

CHURCH PLANTER CHRIS BROWN CO-LEADS MINI-CONFERENCE ON INTEGRATING FAITH, LIFE, AND WORK

The Rev. Chris Brown '08—coordinator of the **Church Planting Initiative** at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, founding co-pastor of The Upper Room Presbyterian Church in Squirrel Hill, and a 1001 New Worshipping Communities coach—is co-leading a day-long mini-conference at PTS on March 17: Making a Wake: Integrating Faith, Life, and Work as We Follow Christ.

“Making a wake,” explains Chris, “comes from the charge that PTS alumnus BJ Woodworth '07—pastor of the Open Door church plant in Pittsburgh—gave at my ordination service: ‘Ministry is what happens in the wake of the pursuit of God.’ In other words, as Christian leaders pursue faithfulness to Christ in their own lives, ministry naturally flows out of them.”

Chris recognizes this truth in the example of the missionary Saint Columba, who prayed “God of the wind and waves, send us where you will” before stepping with his companions into a rudderless boat and letting the ocean carry them into God’s desired future. “So began the journey that led to the establishment of the Iona monastery and the evangelization of Scotland,” he notes. Set for St. Patrick’s Day, Making a Wake will consider what the example of these Celtic saints means for us today, given the church’s current location on a “stormy sea.”

No stranger to the winds that bring unexpected change, Chris has also experienced the “truth of the wake” in his own life. He came to Pittsburgh from Colorado to get an **M.Div.** in preparation for the pastorate. But three months after he graduated, he found himself serving espresso in a local café. “For the next five years, the café would be my employer, my community, and my mission field,” says Chris. “This wasn’t a mistake. It was exactly where God had called me to be.” Thus Chris was baptized into the world of bivocational ministry and church planting.

“I didn’t need an M.Div. to serve espresso or bake muffins, but I did need theological education to prepare me for the conversations that took place every day at the café,” Chris notes—conversations about caring for aging parents, fighting addictions, new-age spiritualities, and the idea that there is only one Truth. “These were real people, with real struggles, in need of real gospel. And that’s precisely why I wanted to be there.”

At the same time, Chris and fellow PTS alumnus Mike Gehrling '08 co-founded The Upper Room, a PCUSA church plant in the neighborhood of the café. “Our congregation has grown from a small group to a house church to a chartered congregation, but I know without a doubt that some of the most important ministry I’ve done has been in the café, says Chris, who in 2014 moved on from there to serve as coordinator of the Seminary’s Church Planting Initiative. “I’m still bivocational—serving part-time at PTS and part-time at The Upper Room—but now I have the joy of encouraging and supporting other church planters as they embark on similar journeys.”

At the Making a Wake mini-conference—co-led by Vera While, associate for 1001 New Worshipping Communities—participants will learn postures and practices that make us more attentive to the Holy Spirit. And they’ll receive encouragement from the vision that ministry is the wake which forms as we move forward in pursuit of God.

For more information about Making a Wake, visit www.pts.edu/JIJO_2015.



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



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