

# Meet Nate Sell,

## IPC's New Assistant Youth Director

*Nate was interviewed recently by Paul Romjue.*

### **1. Tell us a little about your childhood.**

I moved around a bit growing up. I lived in Greensburg, PA until I was twelve years old, then Princeton, NJ through my middle school years, and then lived in Granville, OH for my four high school years. My family mom now lives in Iowa, so when people ask me where I am from, I get a dumb look on my face (similar to the face I make when trying to figure out some basic math problem). I have an older sister, Kristin. We look alike, and when we were little, we would tell people we were twins. My parents met in youth group at the First Presbyterian Church in Greensburg, and both sets of my grandparents still belong there. When I visit, old ladies tell me that they knew me when I was “this tall,” and “this big” (unfortunately they don’t raise their hands very high for the tall part and spread them very wide for the big part).

### **2. When did you first feel that you were called to ministry?**

For a long time ministry had been a vague idea in the back of my mind which I might explore “sometime down the road.” My father was an ordained Presbyterian minister and my mother is now the director of admissions for a Presbyterian seminary, so to be honest, I thought I would skip the allegations that I was going into the family business and do something a little easier, like write the next great American novel. This changed for me, however, when I received a scholarship with the Fund for Theological Education in the summer before my junior year in college. I went to the conference on excellence in ministry mostly to collect a check to help pay for my college education (a little iffy, I know) and somehow in the midst of that conference a spark was lit. I thought, “These are the questions that are important to me. This is what matters. This is what I am passionate about.” I went from being uncertain about where the church was going to being excited about participating in what the Church can be. I feel called to youth ministry in particular for two reasons. The first is that I had some incredible youth ministers when I was growing up. They showed me God’s love and guided me on my spiritual journey in a remarkable way. I want to do the same thing for others. The second might seem obvious, but the youth are the future of the Church. It is important that youth are fostered spiritually and led to spiritual maturity not simply to keep the pews filled, but because the Church serves as Christ’s hands, and there is much work to be done.

### **3. Tell us a little about your college years.**

If you’ve seen “Animal House,” that pretty much sums it up. Just kidding. I graduated from Sewanee in May. Out of all the places I have been, Sewanee is where my soul has felt most at home. It is a place where I could take classes with names like “Sacred Manhood,” or end up in a professor’s house discussing Wendell Berry while drinking hot apple cider. I could walk out my dorm room and go backpacking any time I wanted, or go rock climbing



*Nate Sell, right, with IPC Youth Cammie Coulter*

after class. The chapel’s stained glass windows would light up a snowy night, and the people that frequented that chapel helped me fill my heart spiritually.

I was able to fulfill a boyhood dream of playing college lacrosse while at Sewanee. I also got to be a leader with Sewanee’s Outing Program, and was able to lead a variety of trips. One such trip was a weeklong mountaineering trip at 13,000 feet on the Continental Divide in January (I’ve never seen so much snow). Through Sewanee’s Outreach program, I spent a spring break in Ecuador meeting and serving with people who were impoverished economically, but able to teach me much about spiritual wealth. Sewanee was, for me, a place of porch swings and intentional conversations and night canoeing and working hard and playing hard. I could gush a little more, but I think you get the picture.

### **4. Your resume reached us when you were hiking the Appalachian Trail. Tell us how that happened.**

I started hiking south from Mt. Katadin on June 6, very uncertain about what was next for me. I have had an intense desire to thru-hike the AT since I was twelve years old, and I thought that if I did not do it right after college, there was a chance that I would not ever again have such an opportunity. Also, my three best friends decided to do it with me, so the timing was perfect. I figured that a long walk would be a good way to figure some things out, especially in terms of discerning what I was called to do with my life. The problem with taking a 2,200 mile long walk to “figure things out,” however, is that once you think you’ve figured something out, you still have another thousand or so miles to walk. All you do is think, so you’ll inevitably convince yourself you haven’t figured anything out after awhile just to have something to occupy your mind. But I digress.

