



## A Walk through the Shavings

An untold number of pastors have trod Salem's hallowed soil, but the number of pastors that grew up with saw-dust in their toes is unknown. Many can remember certain ones through the years that have spent their time observing various preaching styles, trying a stint as the Youth leader, and discerning a call to full-time ministry at the Tabernacle's prayer rail. One such young man is Jonathan Andersen. Jonathan, the son of Beth and Jim Andersen, grandson of Pat and Bill Rogers, has a long heritage on the camp ground. Yet, he has not allowed a rich and strong camping history to make him take his faith for granted. Jonathan is sincere about his commitment to Jesus Christ having been nurtured in the youth group of the First United Methodist Church of Conyers. In his own words, Jonathan recounts a piece of his faith journey which intersects with the spiritual growth and development he received at Salem Camp Meeting:

*Each year at Salem Camp Meeting I am renewed and transformed as I spend time in Christian community with friends and family. As a child this is where I was first exposed to the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. While this message was proclaimed from the pulpit and throughout daily Bible lessons, my memory of the Gospel in action is what had a greater impact in my younger years. Families and friends shared all they had. Encouragement flowed from all around. Everyone stayed up later than they normally would because they were engrossed in conversations about their lives. Petty worries of the world were abandoned. Folks left their sin at the altar in the tabernacle. Love abounded. It is this atmosphere where I continually catch glimpses of what true Christian community looks like. Growing up in this setting I was able to form relationships with Christians at all stages of life.*

*When I was about thirteen I began to sense that God was calling me into ministry. However, I had no clear idea of what this meant, what it looked like, or what lay ahead in my journey. But, I knew that there were many others who had traveled this path before me. I began to talk to others who had discerned calls to ministry themselves, and I saw the diversity and the beauty through which God interacts with all of our lives. As I moved on to high school I often ignored the sense of calling I so strongly felt just a few years before. Each summer at camp meeting I was encouraged and pushed forward as I witnessed ministry in action and heard testimonies from friends of where God had led them.*

*After my freshman year of college I was contacted by one of the trustees and asked if I would be willing to give a message at a Morning Watch.*

*Feelings of inadequacy instantly took over my body. How was I qualified to teach others about Jesus? What if I gave a terrible message? As I wrestled with all of these questions I turned again to mentors that had continued along my journey with me, but more importantly, I turned to God and opened myself up as a vessel for his message. Each year since, I have had the blessing of sharing God's word in front of the same group of people that raised me and taught me the Gospel message. I have had the blessing of sharing the love of Christ with youth and children just as others did for me. And I have also had the blessing of a community of believers standing beside me throughout all of this as I continue preparing for a call in to ministry. All of these things have taught me valuable insights about ministry and what it should look like in the church.*



The Rev. Dr. Alice Rogers, Jonathan's aunt, recounts her observations as Jonathan grew in stature and maturity during Salem's annual Gospel campaign:

Salem means a great deal to Jonathan, and his experience reminds me so much of my own journey. At Salem, I watched Jonathan discover mentors of all ages who were willing to talk with him about matters of faith. I watched him walk across the campground and knew that he was surrounded by the communion of saints, and that through those people, God was speaking to him, teaching him about God's love and grace and call to discipleship. I watched him sit near the back of the tabernacle with the other youth, wanting to appear unaffected by the Gospel proclamations, but finding that, at Salem, you can never sit too far away from the Holy Spirit. That distance from the altar only meant that he would have a longer walk through the shavings when God called him to respond to the preacher's message.

Please keep Jonathan in your prayers as he discerns his next steps in ministry calling. Read an essay Jonathan wrote on Salem for his freshman year English class at Furman University at <http://travelingboots.blogspot.com/2008/07/campmeeting.html>