



The Pastor Nominating Committee of  
Wayside Presbyterian Church

is honored to introduce

**Rev. Dr. James F. Bernhardt**

Senior Pastor/Head of Staff

**Begins at Wayside December 1, 2015**

---

**James' Vision of His New Church Home**

The Pastor Nominating Committee has frequently, thoughtfully and prayerfully asked, "Who is Wayside, who is God calling Wayside to be, and where is God calling Wayside to go?" The answers to these questions have guided the PNC while discerning who God may lead us to call as Wayside's new Senior Pastor and Head of Staff. When the PNC read Rev. Bernhardt's response to the question, "To what type of church setting do you believe God is calling you," we felt as though the church community he described was indeed Wayside.

"I am seeking to serve a congregation that takes seriously the powerful love of Jesus Christ and wants to live it out both within the church and the world. At the same time I am seeking to serve a congregation that does not take themselves too seriously; a people who can laugh together, who have patience with each other, and exemplify a humble spirit.

Because it is so much fun to teach and learn together, I long for a congregation that is eager to ask questions and to wonder. I have been fortunate to work with dedicated colleagues who enjoy thinking and planning together, so I

---

Everyone (adults and children) is invited to a gathering at Wayside on Saturday, October 3rd beginning at 5:00 p.m. to welcome and meet Rev. Dr. James Bernhardt and his wife, Anita, and celebrate this exciting time in the life of Wayside. Details to follow.

---

seek a church where collaboration and trust are valued. As pastor over time to people of all ages and persuasions, I want to serve a church where everyone is regarded as a beloved child of God, welcomed, and enfolded into the church family. I seek a church that has looked to its future and laid plans for its ministry but that also knows this is an ongoing task, never completed, where prayer and creativity keep open the work of the Spirit. I hope to serve among a people who have a deep appreciation for history and heritage, who see this as a foundation for a vital future; a people rooted but reaching.

As a life-long Presbyterian, I acknowledge a love for Reformed worship, and want to serve a church that likes to use the whole pallet of music, art, people, and expression in praise to God. These are some of the qualities I seek in the church, and which I believe I can nurture with my gifts."

—Dr. James Bernhardt, PIF

**James' Previous Calls:**

- Pastor/Head of Staff, Northminster Presbyterian Church, Hickory, NC (1999–present)
- Pastor, Clinton Presbyterian Church, Clinton, IL (1992–1999)
- Pastor, Claremont Presbyterian Church, Claremont, MN (1988–1992)

**James' Formal Education:**

- Doctor of Ministry, Union- Presbyterian School of Christian Education (2007) - D.Min. project: "Casting Out Fear and Renewing Hope: A Congregation Responds to Mental Illness"
- Master of Divinity, Union Theological Seminary (1988)
- Bachelor of Arts, Political Science, University of North Carolina at Wilmington (1984)

## James' Letter to Wayside:

Dear Friends in Christ at Wayside, I am excited about the possibility of joining with you in mission and ministry at Wayside Presbyterian Church. It seems that God is bringing us together to serve our Lord Jesus Christ. I have met the PNC of Wayside, and I look forward to meeting you. Now, as you prayerfully consider our common calling, here is a brief introduction to me.

My journey of faith began in the First Presbyterian Church of Lenoir, NC where I was baptized, and continued within my faithful family, who nurtured my love for God. I learned early the joy and beauty of Christian worship and was taught a deep faith in God that encouraged inquiry and spiritual openness. Church leaders and family members showed me how Christian service helps others and expands understanding. After graduation from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington,

answering a sense of call, I entered Union Theological Seminary in Virginia to study for ministry in the church. It was there I met Anita, who was seeking ordination in the United Church of Christ. We married and then began parish ministry in Minnesota. Later we moved to serve the church in Illinois, and finally to North Carolina. Along the way we welcomed Samuel and Mary to our family.

Sam is now 24, a graduate of Belmont University in Nashville, TN. He lives in Nashville and is an audio engineer and a recording studio technician. Mary is 20 and a junior at Elon University in Elon, NC. She is studying psychology with a concentration in neuroscience.

Anita has served the church in a variety of capacities. Currently, she is an associate for the Presbytery of Western North Carolina, working with congregations there and a major mission fundraising campaign.



