

A Portrait of Words for Rev. Joseph “Kirk” Weisz

Tell us a little bit about yourself?

I am originally from the USA and I grew up in the small town of Greeneville, Tennessee, which is located in the Southeast. Our family home was located on a college campus where my father was the college chaplain and my mother was an art professor. I have two brothers (I am the middle child) who are both airline pilots. I completed my undergraduate studies at King College, a Presbyterian liberal arts college in Tennessee where I majored in English literature. I am a former college football player (known as soccer in the U.S.), and I continue to play even today. I also enjoy watching English Premier League football with Arsenal being my favourite club. I am an avid runner and have fallen in love with running around the seven mountains that surround Bergen.

What is your ministerial background and education?

I first felt being called into pastoral ministry at a very early age. I remember very vividly as a teenager watching my father work as a minister. I was moved as I saw him offer pastoral care to the dying, preach at funerals, offer the yearly sermon at convocation services where he was a college chaplain and also when he invited international students to our home for meals and fellowship. I remember thinking to myself, “I want to be like this in my life.” I attended Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey after college, the same seminary my father attended. I began to follow a more direct path into ordained ministry while I was serving as a chaplain at a veterans hospital in Tennessee. It was in this hospital context that I was drawn to the deeply fulfilling work of offering pastoral care to men and women who had suffered deep physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds from their service in the military. After working as a hospital chaplain for two years, I was ordained and served as the pastor of Unity Presbyterian Church, a small congregation located in Newton Grove, North Carolina. During this time, I gained experience in every dimension of the church which included preaching, teaching, celebrating the sacraments, and developing various mission opportunities. After three years, I felt called to advanced theological education and clinical training in pastoral counselling. I enrolled in the Doctor of Theology in Pastoral Counselling program at Columbia Theological Seminary in the autumn of 2010 and continue to work on my dissertation. In conjunction with my doctoral education, I worked for two years as a pastoral counsellor offering individual, couple, and family therapy.

What brought you to Norway?

I moved to Norway after my wife Sarah, an environmental engineer, took a permanent research position at Uni Research in Bergen. Living in Norway has been a wonderful experience for me and my family. We feel very fortunate to live in such a safe and beautiful land. Since coming to Norway our family has grown significantly with the birth of our two

sons, Jacob and David. We are looking forward to baptising them both this autumn in the Anglican Church.

Why did you chose to accept this position at the Anglican Chaplaincy in Bergen?

I knew that I was being called to this position after reading over the “role description” just once. It quickly became apparent to me that my educational background and my ministerial experience would help support and further the core mission of the church; to develop a ministry of hospitality to international people in Bergen. I believe strongly that hospitality is central to the Gospel. The Anglican Chaplaincy in Bergen offers an invaluable ministry to residents in Bergen who have come from abroad and are adjusting to Norwegian life and culture. This gift is made real through offering worship in the English language, gathering for fellowship and shared meals, and most importantly providing a welcoming and inclusive community of faith where *everyone* can encounter God’s grace and love.

You hold a 50% position at the church. What will you be doing with the other 50%?

This is a very important question. The rest of my time will be split between taking care of my 7-month-old son David while my wife returns to work and finishing my doctoral dissertation. Once my son is in “barnehage” and my dissertation has been defended, I will use this time to develop a private pastoral counselling practice in Bergen. In general, Sunday, Monday and Wednesday will be devoted to the ministry of the Chaplaincy.

How do you see yourself adapting to the Anglican tradition?

I see myself adapting to the Anglican tradition very well, although there will be a steep learning curve as I get settled into the position. My first task is to learn to lead a liturgical service with communion by extension along with other Anglican traditions within the Chaplaincy. In addition, I am currently exploring Anglican ordination, which will require intensive study of the theology and traditions of the Church of England. This is a process that I am very much looking forward to beginning this autumn. In the meantime, I will be very intentional about maintaining a distinctly Anglican identity within our congregation by including a liturgical format to worship every Sunday.

What are you most passionate about in your life and ministry?

I have a deep passion for the field of pastoral theology. This basically means that I have a keen interest in offering pastoral care and counselling. It also means that I appreciate the insights of psychology and the behavioural sciences and from time to time you may hear my therapeutic voice come out! In congregational ministry, I am most passionate about developing congregations that are caring and inclusive, faithful to scripture, promote and seek justice, and teach the Christian Gospel. In my personal life, I am most passionate about being a loving, playful, and present father to my two young boys.