

The Pastor Nominating  
Committee Presents the

CANDIDATE FOR  
HEAD OF STAFF

**Shannon  
Johnson  
Kershner**



“That church in Corinth had no idea what their future held. It was scary, I am sure. It was stressful, no doubt. It was challenging, absolutely. And yet Paul kept reminding them time and time again, just as Paul reminds us, that while they did not know what their future held, they did know who held their future. Their task, their collective work, was to do whatever they could to stay open and to say yes. And that is our collective work to do too.” — [Shannon J. Kershner](#)

## To the Congregation from Shannon

Central has a deep commitment to the city and desires to be of use for the repairing of God’s world. You value the centrality of worship and the proclamation of the Word that both embraces tradition but is also willing to be shaken up by the Spirit. You, too, want to be a congregation that walks alongside its staff and listens for God’s hope together. I have admired the vulnerability and the authenticity you have shown throughout this call process, as well as the good humor. I firmly believe that together, we will discern what parts of Central’s rich legacy we want to carry forward with us, what parts we might need to set aside, and how all of us can be reformed and rejuvenated by God’s wildly creative Spirit set loose in our midst.

# A message from the PNC



The PNC met for the first time on January 29, 2022 at Wahoo Grill. We got to know each other over dinner and closed the restaurant down! We were excited to begin our work together and set about developing the MIF (ministry information form). We reviewed the town hall meetings, The Pulse assessment focusing on staff concerns, The Leadership Clarity Check, and the Congregational Assessment Tool. We participated in the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center conflict resolution program and attended the Session's visioning workshop. We met via Zoom with Georgia Tech's Bill Drummond, who had conducted a demographic study of Central. Once the MIF was completed and approved, we began sifting through referrals from the Church Leadership Connection, aka Presbyterian Match.com.

We reviewed self-referrals and those made by congregants and friends of Central. It was a lot (80!), but we understood our process was greatly streamlined by the proliferation of streaming services and online worship archives. For each candidate who piqued our interest, we listened to sermons and delved into church websites to gain some understanding of the context from which they came. We interviewed 6 candidates, 5 of them twice, and invited two candidates to come to Atlanta for in-person interviews.

There were times when we felt great excitement and possibility and other times, especially early on, when we felt as if we were wandering in the wilderness. But we persisted, we leaned on each other, and we listened for the holy spirit (sometimes having more faith that it was present with us than at other times!).

We relied upon prayer, scripture, and encouragement from one another and from our Presbytery liaisons, Chip Blankenship, Mark Roberson, Andy James, and Joy Fisher. We received support and guidance from the session, the finance committee,

the endowment committee and many others. All the while, we felt confident we were heading into a bright future, building on the wonderful work of the congregation, Pete Paulsen, John Semmes, Jasiel Hernandez Garcia and our stellar staff members, notably Mark Wallace Maguire. Once we began engaging in serious conversation with our candidate, the pull of the holy spirit became undeniable. As promised, our mutual discernment was made clear.

“Our God is a God who does not know how to love frugally but who only knows how to love extravagantly . . . who will always replace the stench of death with the sweet fragrance of new life . . . who does not and will never hold back a single drop of God's very self from us or the world.”— SHANNON J. KERSHNER

Thanks be to God!

Now, we are thrilled to introduce you to Shannon Kershner, to whom God has led us. We trust you will be as excited as we are and will warmly welcome her and her family into the life of Central Presbyterian Church.

As for the PNC, we will meet once again this evening at Wahoo Grill to celebrate our work together, honor the bond we have formed with each other, and toast to the future of our beloved church.

*In Gratitude,*  
Your PNC

Judy Kisla, Vanessa Hunter, Mike Sizemore, Lashawn Green, Andrew Vogel, Beth Grashof, Vicki Collier



# Why Shannon?

**A**fter our first interview with Shannon, it was clear that something very special was occurring. Despite asking her the routine questions used for each interviewed candidate, this first conversation evolved and deepened to the point of leaving us feeling as if this was more like a second or even third interview. Shannon clearly was very well prepared, knowledgeable, curious, authentic and not afraid to ask deep inquisitive questions about Central. The conversation felt comfortable, energized, collaborative, interactive, playful, but also serious and thought provoking. It was clear that we were experiencing her leadership style in live action which continued throughout the interview process. - *Judy Kisla*

