicked smart and has a great sense of humor, is peaceful, establishes boundaries easily, works hard, and reaches across generations. Her empathy is out the roof and she has great buoyancy with a capacity to lean in."

– Rev. Guy Griffith, Associate Pastor, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Nashville, Tennessee

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"I am so thankful for the faithful work of The Associate Pastor Nominating Committee! They have represented you so very well throughout this process, and, relying on the leading of the Spirit, they have brought you an outstanding pastor in the Reverend Whitney Booth Lockard. I know she will serve the First Presbyterian Church of Athens with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love, and I can't wait to welcome her as a colleague!"

– Rev. Dr. Ryan Baer, Senior Pastor, First Presbyterian Church of Athens, Georgia

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"I have found Whitney to be a good listener who seeks wisdom and is solidly grounded in her faith and relationship with God and others."

– Rev. Hilary Shuford, General Presbyter, Northeast Georgia Presbytery



Mark, Whitney, and her parents, Joe and Susan

Rev. Whitney Booth Lockard



Whitney was born in Decatur, GA to Joe and Susan Booth. Right before her 3rd birthday, the family moved to Apple Valley (halfway between Commerce and Jefferson) to the house next door to her father's childhood home. Her parents still live there– Mark, Whitney, and Josie are now in the house next door, where Joe and his three brothers grew up.

Whitney went to Jefferson High School, where she was the drum major of the marching band and played tennis. Her family attended Commerce Presbyterian Church, where Whitney was confirmed and baptized. She was also an active participant in the Northeast Georgia Presbytery, serving on the Youth Council, as well as attending Montreat Youth Conferences, retreats, and mission trips with youth from around the presbytery.

She moved to Nashville as a wide-eyed college student at Vanderbilt University in 2004, where she immediately found a home with Presbyterian Student Fellowship. Whitney earned a Bachelor of Arts in English and Spanish in 2008. Unsure of what her next steps would be, she applied to the Young Adult Volunteer program and spent a year in Seattle, helping lead worship at Mt. View Presbyterian Church, living in an intentional community, teaching ESL, and serving lattes at Starbucks.

Although her call to ministry had felt like such a consistent piece of her life, Whitney had always pictured herself in a non-traditional ministry profession. Applying to seminary felt like a step that, regardless of where it would lead, might help her to find clarity. She moved back to Nashville in 2009 and enrolled at Vanderbilt Divinity School, earning a Master of Divinity degree in 2012. As part of her studies, she held internships at Harpeth Presbyterian Church and The Upper Room, where she continued to work in various capacities for the next few years.

In 2012, Whitney took a part-time, temporary job working in youth ministry at Westminster Presbyterian Church (Nashville) that morphed into full-time and lasted for six and a half years! In that time, Whitney and Mark met, began building their life together, and married in 2017. In 2019, she was hired as the Chaplain and Director of Religious and Spiritual Life at Agnes Scott College. Whitney was ordained by the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee and celebrated her ordination in Sunday morning worship at Westminster as she and Mark were packing the last UHaul to move to Decatur. The years of 2020-2021 brought lots of unexpected change with a move back to Apple Valley, and the birth of Josephine Louise Lockard. Shortly after Josie was born, Whitney accepted the position of Associate Pastor at Commerce First United Methodist Church, where she has overseen multiple age-level ministries and developed programs for intergenerational connection.

Education

Vanderbilt University, Master of Divinity, 2012
Vanderbilt University, Bachelor of Arts (English, Spanish), 2008

Pastoral Experience

Commerce First United Methodist Church (Commerce, GA), Associate Pastor, 2021-2023
Agnes Scott College (Decatur, GA), Chaplain and Director of Religious and Spiritual Life, 2019-2021
Westminster Presbyterian Church (Nashville, TN), Associate Director of Youth, 2012-2019
St. Thomas Hospital (Nashville, TN), Chaplain Extern & Associate Chaplain, 2018-2019
Harpeth Presbyterian Church (Brentwood, TN), Pastoral Intern, 2011-2012

Church and Community Leadership

Church Property Commission, Northeast Georgia Presbytery, 2024
Association of Presbyterian Colleges and Universities Board Member-at-Large, 2020-2021
UKirk Nashville Board Chair, 2018-2019

A Note from Mark

Friends,

Whitney, Josie, and I are thrilled to become part of what God is doing at First Presbyterian Church and in the Athens community through your work and witness. It is with great humility and honor that we thank you for asking our family to join your family.

