

CREATIVELY GETTING THE JOB DONE

A native “yinzer” born and raised in Western Pennsylvania, the Rev. Allison Bauer '05 serves as pastor at Second Presbyterian Church in Portsmouth, Ohio. Previously she led Frankfort Presbyterian Church in Hookstown, Pa., for 10 years, where she distinguished herself as a creative leader.

Allison recently received the Seminary’s second Fred McFeely Rogers Award for Creative Ministry. In her new role in Ohio, she is learning that creativity looks different in different contexts. “And that means the creative tricks I used in my first church will probably *not* work in my second!” she notes.

But she also realized there must be some parts of being creative that can transfer from one place to another, so she started to ponder the principles behind creativity.

She came up with three. “Technically, Albert Einstein came up with them, but I don’t think he would mind if I borrowed them!” quips Allison.



The first transferable principle is, “Creativity is contagious; pass it on.” Allison found that one person’s creative idea often sparks creativity in another when one year she had the idea to make a Christmas movie. “And sharing that idea was pretty much all I had to do,” she says, because the idea created such a spark in the congregation that the project just took off. “I love to find a creative way to connect with someone’s ‘sweet spot,’ that place inside each one of us that motivates us to step out in faith, to try something new, or to reach out a helping hand.”

The second principle defines creativity as having fun. “Wrapped up inside creativity there is fun and passion and playfulness and imagination and risk and daring and hope and, I think, a desire to create something in a way that imitates and glorifies our own Creator God,” explains Allison. She goes on to say, “Part of being creative in a congregation is to do a familiar thing in a new and often fun way. Sing something you normally speak; speak something you normally sing; ask a couple of people to act out a Scripture passage; ask an unlikely person to help with something; ask a question in the middle of a sermon and wait for answers. Try to touch hearts. It’s all about joy in the Lord, right?”

Finally, Allison shares Einstein’s third principle: “A person who never made a mistake never tried anything new.” Creativity involves trying something new, which means taking risks, which means means possibly failing. “To be creative in a congregation,” says Allison, “there must be enough trust to risk looking foolish in front of each other. And you as the creative leader must be willing to risk looking like a fool yourself in case your creative effort flops, as it occasionally will. But I’m willing to bet, even in the middle of the biggest failure, there’s still one person whose heart you touch and who is more deeply connected to God as a result. And that makes potential failure totally worth it!”

“Fortunately,” she concludes, “we worship a Creator and Creative God who loves us and grants us the courage to stand up and take risks—even those that might make us look foolish. After all, God chose the foolish things of this world to shame the wise” (1 Cor 1:27).

Allison earned her bachelor’s from Grove City College and MDiv from PTS. In her leisure time, she enjoys kayaking and hiking with her pup, Rocky, as well as reading.

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Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
616 North Highland Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15206
Phone: 412-362-5610



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