As Central enters this next phase, it is important that we hire a head of staff that is skilled and competent, and Shannon checks those prerequisites. At the same time, as we look to grow and minister to different types of demographics that are flocking to our downtown area, we also need a leader who brings charismatic energy and excitement. For Central to fully realize its potential as a downtown church, our next pastor must establish genuine connections and relationships with people from a wide variety of backgrounds. Shannon will do just that. - *Andrew Vogel*

Shannon has many skills and qualities for which we have been searching. She is engaging, authentic, deeply spiritual, committed to mission, an adept leader, mentor, fundraiser, community partner, and so much more. All of these are important to me, but what really cemented my conviction that Shannon was the pastor we needed at this time was a moment during a heartfelt conversation. We were exploring our regrets, fears, longings and hopes for our church. As PNC members were revealing those things, Shannon began to pastor us, ministering to the pain we were expressing and leading us into healing and hope. It was natural, it was sincere, it was spiritual; it was a gift to us that we so deeply appreciated. - *Vicki Collier*

What differentiates Shannon and elevates

her above the many qualified candidates with whom we spoke is the depth of experience she brings in the domain of administration. She has been responsible for budgets big and small, addressed staffing needs, optimized utilization of built spaces, and has grown both membership and endowments in every position she has had in her career as Head of Staff. Furthermore, Shannon has a national reputation as a Presbyterian thought leader. She has worked on anti-racism in a large urban congregation, developed youth programs, and is an engaging preacher. Shannon is uniquely able to see Central for who we are right now—committed to do all we can as a Matthew 25 church, ready to be together and have fun as a community in Christ. Shannon has racked up all of these accomplishments while growing into the demanding roles of wife and mother. She has a smile as big as Texas and a fire in her eyes that tells of a person living in fulfillment of doing God's work. I could not imagine a more inspiring human to lead us into Central's future. Praise be to God. - *Vanessa Hunter*



Central's community outreach is what drew me to Central. Central's rich worship is what keeps me here. Shannon's passion for ministry will keep me coming to Central for years to come. Shannon's sermons are thoughtful, theologically grounded, compelling, and accessible. To Shannon, vibrant, creative worship that incorporates the spoken word with music, and all the other art forms, is an essential element of church. Equally important to her is a commitment to serving others. In her sermons, Shannon pushes people to examine how their faith impacts their life. Shannon invites people into partnership with the world in their commitments to mission, stewardship, engagement, and each other. - *Beth Grashof*

What might you look forward to when you come into Shannon's presence? Shannon is smart, forthright, determined, and maintains a perspective with humor in her interactions. But Shannon does not come alone to Central. Her husband Greg will bring additional new energy to Central's men. Upon spending some time with Shannon and Greg, I felt like I was already with good friends. - *Mike Sizemore*

An experienced yet youthful leader, she loves music and the Word of God. She is financially savvy, spirit led, and a kingdom builder. Shannon is an exciting leader who will challenge our youth, inspire our families, and help heal our communities. She will bring so much joy! - *LaShawn Green*

# Meet Shannon & her family



**G**reg and I were lucky to meet way back in high school. Both of our youth groups attended an annual Senior High Youth Conference at Mo-Ranch (Synod of the Sun conference center). We did not really start dating (the first time around) until I had graduated from high school and Greg was already a sophomore in college. After Greg graduated from Baylor University and spent 9 months in Nigeria as a Young Adult Volunteer (with PCUSA), he came home and we became engaged my senior year of college. We married in December of 1994 and are looking forward to celebrating our 30th anniversary in less than two years.

We both attended Columbia Theological seminary as full-time married students. Though Greg eventually discerned ordained ministry was not his call, he has lived out his theological education through being a stay-at-home Dad for most of our children's younger lives, as well as taking that moral and ethical framework into his current vocation as a Certified Financial Planner with Raymond James. I know I would not have been able to do nearly all I have done if it were not for his constant support, care, and deep love.

We are the parents of Hannah, who graduates from Davidson College in May, and Ryan, who graduates from Francis W. Parker high school in Chicago in June. Hannah has

“We are being called to participate in God’s generous scattering of goodness and compassion and mercy, so we might see what grows as a result. If anything, we need to scatter these seeds of goodness and compassion and mercy even more wildly, fully, lavishly, generously. Our creation is longing for the birth of new life, of new neighborliness, of new beginning. And we can help God plant it where we are.”

