

THE PASTOR NOMINATING COMMITTEE OF  
First Presbyterian Church,  
Knoxville, Tennessee

JOYFULLY NOMINATES...



The Reverend Mark R. Curtis  
FOR PASTOR / HEAD OF STAFF

“FOR CHRIST IN THE HEART OF KNOXVILLE”



## LETTER TO THE CONGREGATION FROM THE PASTOR NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Dear First Presbyterian Church Family,

It is an honor for each of us to have been elected by our congregation to serve for the last year as your Pastor Nominating Committee. We are grateful for your prayers that sustained us as we went about our work of discerning who God had prepared to serve First Presbyterian Church. We met weekly during this time either in-person or via Zoom. Determining how to conduct a search for our next Pastor/Head of Staff in the middle of a pandemic was our first task. The amazing number of responses from our church members to our Congregational Survey helped us understand your hopes for the future of our church and the qualities of the individual that would best lead us in fulfilling these hopes and dreams. The wonders of technology helped us overcome the restrictions on travel and meeting in-person due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only did we have our own Zoom meetings, but we also interviewed candidates using the same medium. When the entire country was shut down, churches across the denomination figured out how to conduct worship services through live-streaming, videos, FaceTime, or other methods. This allowed the Committee to listen to and view hundreds of sermons without leaving the comfort of our homes.

After a very detailed and thorough search, and with God's great guidance through the Holy Spirit, we unanimously believe Mark Curtis is the 16th pastor God has chosen especially for our congregation as we enter our 230th year.

### THE PASTOR NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Vicki Bible

Geoff Emery

Travis Maryanski

Ginny Morrow, Co-Chair

Joanna Pennoyer

Stephanie Spurlock

Rachel Trentham

John Whaley, Co-Chair

Craig Wrisberg

## LETTER TO THE CONGREGATION FROM REVEREND MARK R. CURTIS



Dear First Presbyterian Church Family,

With such a long and faithful history, First Presbyterian Church has touched the lives of countless saints who have passed through its doors. It was not until I began meeting with the PNC months ago that I realized the many providential connections that I have had with First Presbyterian Church since I moved to East Tennessee in 2006. God has used the people and ministries of FPC as touchpoints in my own journey of faith and ministry – conversing over coffee with your pastors, serving on Presbytery committees with your members, and walking alongside Keli (Shipley)

Cooper during her time ministering to your youth. I learned great things about the congregation through these relationships, and I have continued learning about your community of faith through the many meaningful conversations I have shared with the dedicated members of the PNC. I am thrilled that our God who provides – *Jehovah-jireh!* – has led me to connect in a new way with First Presbyterian. I am eager to meet each family, learn each name, and hear each story as we journey together in the weeks, months, and years ahead.

God has been at work in and through the people of FPC for nearly 230 years, serving as the hands and feet of Christ in the heart of Knoxville. I am excited to join the work you are already doing to glorify God amid bustling downtown life. I can already see how God is moving in worship – through music and liturgy; in discipleship – through the Christian Education, Worshipful Wednesdays and First Fellowship; and in service – through FISH, Family Promise, Habitat for Humanity and the Mission Market. I know God has plans for our future together far beyond anything we dare ask or imagine; as God declares in Isaiah, “Behold, I am doing a new thing!” Because I know that God is the author of this new chapter for FPC and for my family, I am overjoyed to accept the call to become the Pastor/Head of Staff of First Presbyterian Church.

In Christ,

## AS STATED IN OUR MISSION STUDY

### The Church We Are

First Presbyterian Church of Knoxville, Tennessee, est. 1792, is Knox County's oldest congregation. While we cherish our history and mission "for Christ in the heart of Knoxville," we continue to seek new ways of nurturing our congregation and serving our neighbors — locally and globally. Our primary vision is to show the love of Jesus Christ with each other and with those we come in contact with beyond the walls of our church. While our congregation has varied political and social views, we feel called to be an example of how diversity of opinion does not have to be a divisive issue. We recognize the post-pandemic church is likely to be altered in some form. Nevertheless, we will continue to foster active participation in our current members while seeking to attract younger generations which are necessary for future growth. We desire to be more intentional in connecting with downtown Knoxville, which has enjoyed a robust revitalization in recent years. We enjoy active relationships with many of Knoxville's local missions/service organizations, including ministries to the homeless and temporarily displaced families, and support for groups like Al Anon, YWCA, and Habitat for Humanity. We will expand these efforts by forging more creative connections with our urban neighbors, which could include community partnerships, educational/worship opportunities, and cooperative justice initiatives. Jehovah-jireh!