*James and Anita Bernhardt,  
30th Wedding Anniversary, August 24, 2015*

The prayerful call process your PNC and I have undergone has linked common interests and gifts with the faith and trust that God brings people together to do ministry in Christ's name. Our mutual commitment to meaningful worship, spiritual growth, and mission gave us a sense that God has called us together. We found common ground in our conversations about the opportunities ahead for the next Senior Pastor of Wayside with my faith, experiences, and successes. It is with joy and thanksgiving that I come to the possibility of this new chapter in my life and the life of Wayside Presbyterian Church.

Peace and Grace,  
James



*James and Mary Bernhardt*





*James, Anita, Samuel and Mary Bernhardt, Christmas 2014*

**James' Statement of Faith:**

I believe in God, who in love, created all that is, seen and unseen. God created humankind in God's own image to care for the creation and to take care of each other. Even though sin and evil came into the creation God made good, God did not give up. God chose a people and established a covenant with them, a light for the nations, and the bearers of God's promise in the world. When God's people were enslaved, God saved them, named them "God's own people" and gave them commandments to guide and shape their life. God's people were given a land in which to live out covenant community with God and each other. Even when the people asked for a king instead of God, so they could be like everyone else, God remained faithful. Throughout generations God sent prophets to remind the people of who they are, to call for justice, to encourage God's people when they were defeated, and to restore them when troubled times were past.

In the fullness of time, in love, God sent his Son into the world. Jesus Christ revealed the way of God by confronting injustice, welcoming sinners, granting forgiveness, and restoring

relationships. Jesus made God's Word accessible through stories and examples from life. He cared about children. He pointed out the people he saw living faithfully. His faithfulness offended the powerful and called their motives into question. But Jesus did not turn back when the way was hard and threats increased. In faithfulness he overcame sin and evil, his love enduring through the betrayal and denial of friends. Despite his lonely agony on the cross Jesus continued to forgive. His resurrection from death is victory over the power of sin and vindication of God's love. Jesus is Lord of all. Love is the only power that endures. God sent the Holy Spirit into the world so that the church would have at its center its Risen Lord. The Holy Spirit empowers the church, equipping the church with manifold gifts to serve others and tell the world the

good news of Jesus. This same Spirit, who inspired the writers of Scripture, helps us to hear the Bible as God's Word. When the church gathers around the Communion table, the Spirit makes known Christ's loving presence. When the church splashes in the waters of baptism, the Spirit unites us as God's people. Love is multiplied by the Spirit as walls that divide people from God and each other are broken down and people are built up into the church. Through the visible unity of the Church, the people of God proclaim a living Lord who overcomes all that would separate us.

—Dr. James Bernhardt



*Samuel's Graduation, Belmont University, May 2014*

## Impressions of the PNC:

Your PNC has spent many hours researching and reviewing information about James, speaking with James by telephone and Skype, reading and listening to sermons, interviewing references and spending a long weekend with James and his wife, Anita. We share the following reflections and heartfelt impressions to help introduce you to Rev. Bernhardt, who we are confident is the person to help guide Wayside on our spiritual journey.

After listening to the first sermon that James Bernhardt sent, I had a sense that we should continue our conversation with him. The pastoral, caring, loving sense that I detected in that sermon proved to be what we found when we continued talking with Reverend Bernhardt. His thoughtful and faithful approach to our questions, our discussions and our discernment process led us past the typical interview and into a healthy conversation about faith and what the future holds for Wayside as we seek to discern God's will for our congregation. With great enthusiasm and anticipation, I look forward to December 1 when we welcome James Bernhardt as the next senior pastor of Wayside Presbyterian Church and his wife, Anita, and children, Sam and Mary, into our church family. —Melissa Grimm

James has the qualities we are looking for—education, experience, skilled preacher, leadership ability, stability, administrative skills, and passion for outreach. His sermons are excellent in content and delivery. James speaks to you not at you. He will challenge us intellectually and spiritually, yet with simplicity and practicality. And he can be very funny. I was struck by James' pastoral qualities. He is a deeply faithful, good, caring person. He is very bright and witty yet approachable and down to earth. But don't mistake James' easy manner



for a lack of passion or drive. His work over 16 years at Northminster demonstrates James' passion for God and church. James has guided Northminster through challenges—most recently a reorganization of their preschool and reconciling diverse reactions to difficult social issues. This summer, James led youth retreats at the Montreat and Massanetta Springs Conference Centers. A reference told me that James “likes to get his hands dirty” in mission work. During our visit in Erie, James spoke enthusiastically about local mission opportunities. He had done his homework and identified local needs and ways that Wayside could expand its ministries. —Matt McCullough

