

MEET PTS



How did a German and biology major find herself enrolling in seminary so soon after her college graduation? The Rev. Alina Kanaski '16 says her call to ministry started during the summer before she received her degree from Earlham College, in Indiana.

"I was back home, working, studying for the GRE, and figuring out what to do after college," Alina recalls. "I was thinking I'd pursue something related to biology. Then a family friend—a retired pastor—pulled me aside and said he thought I should consider going to into ministry." Initially, it didn't seem to Alina like a good fit with her more quiet personality, but she told him she'd think about his suggestion.

"I prayed about it and was surprised to hear a very loud 'Yes,'" she says. "Then I avoided it for a while. Eventually I started researching seminaries, and since I was attending a Presbyterian church, I narrowed down my search to Presbyterian seminaries. In 2012, right before the new year, I attended the Urbana Conference in St. Louis. There I 'ran into' PTS—and was impressed with what I saw."

Alina applied and found herself in Pittsburgh come the fall of 2013. She entered the Seminary's M.Div. program but at that point didn't think she wanted to go into a pastoral ministry. "I didn't think I was outgoing enough for a big congregation like my home church's," she says. Then she did a field education assignment in a small church and "really liked it." "This church was very different from the suburban churches I'd attended before. The small-church context felt like a better fit for me—it was more personal, I could get to know everyone. There I figured out how to be myself and do ministry," she says. Another field ed assignment, this time in a large suburban church, confirmed Alina's call to a small-church context.

Though she'd entered into the PC(USA)'s under-care/ordination process when she started seminary, Alina hadn't always gone exclusively to Presbyterian churches. So when she became call-ready after graduating from PTS, she didn't feel it was completely out of the question to consider pastoral positions outside the Presbyterian tradition. "I was looking all over for a small church, and a few months after I began doing so, I got an e-mail about a Lutheran partnership," she says.

The partnership Alina's referring to is that between the Pittsburgh Presbytery, Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg to provide ELCA congregations in Southwestern Pennsylvania with high quality, consistent pastoral care. "I received an e-mail from the ELCA bishop about an appointment to Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Bower Hills, and a call to Chartiers Valley UPC—both small churches near Pittsburgh that are just a five-minute drive apart." Now Alina, as an ordained PC(USA) pastor, serves both congregations—Good Shepherd three-quarters time, and Chartiers Valley one-quarter time.

"Having just started in September, I'm still getting to know people in both churches and become more familiar with Lutheran liturgy," says Alina. "And I've been encouraged by the flexibility of the Lutheran church in allowing me to learn as I go. I like talking to people of other traditions—and other faiths—and the joint services Good Shepherd Lutheran Church does with Bower Hill Community (Presbyterian) Church, St. Mary's Catholic Church, and Temple Emanuel have reawakened and expanded my thoughts about what it means to be a Christian more broadly, rather than thinking only in denominational terms."

About the denominational partnership that facilitates her service also at Chartiers Valley PC, Alina says it's exciting "to find a way to pastor a church that can only support someone quarter time but can do it in a manner that's sustainable for me as a pastor."

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