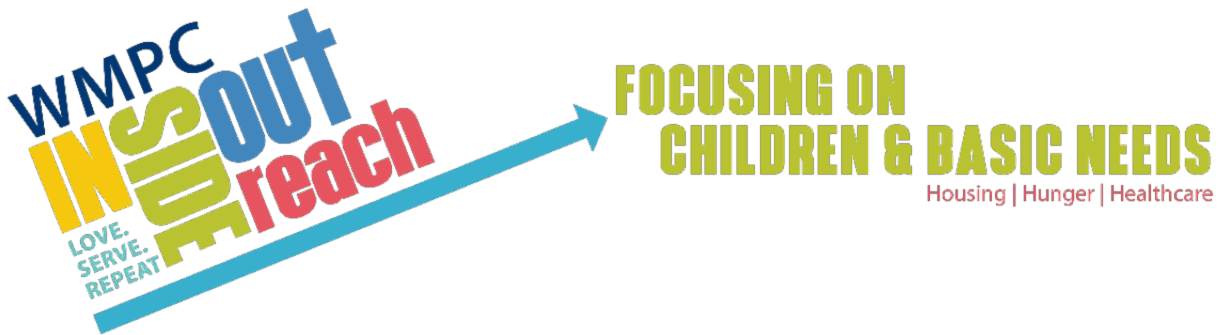

***Special Edition* Meet our new Associate Pastor for Outreach and Community Engagement**

From Outreach at WMPC <Inunnallee-whitememorial.org@shared1.ccsend.com>

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To Laura Rolston <lrolston@whitememorial.org>

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Special Edition October 27, 2025

**Meet Austin Vernon, our new Associate Pastor
for Outreach and Community Engagement.
Austin joins our staff starting on January 5, 2026**



Austin Vernon, a native of Kannapolis, North Carolina, has always considered North Carolina his home. Although his family briefly relocated to New Jersey for three years, he has never felt otherwise. During most of his childhood, his family attended Baptist churches.

Throughout middle school, Austin actively participated in youth group activities. While he continued attending church regularly and volunteering as a children's program leader, he didn't experience significant spiritual growth until he joined Young Life. The adult leaders shared many of the same messages he had encountered in church, but their approach resonated with him on a deeper level. He formed a profound bond with one of his Young Life leaders, who helped him explore his faith more deeply.

During his time at Davidson College, Austin served as a volunteer Young Life leader at a local high school. He was fortunate to become good friends with his fellow leaders and enjoyed being a youth leader. After several conversations with one of his religion professors during senior year of college, Austin made the surprising decision to apply to seminary.

Austin attended Princeton Theological Seminary where he earned a Master of Divinity. His time in seminary was formative, as he was introduced to different types of theology within and outside the Reformed tradition. He loved probing questions of faith deeply and the opportunity to examine his own presuppositions about God and what it meant to follow Christ. From 2016-2018, he served as a Youth Ministry Intern at Nassau Presbyterian Church. In 2017, he also served as a Family Advocacy Summer Intern at Christina Seix Academy, a school for low-income families in Trenton, New Jersey. Austin hadn't gone into seminary seeking ordination, but as graduation approached, he learned about an opportunity at Brownson Memorial Presbyterian Church for the Director of Discipleship and Missions position.

Austin's time at Brownson has been marked by remarkable personal and professional growth. Shortly after relocating to Southern Pines, he married his best friend, Abbey, in 2018. Their family expanded in 2023 with the birth of their son Wesley. His role at the church allowed him to identify new spiritual gifts. He discovered a love for leading adult Bible studies and small groups, leading groups on local and global mission projects, and creating ecumenical platforms for learning and service, particularly in the realm of racial justice. He has found immense fulfillment in preaching, leading worship services, and guiding groups through visioning processes.

Through his work at Brownson, Austin felt God's Spirit calling him to pursue ordination. Initially resistant, he eventually took that step of faith, completing his ordination requirements at Union Presbyterian Seminary, Charlotte. In 2023, Brownson called Austin to serve as their Associate Pastor for Discipleship and Missions, where he has continued to grow in his ministry.

Austin firmly believes God is calling him to serve as the Associate Pastor for Outreach and Engagement at White Memorial. He is excited about entering this new season of ministry with such a wonderful, caring, outreach-oriented congregation.

Austin lives with his wife Abbey, their two-year-old son Wesley, and their three dogs. Abbey works as a Compliance Specialist in the Human Resources department of a construction and trucking business. Wesley loves trucks, trains, and playing outside.



Q & A with Austin:

- **What's your favorite sport to watch and your favorite team?**

My favorite sport is basketball. At the professional level, my favorite team is the Boston Celtics. At the college level, I pull for two teams: the Davidson Wildcats and the Duke Blue Devils. I know that last one might be divisive for some, but I come by it honestly. My paternal grandfather played basketball at Duke in the late 1950s.

- **If you weren't a pastor, what do you think you'd be doing?**

Growing up I had a dream of going into medicine, especially pediatrics. I think I would be in medicine or another helping profession if I weren't in ministry.

• **How did you meet your wife?**

Abbey and I were both volunteer Young Life leaders during our time at Davidson College. She briefly shadowed my Young Life team before being placed at another high school. We were friends during college but didn't start dating until we reconnected at a mutual friend's wedding a couple years after I graduated.