### The Pastor We Seek

We seek a servant leader capable of re-engaging our congregation post-pandemic, nurturing and inspiring us to assume a more active role in ministry and traditional church activities (e.g., teaching Sunday School, working with children and youth, serving as officers, serving on committees, singing in the choir, providing member care) and spearheading our efforts to forge creative relationships with individuals and organizations in the greater downtown community. As always, our church's foundation for goal achievement will be its fidelity to the teachings of Jesus, communicated through biblically-focused, thought-provoking, and action-inspiring preaching and teaching. We also desire a leader who appreciates our political and social diversity, helping us achieve common ground in worship and service. We believe we will reach our goals with the guidance of someone who actively listens to all of our members, respects our history and tradition while encouraging us to occasionally think "outside the box," and serves as the respected face of our church to the greater downtown community.

### In the Presbyterian Church Personal Information Form (PIF), Mark Curtis was asked to respond to the following question:

*Describe the ministry setting to which you believe God is calling you.*

#### *Mark Curtis' response:*

I find joy in serving a church that strives to follow Christ's Commandment to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself." By following this commandment through an authentic, joyful worship of the triune God, congregants will develop a deep relationship with Christ and be equipped by the Spirit to share that relationship with others in their lives. It is important for a church to understand that all followers of Christ are called to the "royal priesthood," making the participation of all vital to the life and function of the church, through its worship and mission. This is increasingly important in a world that is seemingly growing more divided. The church needs to be an example of welcome and inclusion to all people, especially when good people disagree. With the love of God and neighbor at the center of the work and worship of God's people, I believe we are able to share differing ideas and work together toward a common solution, all while proclaiming the Gospel.

I believe God is calling me to a church that, following the example of Christ, goes to and serves those who are in need of compassion, justice, peace, reconciliation, and witness. Through my experiences working in the church, I have learned to be a leader who can imaginatively solve problems and one who sees the importance of building everything on the foundation of honesty and sincerity. As a leader, I am a clear communicator who places great importance on listening to others. My experiences have taught me to recognize the diversity of gifts provided to the church through its members, and I understand my role in helping a congregation identify and use these gifts for the worship of God and service of God's people.

## THE REVEREND MARK R. CURTIS

### EDUCATION

Princeton Theological Seminary  
*Master of Divinity*

University of California, Berkeley  
*B.A. Political Science*

### PASTORAL EXPERIENCE

Lake Forest Presbyterian Church  
Knoxville, Tennessee, *Pastor*

New Providence Presbyterian Church  
Maryville, Tennessee, *Associate Pastor  
for Youth & Young Adult Ministries*

Alexandria First Presbyterian Church  
Milford, New Jersey, *Director of Youth  
Ministry (Seminary Internship)*

The First Presbyterian Church  
Westfield, New Jersey, *Youth Ministry  
Assistant (Seminary Internship)*

### SERVICE TO THE CHURCH

Committee on Preparation  
for Ministry  
*Presbytery of East Tennessee*

Coordinating Council  
*Presbytery of East Tennessee*

Committee on Nominations  
*Presbytery of East Tennessee*

Presbytery Youth Committee  
*Presbytery of East Tennessee*

Permanent Judicial Commission  
*Synod of Living Waters*

Board of Church Visitors  
*Maryville College*

Blount County Substance Abuse  
Prevention Action Team  
*Maryville, Tennessee*

Keynote Speaker,  
Middle School Conference  
*Massanetta Springs Conference Center,  
Harrisonburg, Virginia*



# The Curtis Family

REV. MARK CURTIS was born and raised in northern California as the oldest of four siblings; his parents, two brothers, and sister all still call the West Coast home. As a young adult, Mark found himself at church whenever the doors were open. He played guitar in the youth group praise band and remains friends with several band mates from his childhood church days. Despite his obvious love of and connection with the Church, Mark set out to college planning to major in journalism. Soon after he began his studies at the University of California at Berkeley, Mark declared Political Science as his major. He spent most Wednesdays across the bay bridge at the Oakland Athletics Coliseum, studying while also watching five dollar baseball games. He had always planned to go to law school and dreamed of being a successful and morally upright political figure. Luckily, God's call was persistent, and Mark instead headed East to attend Princeton Theological Seminary.