I have complete confidence that Reverend James Bernhardt has been called to serve Wayside. We have found a leader who will walk beside us on our faith journey. He has all of the necessary characteristics to effectively lead Wayside as the Senior Pastor. He is pastoral, calm, and composed. He also possesses the necessary administrative skills needed in a Senior Pastor. The future of Wayside is extremely bright, and I can't wait to see where we go with Reverend Bernhardt as the Head of Staff. —Nathan Miller

PNC has spent hundreds of hours “listening” quietly and patiently through this process for God's Word and hope and plan for Wayside. We believe that all of that will come to us in Rev. Bernhardt. James is passionate in his faith, motivating in hope for our journey together, collaborative in leading others to their role in service to Christ and committed to peace and justice in the community and the world. I believe we are meant to walk together in service to Christ.

—Linda Pentz

After spending a short time with Rev. Bernhardt, what one senses is a quiet mature wisdom, a listening ear, compassion, and a prayerful deep faith. There is both confidence and humility. His references are consistently positive.

—Jean Moore

James is an extremely spiritual, compassionate man. His passion for ministry is evident in everything he does, whether it's leading a youth retreat, guiding lay leaders, or providing pastoral care to congregants. He is an insightful preacher and seeks creative ways to reach the entire congregation through word, song, and imagery. We are blessed to have James and his wife, Anita, join the Wayside family. I am excited to see where God leads us together. —Matt McGill



The process of finding our new Senior Pastor has caused me to stop and reflect on what Wayside needs and is being called to do by God, rather than what I felt would be our next step in the process. This new reflection changed my search process and allowed me to approach it more spiritually than before. We were guided to Reverend James Bernhardt by the direction that God has provided to us. He comes to us as a spiritual leader, friend, pastor, and role model. His knowledge of spiritual direction for both adults and youth is impressive and inspiring. It is a joy and honor to not only announce the arrival of a new Senior Pastor, but to also say it is the wonderful Reverend James Bernhardt who will be joining Wayside in our journey! —Karen Sidorowicz

I am impressed by his exceptional compassion and pastoral style. He is very creative; he has collaborated with others to write hymns and he can address the theology of the words of music. One hymn written in collaboration with his Music Director

in Hickory, NC, has been used at Montreat Conference Center and now appears in a hymnal. He and his Music Director also composed a response, a gloria patri, which is sung regularly at James' current church. James is a very multitalented individual.  
—Don Worthington

Rev. Bernhardt is first and foremost a wonderful man with a charming and easy way about him. His pastoral gifts are immediately evident. He is passionate about God and God's people. He has a passion and affinity for youth ministries and has taken various youth groups to Montreat, Camp Grier, and Massanetta conference centers throughout the years and talks about them fondly. I firmly believe that Rev. Bernhardt will provide committed, energetic, and collaborative leadership to our staff and congregation. He is married to Anita, who he met in seminary and who is also an ordained pastor, and they form a wonderfully solid and faithful team with great gifts for ministry.  
—Mark Twinem



*James working at a "Stop Hunger Now" event in which youth from James' current church and a few other Presbyterian churches prepared 10,500 packaged meals in 90 minutes.*

### Here are a few more things to know about James:

**Do you have one or two favorite biblical passages?** Genesis 50:15-21 and Philippians 2:1-13

**Name some places you would like to visit:** I enjoy traveling so my list is very large. How about Southeast Asia, New Zealand, Tahiti, Finland, Italy.

**Favorite professional sports teams?** NFL: Carolina Panthers, Green Bay Packers

**Do you have any favorite college sports teams:** ACC Basketball: NC State; Other college basketball: Davidson College, UNC Wilmington; College Football: Whoever is the underdog.

**What are you most passionate about?** I just preached a sermon on that question. The church.

**Who are your favorite religious authors?** Scholarly: Walter Brueggemann; Devotional: Anne Lamott

**How about a favorite non-religious author?** I read a lot, so this changes, but right now the late Kent Haruf.

**Do you have a favorite dessert?** Strawberry rhubarb pie.

**What are some of your favorite movies?** Shawshank Redemption, Silver Linings Playbook, Waking Ned Divine, to name but a very few.