— SHANNON J. KERSHNER

majoring in Gender and Sexuality Studies, with a minor in Chinese culture and a focus in Africana studies, as well. She is looking for work in the Atlanta area, leaning towards the non-profit, social justice/DEIB sectors. Ryan will head off to Elon University in the fall and hopes to study computer programming and business. They are both incredibly smart, kind, funny, and loving (and yes, I am biased).

We are the only people in our families who have left the Lone Star State. My sister and her family reside in Irving, Texas and my parents live in a small town outside of Fort Worth, Texas. Greg’s parents and youngest brother live in Houston and his other two brothers and their families make their lives in Austin, Texas.



# Shannon's Passion *for* Ministry

I enjoy serving a church that is both pastoral and prophetic. Its pastoral ministry is fulfilled in the way it feels like home and a caring community to all who enter. And it is also a safe place to be uncomfortable as we vulnerably wrestle with the ways we are or are not living out our faith. The church is called to be genuinely welcoming to all God's people, in lived action and not just with lip service. It seeks to stay together as church in the middle of diversity, realizing that Christ's body is one of unity, but not one of uniformity.

The church's prophetic ministry is proclaimed every time it says "No" to the powers of death, separation, and lies. The congregation is not content to simply stay within its walls but is compelled to respond to God's call to get out into the messiness of life and bring a word of grace, healing, and justice for all God's people in our complicated world.

I believe I am called to serve congregations that are rather diverse in terms of theological and political perspectives, racial and ethnic identities, LGBTQIA+ identities, socioeconomics, family structures, etc. I have the skills to be a faithful steward of the diversity of God's people. I can earn my congregation's trust and do not take that for granted.

In my preaching and leadership, I say what I believe without being exclusive and authoritarian about it. I believe in a living God whose Spirit summons us to speak Truth, but to speak it in a way that builds up and does not destroy. My style of leadership is one of vision, collegiality, and playfulness. I try to never get so far out in front of my colleagues or congregation that I am mistaken for the enemy. We move into God's future together, listening for God's voice through the voices of each other.



## Work History

> SENIOR PASTOR/HEAD OF STAFF | FOURTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CHICAGO, IL | MAY 2014 – PRESENT

5,400-member congregation located on Michigan Avenue in downtown Chicago.

> SENIOR PASTOR/HEAD OF STAFF | BLACK MOUNTAIN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NC | OCTOBER 2009 – MARCH 2014

650-member congregation located in a small town in Western North Carolina, located outside of the gates of Montreat.

> SENIOR PASTOR/HEAD OF STAFF | WOODHAVEN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, IRVING, TX | MARCH 2002 – SEPTEMBER 2009

350-member congregation located in the Dallas/Ft Worth metroplex.

> ASSOCIATE PASTOR FOR YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS | THE WOODLANDS COMMUNITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, THE WOODLANDS, TX | MAY 1999 - FEBRUARY 2002

800-member congregation in community just north of Houston.

# Pastorate at Fourth Presbyterian, Chicago



“Shannon is one of the most gifted leaders with whom I’ve had the privilege of working. She has the rare combination of being a strategic thinker, inspiring a passion for excellence in all things and bringing any assembly of people to raucous laughter. When she doesn’t have experience or knowledge, she gets curious and learns quickly. Shannon constantly takes in information, makes connections to larger issues, and communicates in a way that makes it accessible for everyone. Perhaps the thing I’ve appreciated most about her is that she looks at each person she encounters as God’s beloved. I see evidence in the way she treats each member of our staff and the way she leads through collaboration. She has helped us understand that we cannot bring about God’s dream for the world without the full participation of everyone. When she makes a mistake, she listens, apologizes, and works for reconciliation. No matter what has come her way, she leads with grace, empathy, forgiveness, and humor.”

