

## Introducing the White Family Howard, Leah, Sophie, and Dow

Leah and I could not be more excited about the opportunity to serve at Macomb Wesley. For both professional and personal reasons, we feel this is tremendous for our family. We had been praying for an appointment to “the church that needs our family, and the church our family needs.” I hope you all have been praying also and we will all find that God has been working to answer our prayers in ways we could not even know how to ask or imagine possible.



We are currently living in Champaign-Urbana where I have one of the most unusual appointments in Methodism. I am the Senior Pastor/Director of Wesley Church and Foundation at the University of Illinois. As the title suggests, it is a two part job. I am the Senior Pastor of a large and diverse Campus Congregation with contemporary and traditional worship services. I preach most of the time, but share the pulpit regularly with the three other pastors on staff. Urbana Wesley and Macomb Wesley have much in common, including large, beautiful facilities on state University Campuses, great music programs, and storied histories. Both congregations gave birth to Wesley Foundations in the past and are trying to address the challenge of reaching young adults in today's world. I also serve as the Director of the First Wesley Foundation. Since there is a Campus Minister who leads the Program Side of the ministry, my role is somewhat akin to a not-for-profit director. It has been a wonderful ministry. I'm especially pleased with the increase in student participation, stewardship, and the growth of the congregation as a welcoming community. Most longtime church members describe these years as a time of renewal and transformation, which ended a 30 year decline. God's most impressive work with us has been a local mission project that began as a small monthly food pantry for a few dozen working poor families four years ago, and last year served a week's worth of groceries for over 10,000 people with over 1400 volunteers. It's been a great privilege to serve there, and the church and I will both grieve a change after 8 years. But over the last year, I've begun to recognize a restlessness to return to being a full-time pastor again, and a longing for a different challenge. Leah and I have also talked about the importance of being part of a church where our young family can be involved – a place where our children can grow as disciples, and where Leah can share her gifts of hospitality, compassion and creativity. It's also become clear that although they have not requested it, this is a good year for Urbana to have a pastoral change.

Before Urbana, I served at Bethalto, Williamsville, and Mt. Vernon. I look forward to sharing some of the stories of how those congregations turned around. For my hobbies, I'm a singer and actor. I enjoy musical theater, which is a very good thing, since I met my wife in a production of Godspell at the Springfield Muni Opera. (Ask her sometime about what it was like dating Jesus.) I was born and raised in Moline, and graduated Moline High in 1985. My family was active at First UMC (now Riverside) in Moline. My dad taught Speech/Communications at Black Hawk College and my mom is a nurse, currently working as a Parish Nurse. I have a B.A. In Religious Studies from Texas Christian University, a Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry in Preaching from Chicago Theological Seminary. You can call me Dr. White, but Sophie might point out I'm “not the kind of doctor who helps people.” Most people call me Pastor Howard or just Howard, although I've heard everything from Father White to Preacher Man. I enjoy teaching preaching at our conference's License school for two weeks each Summer, and have taught a course in Worship for Garrett-Evangelical Seminary's extension school for Local Pastors several times. I am a member of

the Academy of Homiletics, and I used to do some professional speaking and was a member of the National Speakers Association. I have done a lot of traveling and my full resume includes a couple of international study experiences and a year living in John Wesley's House in London while I served as the Associate Pastor of Wesley's Chapel, "the Mother Church of World Methodism." Years later, that's where Leah and I were married.

For Leah, moving to Macomb will be moving home. Some of the happiest years of her childhood were spent in Macomb, and though her family moved to Carthage after her Freshman year of High School, she came back to attend Western from 1989 to 1993. While working on her degree, she did student teaching at Edison, where she had once been a student. Leah taught Jr. High Drama and Theater in Chatham, IL, where she was a speech coach and show choir choreographer. Throughout her career she has created and presented numerous drama workshops for all ages, including for persons with disabilities and teacher in-service training on the use of Drama in the classroom. Leah has worked in the arts in each of the communities where we have lived, serving as Managing Director at Alton Little Theater, Marketing and Audience Development Manager for Parkland College Theater, and for the last two years teaching Speech, Drama, Theatre and Worship Arts at Judah Christian School, a private religious school in Champaign. She also works as a Designer for the May Arts Ribbon Company, writing articles and making videos that showcase new ideas for their products.

When Sophie and Dow find out that we're moving, they'll be disappointed until they hear that we'll be living in the same town as their cousin Sam and another one on the way, and just down the road from all the family in Carthage, Rushville and Moline. They love school, especially reading, math and science. They love singing in the children's choir at church, and are Vacation Bible School junkies, usually going to 3 or 4 different VBS's every Summer. They are learning piano and may have caught the family acting bug. I travel to a lot of different churches in my current position, and they have never met a church they didn't love. Dow is in Kindergarden, loves legos, and plans to be either a missionary or a flying squirrel when he grows up. His sister Sophie is in Second Grade. She loves anything pink or purple, reads chapter books in one sitting, likes doing workbooks for fun, and will talk to anyone about anything, which makes it hard to get out of the grocery store or to get through a children's sermon.



I want to thank Macomb's Staff Parish Committee, which has done some outstanding work of interpreting the current reality and congregation's needs to the Superintendent. I'm told this is one of the first appointments made this year, which is testimony to Macomb's importance to Bishop Palmer and the Cabinet. I also want to recognize the significant work your congregation, pastors and leadership have done in working through the MAPP process. I've read most of the material produced in that process and am struck by the level of participation, the honest self evaluation, and rapid implementation of several goals. Your Mission, Vision and Core Values fit me very well, which is certainly part of the reason my family is coming to join your faith community. We will embrace working together with you on goals you have set and discerning together where God is calling us next.

Obviously there will be details related to moving and transitioning that will need to be worked out, and I will work together with the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent to insure the best start for the future. But until July first, I will try to stay behind the scenes, and I will enjoy hearing how you are progressing through your goals, and hearing how you celebrate Pastor Russ's ministry as you and he remember not just a chapter in Macomb's ministry, but also celebrate his long and faithful service to God and His church as he approaches retirement.

May the Peace of Christ be with you,  
Howard White