**Do you enjoy any particular hobbies?** Home projects, cooking, camping, hiking.

**Favorite musician or band:** Phil Lesh, David Grisman, Railroad Earth, Avett Brothers, too many to name.

**Name the person you would most like to meet:** Barack Obama—I am a few weeks older than he is.

**Do you play any musical instruments?** The guitar, sort of.

**What are the top two items on your bucket list?** I don't have a bucket list.

**One more thing you should know about me:** No matter where I live, I am forever a North Carolinian from the Blue Ridge Mountains.

*As I met with James, I said to myself, "Here is a pastor!" His questions to me revealed that he understood how a church works and needs to work, within its walls and without. We actually started brainstorming together new ministries for the congregation and the community around us. From all the candidates that were interviewed, that was a first! I look forward to our ministry together.*  
—Keith

## Insight from References:

**Barbara Stark**, Ruling Elder,  
Northminster Presbyterian Church,  
Hickory, NC

- “James has a great personality with a good sense of humor. He gives very thoughtful sermons and may break out in song at times.
- He is true to his convictions but is understanding of people with other viewpoints and won’t push a personal agenda. His leadership is cooperative and collegial.
- You can tell he works hard on his sermons. The congregation is engaged from beginning to end.
- Two distinctive qualities are that James is thoughtful yet with sense of humor, and he is very caring. His pastoral care is excellent.
- “Our loss is your gain.”

**Nathan Crabtree**, Music Director  
of Northminster Presbyterian  
Church, Hickory, NC

- James really cares about the church and especially those in the church.
- James’s preaching is exceptional. He should be a regional or national resource for other ministers. Nathan has been to seminars for worship and he has not heard a sermon at these seminars that is as good as James gives.
- He is a good administrator. He approaches all he does in a collaborative manner. He listens to what others are saying, both on the staff as well as members.
- James treats the staff with great respect and listens to their ideas. He is the same in a conflict or in a positive setting. He also has a great sense of humor.
- Nathan believes James is seeking a church that gives attention to social justice issues. He will want to get involved in the community and help those less fortunate. He will strive to find the needs of those around him.

**Rev. Dr. Charles Davenport**,  
Friend and Colleague for 15 Years

- Rev. Bernhardt is well organized. In addition, Rev. Bernhardt is a very good preacher, has a passion for Christian education, is active in the presbytery, is a believer in the connectional church, and is a good administrator and a team player who is supportive of others.
- Rev. Bernhardt’s leadership style is “coach/servant style,” not the leadership of a CEO or king. He can survey a situation to become part of the solution himself and to equip others to be part of the solution. He shows empathy and compassion and provides spiritual leadership.
- Rev. Bernhardt’s preaching as exegetical, he takes scripture seriously and applies the text to the present day.
- He has a sense of humor.
- Rev. Bernhardt is a committed disciple of Jesus Christ and he tries to live that out. That permeates all that he does.
- “He will be willing to tell you the truth.” He is very grounded in the reformed tradition. He knows polity. He is compassionate and can work with varied groups.



*The workshop directors of  
Massanetta Middle School  
Conference, July 2015*

**Linda King Van Benschoten,**  
Ruling Elder, Northminster  
Presbyterian Church, Hickory, NC

- “One of James’ favorite quotes is ‘God alone is Lord of the conscience.’ He means that people should come to church where they are in their journey—that God’s inclusive table is open for everybody.”
- James is compassionate, creative and fun. One of his biggest assets is his ability and passion for trying new things. He is also energetic in how he approaches programs and his ministry.
- James loves to preach and works very hard to keep his sermons current and relevant. “When my family comes to visit they ask to go to church to hear him preach.”
- James definitely is collaborative but isn’t afraid to take charge if he has to. He is very genuine and we [Wayside] will feel like he is one us—leading from within not from the top down.
- James’ most distinctive characteristics are his approachability and his ability to relate to people where they are in their lives and faith journey. “If I could think of a way to keep him I would.”