Mark spent his days in class and many evenings serving as a youth leader at the Presbyterian Church in Westfield, New Jersey. His plans were to head back to California after graduation, but once again, God's plans were greater than his own. He began searching for his first ordained call, and interviewed in Tennessee as practice, never imagining that he might actually call the land of the beautiful Great Smoky Mountains home.

This practice interview turned into something greater than he expected, and Mark accepted a call to serve as the Associate Pastor for Youth and Young Adult Ministries at New Providence Presbyterian Church in Maryville, Tennessee. Mark's time at New Providence was fruitful and fulfilling. He ventured throughout the states and abroad leading mission trips. He honed his skills in preaching and pastoral care, and he started a church softball team where he fulfilled his life-long dream of playing shortstop.

Just before Christmas in 2010, Mark took his son from his first marriage to have pictures taken with Santa on the Maryville College campus. This seemingly insignificant decision turned out to be providential; Santa's niece, Diana, was in charge of the student fundraising event for Maryville College. Mark and Diana began to chat, and the rest, as they say, is history. In July of 2011, Diana became a part of the Curtis family as Mark's wife and Daniel's stepmother.

Diana grew up in Nashville and headed to East Tennessee for college where she earned her Bachelor's in English and Philosophy from Carson-Newman, followed by a Master's degree in English Literature from the University of Tennessee. Like Mark, she intended to return home after graduation, but God's plans kept her in East Tennessee as well. Diana spent the first ten years of her career at Maryville College

in the Center for Campus Ministry, helping students reflect on service and discern their own vocational calls. After Mark and Diana's son Asher was born, Diana transitioned to a teaching role at the college where she specialized in American Literature and Composition. In 2018 when Asher was old enough to begin school, Diana joined the English department at Webb School of Knoxville. She teaches the 11th grade AP English Language and Composition class, 12th grade English, and serves as the advisor for the yearbook.

Daniel is in the seventh grade at Coulter Grove Intermediate School. He is an avid reader, and is rarely spotted without a book or kindle in his hand. Currently, his favorite author is Rick Riordan, but he also loves historical fiction. Daniel is a boy scout, a trumpet player in the school band, and a leader of the performing arts program. Asher is a second grader at John Sevier Elementary School. He is following his brother's example and is also developing a love of reading; Junie B. Jones and the Wimpy Kid books are his current favorites. Asher is excited to start his first season of flag football this fall, and he loves spending time outside, playing with whatever bat or ball he finds. The family shares their home in Maryville with a tuxedo cat named Newman and an Australian shepherd named Jovie. Together, the family loves watching Oakland A's baseball and Jeopardy, taking the dog for neighborhood walks, and riding bikes on the greenways of Maryville.

In 2014, Diana and Mark followed God's call to Lake Forest Presbyterian Church in South Knoxville where Mark became the Pastor. Serving this congregation for seven years has been one of the happiest chapters in their life to this point; Lake Forest is a faithful and fun congregation that does God's work in the South Knoxville community. Under Mark's leadership, the church closed its budget deficit and built a robust children's program. Lake Forest is a thriving congregation, and Mark is confident that God has great things in store for the church and the saints who worship and serve there.

The ever creative and surprising voice of God spoke once again as Mark, alongside the dedicated members of the First Presbyterian Pastor Nominating Committee, discerned a call to venture across the river to serve as the next pastor of First Presbyterian Church. Mark, Diana, Daniel, and Asher are all excited about the upcoming adventures that await them downtown. The family is eager to meet their new church family and serve God with the congregation of First Presbyterian. Overall, they are all grateful that God's providence has faithfully led them to unexpected places – and has continued to provide blessings greater than they could imagine. They are ready to start the next chapter, and can't wait to see what wonders God has in store for First Presbyterian Church.

