

Philip Eldon Waite



The College Mennonite Church Board and Pastor Search Committee are pleased to introduce Phil Waite as a candidate for Pastoral Team Leader at CMC.

Currently Phil is the pastor at First Mennonite Church of Christian in Moundridge, Kansas, where he has served since 2005. Phil is also pursuing a Doctorate of Ministry in Preaching at Chicago Theological Seminary. He anticipates completing his doctoral thesis in the next few months.

Raised in a Christian home and baptized in an outdoor swimming pool at the age of 12, Phil credits his parents with “teaching me that Jesus loved me and not to play with guns.” As a history and peace studies student at George Fox College in Oregon, he “began to see the disconnect between things Christians taught about Jesus, and the ways Christians live their lives, especially regarding the teachings of Scripture on issues of peace and justice.” As an adult, Phil discovered peace church traditions, becoming a first-generation Mennonite. He says, “What attracted me to Mennonites was the emphasis on the teachings of Jesus and their relevance for how we live our lives today.”

Phil is married to Beth Bontrager, whom he met in Pennsylvania just prior to leaving for a Mennonite Central Committee term of service in the Philippines. Following two years of correspondence and occasional long-distance phone calls, they married when Phil returned to the United States. Phil and Beth have two sons: Jonathan Bontrager-Waite, age 11, and Lukas Bontrager-Waite, age 8.

After a Mennonite Voluntary Service term in California during which Phil began to consider his call to ministry, Phil and Beth moved to the Elkhart area. Phil studied at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, receiving a Master of Divinity, while also working as Service Adventure coordinator at Mennonite Board of Missions. He says, “My years at seminary taught me to love the Scriptures and to get excited about theology. Increasingly, I have seen that word and deed cannot be separated. We need a Word, a Story, if we are going to live the lives Jesus calls us to.”

In 1999 Phil accepted a call to ministry at Chicago Community Mennonite Church, serving as pastor there for 5 ½ years. And from there he accepted the call to First Mennonite of Christian. Of his call to pastoral ministry, he says, “My call is rooted in a love for God and the church and is nurtured by the Scripture. I have a deep sense of encounter with God when I read the Bible, and my sense of call is sustained by a desire to share the God I find there with others.”

During Phil’s years at First Mennonite, the congregation has gone through a transition process that led to developing a new mission, priorities and values and a new organizational structure. Phil says, “This experience changed my life and the way I think about ministry.” He adds, “I am attracted to understanding the big picture—the vision.”

Phil recognizes the uniqueness of the Pastoral Team Leader model at CMC. Of the team leader role, he says, “I understand this role to be a shared model of leadership where pastors work together on the various tasks of ministry. The role of the team leader is to equip and lead.” He adds, “I understand that the Pastoral Team Leader needs to help lay and pastoral leadership, as well as the congregation at large, experience clarity about goals, mission and purpose of the congregation.”

Phil enjoys cross-country skiing, baseball, splitting firewood, reading the Sunday *New York Times*, and walking Moses, the family dog.