— REV. ANDREA DENNEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONAL MINISTRIES AT FOURTH CHURCH

## EARLY YEARS

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- Built trust with the congregational leadership, becoming more relational and establishing a partnership between staff and member leadership
- Shifted the style of preaching, by bringing the congregation into my imagination, using both academic material and current events
- Encouraged staff and congregation to be their full broken and beautiful selves
- Did a series of cottage meetings every Sunday after worship
- Focused on shifting people to trust that everyone has good intentions

## YEARS 3-6

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- Set strategic directions based on community organizing model; set this for short-range planning rather than hitching posts
- Worked with consultant to re-organize staff, Revising clergy focus areas to emphasize evangelism and community engagement, caring ministries, small groups and discipleship
- Continued work on building relations among congregational leadership and ministries
- Added Joint Finance budget workshop so that congregational leaders set the priorities of organization through budget decisions
- Established Young Adult Committee
- Established Children & Family Pastor position

## YEARS 7-9

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- Worked with senior staff and congregational leaders to distill what was essential to continue as the world closed down:
- Continued to worship and then we worked a continuous improvement plan to enhance our livestream worship experience
- Continued with our Meals Ministry Program, shifting our delivery system  
Reworked delivery of emergency clothing and hygiene items to vulnerable populations
- Shifted our Center for Life and Learning (older adult learning community) to Zoom
- Convened a group of congregational members who are infectious disease doctors to form a council that guides our actions and policies
- Worked with government officials and other faith leaders to adhere to recommendations and advocate for those who were not present at decision-making tables



# Shannon Johnson Kershner | IN WORDS



“Shannon Kershner is a brilliant preacher with a passion for God’s people. As a colleague I have witnessed her extraordinary administrative skills, commitment to intergenerational ministry, compassion and peace making. I can state without an ounce of hyperbole she is one of my favorite preachers who understands the weight and seriousness of carrying the mantle we call the Gospel.” — Otis Moss, III, Pastor, Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, Professor of Homiletics at Mercer University, Atlanta

“Rev. Shannon J. Kershner brings with her the passion of a prophet, the empathy of a pastor, the presence of a preacher, and the joyful laughter of a woman who loves this thing called life. I have been honored to be her sacred partner in the work of justice and the deepening of interfaith bonds this past decade in Chicago; the community of Central and the city of Atlanta have no idea how fortunate they are that my dear friend Shannon, the amazing Rev. Kershner, is bringing her family, her heart, and her gifts to your community.”

— Rabbi Seth Limmer, member of the Reform movement rabbinical association



“It is past time to stop flying under the radar, mainline church. Rather, it is time to be loudly kind, to be obnoxiously compassionate, to be irritatingly loving. To say no to the corrosive power of contempt and to answer hatred with the strength of love. ... God will use our witness. And our world will change. We will be changed. That is our promise.”

— SHANNON J. KERSHNER



“If the power of the risen Jesus is still loose in our world, then that means our stories are nowhere near done. That means that the justice of God is stronger and more powerful than injustice. That means that we cannot escape the call and the demand that we learn how to love our neighbor. That we learn how to love ourselves.”

— SHANNON J. KERSHNER

• “It’s not all on the pastor. How can Central Presbyterian Church inspire her on? You [Central’s] elders must be at your best. Live it out in God’s hands; it’s the role of your community to envision and the pastor to move it there. The pastor is the implementor.”

• “You can’t help but love her.”

• “She has an amazing, compassionate heart. It’s a new day for Central.”

• “A golden age is coming.”

— Joe Clifford, Pastor and Head of Staff,  
Myers Park PC, Charlotte NC



“Shannon is a fantastic preacher, relevant and appealing to young people. She will help the church grow into its future. She is a pastor first, but also a good administrator. Although she does not relish conflict, she is good at handling it. She is a graceful truth-teller. An accomplished fundraiser, she speaks naturally and compellingly. She is wise, willing, and deeply attuned to racial justice. Shannon is a collaborative leader and mentor. She is effusive and joyful; she knows the moment she is in and can be serious. She is deeply spiritual with an active prayer life. Shannon feels most in her element in a relational kind of ministry.”

— PEN PEERY, FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF  
CHARLOTTE, CHARLOTTE NC

“We are loved and claimed by God for being just who we are because of who God is—a God whose first words to his scared friends were ‘Peace be with you’. . . in every moment of our life God pronounces a blessing over us. ‘Peace be with you.’”

—SHANNON J. KERSHNER



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