• **Do you prefer mountains, beach, or city getaways?**

I like all the options above, but if forced to choose, I'd go with the mountains. I love to hike and there's something about being in the mountains that makes me feel closer to God.

• **Are you more of a cat person, dog person, or "no pets, please" person?**

We are dog people. We have 3 dogs: Goose, a 9-year-old golden retriever, Maisel, a 5-year-old Australian shepherd, and Petey, a 5-year-old (we believe) Great Dane rescue – our house is crazy! Recently, however, our son Wesley has been asking for a cat, and we don't know how to handle that. We are definitely open to cats but not four animals!

• **What's a movie you could watch over and over again?**

This is a hard question because Abbey and I love to watch movies together. One of my favorites is The Lord of the Rings trilogy. At least once or twice per year, I watch the entire trilogy (extended editions, of course). Once I begin the first movie, I know I can't stop until I've watched all three over the next few days.

• **Do you play any instruments (or wish you did)?**

The extent of my musical career occurred in middle school. I played the trumpet for three years and thoroughly enjoyed it. I wish I knew how to play the guitar.

• **If you could visit anywhere in the world, where would you go?**

Two years ago, I traveled to England for the first time. That trip made me want to see Scotland and Ireland at some point. Those two countries are on my traveling bucket list!

• **Are you more of a planner or a "let's see where the road takes us" traveler?**

I'm probably somewhere in between. Abbey loves a good plan, so we typically have a general idea of what we'd like to do during vacation. At the same time, however, we don't like to fill every minute of every day, and we like to do spontaneous things. I'd categorize our family as planners with the freedom and flexibility to change.

- **What's the most adventurous thing you've ever eaten?**

During a mission trip to Peru in 2024, we had the opportunity to try authentic Amazonian cuisine. This consisted of large ants, which were crunchier and tastier than you'd imagine, and guinea pig, which I didn't love. I'm an adventurous eater and am willing to try most things at least once!

Perspectives from the Search Committee:

"Austin has all of the qualities I was looking for in our Associate Pastor of Outreach & Engagement. He is passionate about mission and outreach, he is an excellent communicator and has a wonderful demeanor that I believe will fit well with our staff and congregation." - Ruth Landers

"We were inundated with outstanding candidates, but when we interviewed Austin, everything felt right. His servant heart, warm spirit, and clear vision will lead and inspire us to walk respectfully with all of God's people in our call to serve with them." - Linda Robinson

"We asked Austin what he would do in his first 90 days as Outreach Pastor. He said "listen". This said it all to us demonstrating wisdom and patience. We look forward to working with him to continue developing our outreach mission." - Stuart Phoenix

"Austin brings extensive experience in outreach, having led impactful community projects such as a third-grade tutoring program and a StepUp initiative in Moore County. Known for his approachable and collaborative leadership, he inspires others to share their gifts and engage in meaningful service. His education, experience, and genuine heart for ministry make him an ideal Associate Pastor for Outreach and Community Engagement." - Diane Payne

"The committee was impressed by Austin throughout our extensive search process. We are excited to add Austin's thoughtfulness, energy, and heart for service and community involvement to our congregation." - William Silverman

Austin's Perspectives

"I value the opportunity to gain deeper understanding of God's Word through collective discernment. Whether that occurs in a sermon or mission trip, I feel spiritually enriched when I'm exploring scripture with others. Throughout all stages of life, we are invited to journey towards greater understanding of the living God and to experience the transformative grace God offers us on the path of discipleship. I also value missional ministry that promotes proximity, accompaniment, and mutual

transformation. We worship a God who engaged in the ultimate act of proximity – the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Just as God sent Jesus into the world and anointed him with the power of the Holy Spirit, we are sent out to be God's presence in the world, standing with those who suffer on the margins of society. Through proximity to the most vulnerable, we are transformed as we draw closer to the heart of God. In my ministry at Brownson, I have found great joy in establishing local partnerships, such as a reading program for third-grade students. It's humbling to witness God transforming the lives of students and volunteers. I also worked to strengthen an international partnership between Brownson and the School for the Deaf in Nueva Cajamarca, Peru. Before the school's opening, students with hearing impairments in rural Peru could not communicate with their classmates, families, or friends. It's been an honor and privilege to lead intergenerational mission trips to this school, as we engage in the ministry of presence and solidarity with our Peruvian friends. I first discovered White Memorial's remarkable outreach ministry during a visit to StepUp Ministry on a Tuesday night in 2024, with a group of Moore County pastors who wanted to learn more about this amazing ministry. Being in Main Hall witnessing authentic relationships and seeing the program in action was deeply moving. After this visit, we began a conversation with StepUp about establishing a satellite location in Moore County. This past June, our planning team received exciting news that Moore County will become the newest StepUp location. I'm excited to build upon the firm foundation and dynamic spirit of White Memorial's outreach program. I'm particularly inspired by the "Be Thou My Vision" document and the genuine desire of White Memorial to change and grow, not out of crisis but in pursuit of God-sized dreams for our community and world. I can't wait to collaborate with staff, Session, the congregation, and community partners as we join in the work God has called us to do."

Thank you to our Search Committee

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to our faithful search committee for their dedicated and thoughtful efforts in filling the position of Associate Pastor for Outreach and Community Engagement.

Ruth Landers, Chair

Diane Payne

Stuart Phoenix

Linda Robinson

William Silverman

William White

Linda Nunnallee, ex officio

Christopher Edmonston, ex officio



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