

MEET PTS



MILLER SUMMER YOUTH INSTITUTE CONTINUES PROGRAMMING ONLINE

The Rev. Derek Davenport, director of the **Miller Summer Youth Institute**, figured that 2020 was shaping up to be a banner year. All three of the primary SYI ministries—a high school academy at Waynesburg University, high school mission experiences for church youth groups, and a two-month residential college internship program—were completely booked and ready to go.

Then, the world fell apart.

Adjusting to the pandemic was particularly challenging for Derek because all three of these SYI ministries have always hinged on embodied, face-to-face experiences. There was simply no way to redesign the academy or mission experiences in time for the summer. So Derek—along with SYI co-director the Rev. Erin Davenport (who is also his wife)—decided to pivot these two ministries, creating in their place an online opportunity for all SYI constituents, including alums. This gathering, called Unprecedented Hope, took place in July 2020. Meanwhile, the Davenports adjusted the college internship program to an online format. This was quite a feat, since a core element of the internships is close mentoring relationships. This was possible due to the heroics of MDiv students Cici James and Simeon Rodgers, who served as mentors and built an incredible sense of community over video chat with the interns.

“It was so important for us to provide community for these college students during the pandemic,” Derek explains. “This crisis hit them differently. Some have no home base to return to, some are locked into their dorms, and there is a lot of isolation.”

The community was so life-giving that it has lasted well beyond the two months of the internship; the eight interns are still maintaining their friendships online—and Derek and Erin are known to send them pizzas from time to time.

The Miller Summer Youth Institute is now working on its 2021 offerings. In addition to hosting another online college summer internship program, Derek and Erin are exploring new creative opportunities. They will be partnering with the Presbyterian College Chaplains Association to help lead their online conference, which will focus on finding hope in the neighborhood.

SYI will also be trying something completely new: a college spring break online event! Students from at least six schools spread across the U.S. have worked together to create this interactive learning experience. They will talk about social justice in their own contexts, especially related to COVID-19 and mental health issues on college campuses. The content will be extremely practical, teaching students how to identify people (even themselves) who are suffering in isolation and how to work with local agencies to help meet tangible and relational needs.

Thank you, Derek, for your innovative work helping young people explore questions of who God is calling them to be and what God is calling them to do.

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