

## **JOHN CALVIN PRESBYTERY**

### **The Rev. Dr. Tom Willadsen - Biography**

I grew up in Peoria, Illinois with my mother and older brother. Peoria is my mother's hometown; we moved there when I was almost a year old, following my father's death.

I attended public school and Westminster Presbyterian Church. In my family, school was like church: you went unless you were sick. I attended Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, church camp and youth group. Each summer the Senior High Youth Group went on workcamp. By the time I graduated high school I had seen 13 states through the window of the church van.

I began to feel what I now know was a call to ministry on workcamps.

I attended college in the Chicago area, where I majored in Urban Studies. Following college, I served the City of New York for one year as an Urban Fellow. My internship was in the Department of City Planning's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

I attended seminary at the University of Chicago, taking numerous courses at McCormick.

My first call was to First Presbyterian in Mankato, Minnesota, as associate pastor. While there I led the Senior High Youth Group on work camps, the first of which was to Springfield, MO. After nearly five years, my wife and I moved to the Baltimore area, where I was associate pastor of a large, suburban church. Our first son was born in Baltimore. After three years I accepted a call to First Presbyterian Church in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, where I served 19 years. Our second son was born in Oshkosh. While in Oshkosh, I earned a Doctor of Ministry from Louisville and my first book, "OMG! LOL! Faith and Laughter" was published.

Following my time as pastor in Oshkosh, I took about a year away from parish ministry. I worked on a variety of interfaith and civic efforts to make Oshkosh more welcoming.

I returned to parish ministry as a Transitional Pastor in late 2019, six months before the COVID-19 pandemic. I served Faith Presbyterian Church in suburban Omaha for nearly three years. I found transitional ministry is a good fit for my short attention span and lack of ambition.

Most recently, I just finished serving Spanish Springs Presbyterian Church in suburban Reno, NV for two years. While at Spanish Springs the church reduced its mortgage by about 25%. I was also very active in the strong, engaged interfaith community. My proudest achievement was organizing Interfaith Laughter Night on April 1, 2024. The event raised money and awareness for a local literacy non-profit. More than 20 people, representing eight religions, took the stage to tell jokes about their faith traditions.

Why did the Presbyterian cross the road?

You're confusing us with pedestrians; we get that a lot.

My older son is in graduate school at the University of Kansas and my younger son serves in the United States Army.

I am excited to begin another chapter in my career as I seek membership in John Calvin Presbytery.

### **The Rev. Dr. Tom Willadsen - Statement of Faith**

I believe and trust in God, who created the earth and humanity. We exist to give glory to God by living faithfully in covenant with God and with one another. One of the ways we experience the goodness of God's covenant with us is through an appreciation of Creation. In spite of this goodness, we have broken our covenant with God and consequently, with one another by making ourselves the center of reality. Thus our perception of what is truly good is confused. Living only for ourselves denies the honor of those around us and therefore, denies honor to God.

God remained faithful to us even after we had broken our covenant with God. As a sign of this fidelity, God chose Abraham and Sarah to be a blessing for all nations. In order to rescue their children from slavery, God called Moses to lead them, with signs and miracles, to a new land where they could live faithfully in covenant with God. God gave them the Torah to instruct them in the gift and demand of covenant life. Throughout their life together, God sent prophets who called Israel back to the faith of Abraham and Sarah.

In the fullness of time God sent Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, fully divine and fully human, to demonstrate God's redeeming love for us by his words and deeds. His words showed that the heart of the Torah is love of God and for one another. His deeds showed the depth of God's love for us and how we should respond to that love. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, embraced the outcast and forgave the sinner. Jesus' life of radical obedience and radical grace exposed our human faithlessness for what it is. As a consequence, Jesus was executed as a common criminal.

Jesus' death seemed to prove the futility of faith. But God worked a miracle among us and raised him from the dead. Through the Gospel that the church proclaims God reaches out to Jews and Gentiles, extending the blessing of Christ to all people. Through baptism into Christ's death and resurrection we receive the blessing of the covenant. In His supper, Christ nourishes the members of his body with the bread of life and the cup of salvation. The Church, as the body of Christ, lives by his Word. When we hear this Word, the Spirit creates faith in our hearts. The Church lives in faith, hope and love, giving glory to God. In life and death, we belong to God.