

## Letter From Blake

Dear friends at First Presbyterian Church of Winston-Salem,

Greetings from the mountains of Western North Carolina! What a joy it is to be called by you and to serve as your next Senior Pastor.

I am a native of Georgia but have called North Carolina “home” since 2009, when my wife, Erin, and I moved to Durham so I could attend Duke Divinity School. During that time, we joined Blacknall Memorial Presbyterian Church, where I began seeking ordination in the Presbyterian Church (USA). After graduation, I worked as a chaplain at Duke Hospital before serving as a pastoral resident at White Memorial Presbyterian Church in Raleigh, where I was ordained in 2013. Since 2015, I have served as the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in the beautiful town of Sylva, NC.

While I have certainly heard of the good work taking place at FPC Winston-Salem over the years, I was not pursuing this position until the co-chair of your search committee, Nathan Hatch, contacted me and invited me into a process of discernment. (I had overlapped with Nathan and Julie’s daughter, Beth Hilliard, and her husband, Jonathan, at Duke.) Since then, I have enjoyed learning more about your church family and the incredible work you are doing in Winston-Salem and beyond.

For example, it is clear to me that you are a community of faith that invites all people to say “yes” to Jesus with their whole lives. I have seen this in your vibrant worship services, your dedication to Bible study and spiritual formation, and your service to so many others, both locally and abroad. As Jesus said, we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love our neighbors as ourselves (Luke 10:27)—and you are doing precisely that.

In his book, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, pastor and missiologist Lesslie Newbigin wrote this: “How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer... is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.” I believe that you are such a congregation, and it will be my honor and privilege to serve alongside you as your new Senior Pastor.

Gratefully, in Christ,  
Blake