I grew up in Gurley, Alabama, a small town outside of Huntsville. I grew up an Alabama fan, but I hope you won't hold that against me. After graduating from Martin Methodist College (now UT Martin) in Pulaski, Tennessee, I moved on to graduate work at Vanderbilt Divinity School. I should have met Whitney there, but I didn't. God's timing is a mystery! I finished my Master of Theological Studies after obsessing over Paul Tillich and Flannery O'Connor, ultimately completing my thesis on the Catholic identity of beat poet Jack Kerouac. Not really sure what I should do next, I picked up a gig in the Vanderbilt library system until starting an editing job at the United Methodist Publishing House. I worked there in multiple roles for almost eight years. I met Whitney during that time and we quickly fell in love, began sharing a life together, and got married in the front yard of the house where we would start our family years later.

After the move to Apple Valley in 2020, I felt called to make a change, so I went back to graduate school at UGA and became a teacher. I'm currently teaching English at Jackson County High School, and I feel like I'm doing exactly what I'm supposed to be doing. That's how I see this moment for Whitney. This is exactly what she should be doing and what we should be doing as a family. We have been around the world together, but this move, to this church in this community, feels like the beginning of a unique journey. We cannot wait to know you better and share in the life God is weaving into being right here.

In grace and peace,



Mark



Mark and Josie (2)



Josie



Mark and Whitney

Ten Things to Know about the Lockards



1. Josephine is named for her grandfather Joe Booth (known to Josie as "Pop"), who is turning out to be possibly her favorite person in the world.



2. Mark and Whitney love to travel and did a good bit of globetrotting pre-pandemic and pre-parenthood. Some of their favorite trips have been to Iceland, Norway, and Japan.



3. Mark grew up outside of Huntsville, Alabama and graduated from Martin Methodist College (Pulaski, TN). He also earned a Master of Theological Studies from Vanderbilt Divinity School, where he and Whitney overlapped for a year without meeting.



4. Whitney has seen Taylor Swift perform in concert 3 times over the last decade and would appreciate any leads on obtaining a ticket to the Eras Tour. Will travel.



5. Josie turned 2 in September. At the moment, she loves playing outside in her Cozy Coupe, looking for the moon, watching Winnie the Pooh, and reading Madeline (both of which seem to be on a nonstop loop).

6. Whitney and Mark met in 2015 when they were living in Nashville. They married in 2017 in the front yard of their (now) home in Apple Valley.



7. They spend a lot of summer evenings with Whitney's parents watching Braves baseball. But when it comes to basketball season, Whitney and Mark are all about the North Carolina Tar Heels. If it's mid-March, they're probably talking about their brackets with anyone who will listen!



8. Mark worked as an editor for the United Methodist Publishing House for 8 years. In 2021 he went back to graduate school (at UGA) and is now in his second year of teaching English at Jackson County High School. This year he's teaching 9th grade, 10th grade Honors, and AP Literature.

9. Live music is one of the things they miss most from their years in Nashville, but one of their favorite concert experiences ever happened right here in Athens a few years ago when they saw Jimmy Eat World play at the 40 Watt.



10. Some of their favorite Athens spots include: the Botanical Garden, The Grit (RIP), The Globe, the Greenway at Sandy Creek, The National, and Wuxtry. They're excited to add FPC Athens to that list!



Mark, Josie, and Whitney



Whitney and Josie



Whitney, Josie, and Mark