Anyway, while I was only about 200 miles in, my girlfriend called and told me that one of her friends, and a new friend of mine, Leslie Manning, had heard that there was a youth ministry position opening at IPC. Leslie thought that I should apply for it and that it would be a great fit. I thought that this was very

interesting. I then thought about it for a couple hundred miles and decided that I it might be a great fit, too. I was trying to discern a call and this seemed pretty near perfect. Then I realized that I had not put together a resume before I left for the trail, and that even if I thought it might be a good fit, the search committee in Birmingham probably had no idea that some smelly guy with an Amish/Jeremiah Johnson looking beard was thinking about applying. So then I started writing a cover letter in my head and updating my resume mentally, because I did not have a computer. At the end of July, one of my hiking companions had to get off the trail because his sister was getting married (a weak excuse... I know). The other two guys and I decided that rather than breaking up the band, we would take a break, too. I found a computer, made up my resume, wrote the cover letter, and shipped it off to the search committee. Then I started walking again.

Eventually I got in touch with Kennon Walthall and Paul Romjue, and it sounded like there was a possibility that I could interview for a position when I returned. I finished the trail on October 16th, shaved off my beard (I looked like Forest Gump when he ran across the country... not exactly a good interviewing look), and met with the committee. I was still getting used to fancy things like electricity and running water, but luckily, the process went well. I felt called here, and here I am.

## 5. What are your first impressions of Birmingham and of IPC?

I must admit that I was initially a bit apprehensive about Birmingham. Being in the outdoors is where I feel most alive, and I was worried that I would not be able to get my fill in Alabama. However, the more I looked around, I realized I could get to good outdoor opportunities. I also really like the city of Birmingham. I like that it is composed of multiple smaller communities and does not feel like a really big city, while simultaneously providing great food and entertainment. I am still a bit scared of the summer here, though. I grew up in the cold, and 100 degrees is a lot more intimidating to me than 10 degrees. Thank God for air-conditioning!

In terms of my first impressions of IPC, I can honestly say that I have felt at home from the minute I walked in the door. I love the building and style of worship- both are absolutely beautiful. More importantly, the people are amazing. Everyone has been incredibly kind and welcoming. I am very thankful for how people at IPC have treated me- they have even helped me outfit my apartment!

## 6. What dreams and ideas do you have for the youth program?

I think that the focus of the youth program should be the same as the focus of IPC's stated priorities, those being, "Living in the spirit, living in community, and living in service to others." I believe that these priorities encompass how we are meant to live, and I do not think that someone can be truly well without all three of these components.

I am reminded of Timothy 4:12, when Paul writes, "*Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.*" As Paul suggests, the youth have much to contribute to each other, to the larger congregation, and indeed the world. My dream is that we would live out these words.

Three of my favorite questions are "**Who am I, what are my gifts, and what is my place in the world?**" I think that these questions help us find what we are supposed to do with our lives. One of my dreams would be that we, as a youth group, could ask these questions of ourselves and of each other. If we all asked these questions, I think that the results would be truly amazing. It is already clear to me that the youth of IPC have incredible potential... their energy and intelligence is easy to spot. If that potential is channeled for living out God's mission, I can barely fathom what astonishing things will happen.

## 7. What's on your iPod?

My iPod needs updated right now... it isn't an accurate representation of the music I am into at the moment. Here is a sampler of what I have been listening to: Bon Iver, Joe Purdy, Ray Lamontagne, Mumford and Sons, Ben Folds, Coldplay, Horse Feathers, Iron and Wine, The Weepies, Ryan Adams, and the Jesus and Mary Chain. I've also been jamming to some old U2 recently.

## 8. Any favorite books?

I am an unabashed bookworm, so this is hard. Some favorites include *A River Runs Through It* by Norman Maclean, *The Dharma Bums* by Jack Kerouac, *Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff* by Christopher Moore, *A Walk in the Woods* by Bill Bryson, and the *Narnia* series by C.S. Lewis. I am also a big fan of John Muir, Frederick Buechner, Mark Twain, Ernest Hemmingway, Wendell Berry, and Donald Miller. The best book I have read recently is *The River Why* by David James Duncan.

## 9. Do you have any pets?

I had two dogs growing up, a Golden Retriever named Bob, and a mix named Onny. Both of them have passed away, and I miss having them as hiking companions.

## 10. What do you do in your spare time

Canoeing, backpacking, skiing, climbing, and dabbling in fly-fishing are some of my favorite things to do outside. I also love playing and coaching lacrosse. Reading and writing are daily musts for me, as well.

## 11. Finally, are you an Alabama or Auburn fan?

Steelers! Where I grew up, whether the Steelers won or lost determined the happiness of many people for an entire week. But, I must admit, I have recently become an Alabama fan. Roll Tide.