

MEET OUR PREACHERS:



Dr. Leah Gunning Francis

Dr. Leah Gunning Francis is a seminary dean, mother and the author of two books about clergy involvement in the Ferguson uprising and the pursuit of racial justice. She currently serves as the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Indiana. As a mother of two African American sons, she has grounded her scholarship and activism in an ethic of love that honors the humanity of black youth in a society that too often has little regard for them. Her starting point as a practical theologian is the imago dei, that all people are created in the image of God, and fashions her teaching and preaching to posit this as a core tenet for building beloved community. For Dr. Gunning Francis, faith and justice are inextricably linked. The life of faith call us to do justice, and the work of justice requires us to accept that the way things are, are not the way things have to be – and have the courage to do something about it.



Rev. Gracie Hellweg Payne

As the Director of Young Adult Engagement at Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis, Gracie ministers with those in the transitional seasons of college, early adulthood, and parenthood. She is particularly attentive to those who have not yet found belonging or welcome within the church. Gracie is passionate about encouraging disciples of Jesus as they live out the mission of God for the good of our city and the flourishing of our world. Gracie is a graduate of Indiana University and Princeton Theological Seminary (M.Div.). She served as a Lake Fellow in Parish Ministry at Second, as the Director of Youth Ministries for a congregation in Carlisle, PA and the Student Pastor for a congregation in Dayton, NJ. Gracie loves returning to the ballet studio, gardening, reading novels and poetry, writing as a spiritual practice, and going on walks with her husband, Christian, and dog, Xylo.



Rev. Mike Samson

Mike has been a pastor for 14 years, serving on staff at congregations in Indiana and New Jersey. He graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity degree. He then completed a post-graduate program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, earning a Master of Theology degree. Mike is a native of Montclair, NJ (a suburb of NYC) and enjoys spending his free time with family and friends, playing guitar and making music, as well as playing various sports. Mike is married to Kelly Samson, a native of Vincennes, IN. They have two sons, Matthew (10) and Luke (7), as well as a big dog (a 90 pound golden retriever) and a cat.

