

## A homecoming for Rob White



Robert Long/DTT

Rev. Rob White is the new pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Hernando, a growing church, located on McIngvale Road in Hernando.

BY ROBERT LEE LONG  
COMMUNITY EDITOR

The twists and turns of his faith journey have led Rev. Rob White far from home and back again.

White, the new pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Hernando, didn't need that much of an introduction to the DeSoto County seat after assuming the pulpit at the growing church on McIngvale Road.

Having lived in Hernando until age seven and visiting family over the ensuing years at various intervals, it was a homecoming of sorts for the 35-year-old pastor.

"I can take my two children to the cemetery just down the road and show them the graves of their great-grandparents," said White as he relaxed in the pastor's study at First Presbyterian Church.

And if White wishes to visit his grandfather, he had just walk next door to Wesley Meadows Retirement Community.

It's that sense of family that has welcomed White, his wife Tracy Flores White and children Liam, 6, and Adalyn, 3, back to Hernando once again.

But then again, in spirit and substance, White said his heart was always with the people of Hernando and the surrounding community.

Born in Memphis to Bob and Anita White, Rob moved with his parents to Hernando and lived there until age seven, when the family moved once again to West Memphis, Ark.

When White was a teenager, he attended the Hot Springs, Arkansas School for Math and Science.

"I started asking questions what my faith was all about," White said.

White went off to college at Arkansas State University and became involved with campus ministries and even considered attending a Baptist seminary.

Attending seminary was "put on hold," as White tells it, and he moved to Vero Beach, Fla.

"I found my footing in the Reformed Faith," White said, who began studying and reading theologians John Calvin and Karl Barth.

One of the most transformative things to occur in his life was when others began asking him questions about God and his faith.

He repeats a response that he is still fond of in conversations about faith today.

"Sometimes the best answer is that I don't know," White said, quickly adding: "God is God and I am not."

That probing, questioning, searching nature of one's faith is key to White's ongoing faith journey.

White said certain of one thing — there is a divine reason and a purpose in God's plan, although the faithful might not totally comprehend its grand design.

It was in Vero Beach, Fla. where he met the "love of his life," his wife Tracy.

"I learned so much about faith from her," White said. "She was also so involved in ministry. We have done this together. Two years after we married, my wife turned to me and said, 'It's time for you to go to seminary.'"

Even as he embarked on his seminary studies, in the back of his mind, White said he always knew that he wanted to return to his childhood home of Hernando and play a role in the faith and worship of the congregation at First Presbyterian Church.

White returned to Hernando on several occasions and watched with admiration and gratitude when the congregation of First Presbyterian Church rallied around his family during a critical time of need.

"I am very grateful to Pastor Chip Hatcher for showing me around," White said of the longtime pastor who preceded him in the pulpit. "I knew that someday I wanted to be acquainted with this church."

White would go on to receive his Master of Divinity from Columbia Theological Seminary in Atlanta.

Having lived and studied in larger cities like Atlanta deepened and broadened his faith experience.

"It opened my eyes to how vast God's kingdom is," White said.

For the past five years, White has served as pastor of one of the oldest congregations in Covington, La., the home of Mississippi novelist Walker Percy and other great thinkers.

"I thought I was going to continue youth ministry," White said. "I never thought I would find my voice in the pulpit."

White said he spends a great deal of time perfecting his delivery and message.

"I read old sermons of other pastors," White said.

Yet, as his congregation will readily attest, White has developed his own style. White said he engages his congregation in dialogue and is energized by the diversity of his congregation.

"Our mission says that we are to be a beacon of hope," White said. "This church is a beacon of hope to the community."

## The ultimate solution

Every church has people in it. That means every church has problems. God revealed Himself to us in nature, in the Bible and in Jesus. We should be grateful that God did not create us and then leave us without a knowledge of Him. That would have been awful. The same is true of His creation of the Church. God gave us detailed instructions about being kind, good, generous, joyful, fair, etc. to our brothers and sisters in the Lord. However, we are not very good at obeying His commands. Because of that, we run into a lot of difficulties. Our problems are myriad. Our greed, self-centeredness, need to be applauded, etc. causes us to mistreat and offend others. None of us is immune to this malady and none of us is spared from the hurtful actions of others. I think we can all agree that every church has issues. But wait, there is good news. God has given the ultimate solution; the solution that works in every instance in every church.

Many before me have identified Revelation chapters two and three as teaching that applies to every church in every geographic location and in every age. The seven churches mentioned in this passage seem to be representative of all churches. I agree, but I would argue that the message to the church begins in chapter one. Revelation 1:1 is the purpose statement for the book, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him to show to His bond-servants." (NASU)

Clearly the book is a revealing of Jesus. Just as clearly, it is a gift from God the Father to God the Son. Plainly, the intention is for God the Son to pass it on to the Church. Looking for anything other than Jesus will cause the reader to go astray in understanding the book. Staying focused on Jesus is exactly what the book tells the Church to do at all times as the solution to each and every difficulty that the Church faces.

Jesus groups the seven churches together as early as 1:4. He does it again in 1:11 and twice in 1:20. There are not seven messages. There is one message given seven times. Jesus identifies different problems for each of the seven churches. However, He does not give seven solutions. He gives the exact same solution to each. Revelation 1:12-20 paints an awesome picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. In chapters two and three, each time an issue is identified in a church, that church is pointed back to the illustration of Christ in 1:12-20. We are given seven different looks at the same message. Ephesus is told to look at the One who walks among the churches. Smyrna is told to look at the One who was dead and has come to life. Pergamum is told to look at the One with the sharp two-edged sword. Thyatira is told to look at the One with the eyes like fire. Sardis is told to look at the One with the seven Spirits of God. Philadelphia is told to look at the One who has the key of David. Laodicea is told to look at the faithful and true Witness. Christ brings every church back to the description of Him in chapter one because there is no other message, "Do not take your eyes off Me."

Each church had fallen into the same hole, the same trap: taking their eyes off Christ. The solution to every church problem is for every member to fix their eyes on Jesus. That takes care of every issue.

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STEVE ELLISON

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