**William Sigmon,** Former Stated  
Clerk, Western North Carolina  
Presbytery, and Long Time Friend

- James has “an obvious heart for people in pain.”
- James’ strengths include his compassion, genuineness, strong preaching skills, leadership and administrative skills and stability.
- James is a balanced and collaborative leader. He does not push a personal agenda but will attempt to discern what direction Wayside wants to go and then do what he can to facilitate. He will delegate responsibility appropriately.
- When confronted with differing opinions concerning recent decisions by the General Assembly, James was able to spark dialogue within the congregation which led to a deeper understanding and acceptance of the decisions and allowed the congregation to realize that while there may

be differences of opinion the disagreement did not have to be divisive.

- James has a unique and fresh spiritual connection. His sermons are incredibly well prepared.
- James is “quick with a joke.” He can laugh with you and, if appropriate laugh at you. He is “truly a lot of fun.”
- James is mission oriented and will be looking for a church with an opportunity to make a difference in the local community. James “likes to get his hands dirty” in mission work.
- James and Anita have a deeply stable relationship and very clear Christian values—“they are soaked in it.” They think things through very carefully. “If they come to Wayside, they both will be committed.”
- James “is the real deal.”



*The inspiring and hilarious Northminster intergenerational nativity scene*



## **James' Recent Continuing Education:**

### **January 2015, Stetson University Winter Pastors School, Deland, FL**

- A helpful and enriching respite with excellent teachers: Dr. Lauren Winner on "Overlooked Images of God in Scripture"; Dr. Martin Copenhaver on "Remembering as a Spiritual Practice"; Dr. John Dominic Crossan on "The Parables of Jesus".

### **September 2014, Conciliation Team Training, In Christ Supporting Ministries, Presbytery of Charlotte, Charlotte, NC**

- Training in a Christ-centered approach to mediation and reconciliation for dealing with conflict in the church.

### **March 2014, "Finding Your Voice", Jim Dant, Montreat Conference Center**

- The Presbytery of Western North Carolina Spring Spiritual Retreat based on Dant's book of the same name. He offers a unique approach to consider scripture as the beginning of a conversation in which we are called to participate daily.

### **February 2014, Community Forum on Race, Lenoir-Rhyne University, Hickory, NC**

- As it turns out, a very timely forum rising out of a Racial Reconciliation Reading Group to address long standing racial tensions in our community. The group has helped the participants think carefully and clearly about racial issues arising in the US in 2014.

### **August 2013, Interim/Transitional Pastor Training, Week 1, Montreat Conference Center**

- Helpful training for both interim ministry and for installed parish ministry to consider the family life and history of congregations in planning for mission and ministry

### **January 2013, Calvin Institute for Worship, Calvin College and Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI**

- Attended with Music Director and Director of Christian Education; the Institute presents a diverse expression of worship styles and approaches, musical resources, art and creativity.
- Inspiring speakers included Walter Brueggemann, N.T. Wright, John Bell, Diana Butler Bass.
- A pump primer for collaborative worship planning.

## **James' Other Recent Experience:**

### **Chairperson, Outdoor Ministry Committee, Presbytery of Western North Carolina, 2014–present**

- A newly formed committee to develop outdoor ministry in the mountains and piedmont of western North Carolina in conjunction with the newly independent non-profit Camp Grier.

### **Camp Grier Board of Directors, 2014–present**

- Ministry through Camp Grier formed me as a young person and has rewarded me as an adult. I rejoice to be on the first board of the newly independent camp and helping to shape its future.

### **Workshop Leader, Massanetta Middle School Conference, July 2013 and July 2015**

- Massanetta Springs Conference Center (PCUSA) near Harrisonburg, VA, has hosted the Middle School Conference for more than 20 years. It brings together middle school youth, their church leaders, high school-aged enablers and a team of workshop leaders for four days of learning, playing, dancing and worship.

### **Ministry Division Chairperson of PWNC Administrative Board, 2011–2012**

- Coordinated work of Committee on Ministry, Examinations Committee, Committee on Preparation for Ministry, and the Non-installed Pastor's subcommittee of COM.

### **Member, Committee on Ministry, PWNC, 2004–2010, Chairperson 2009–2010**

- A privilege to serve an important role with many dedicated and gifted teaching and ruling elders.

### **Member, Initial Mission to Nkhoma Hospital, Malawi, PWNC, 2006**

- We worked alongside Malawian folk to build a much needed restroom for caregivers who must remain on site at the hospital to tend their loved ones. This was the beginning of an enduring relationship between the PWNC and the Nkhoma Hospital. Others from Northminster Presbyterian Church have gone over in mission in the years since 2006.

