

MEET PTS



CONTINUED LEARNING FOR CONTINUING GROWTH

“I’m a life-long learner always looking for opportunities to take classes,” says the Rev. Dr. Donna Giver-Johnston, pastor of Community PC of Ben Avon, Pa. Some years after seminary, she earned a **Certificate in Spiritual Formation** from Pittsburgh and Columbia seminaries, and since moving to Pittsburgh in 2013 she’s taken full advantage of the offerings in PTS’s Continuing Education Program.

This year Donna will be teaching a ConEd course—**Preaching a Relevant Word to a Restless People**. “Preachers may be reluctant to mention current events from the pulpit,” notes Donna.

“But it’s important not to communicate inadvertently that we don’t care about what’s happening in the world. So together we’ll learn ways to preach sermons that are pastorally sensitive, prophetically challenging, and particularly relevant today—not in a partisan way, but in one that helps people find their voice as leaders seeking to follow Jesus’ command to love God and neighbor,” she explains.

Raised Roman Catholic, Donna was 12 when she heard God’s call to serve in the church. But because she was female, the priesthood wasn’t an option. “I thought I must have accidentally overheard the divine call meant for the boy kneeling next to me,” she remembers.

Years later, at Westminster College she majored in industrial relations, then went to work in Washington, D.C. “One Sunday morning I attended worship at New York Avenue PC, where I’d been tutoring inner city kids. There I saw what I’d never seen before: a woman in the pulpit. I said to God, ‘Oh, that’s what you called me to do.’” Soon afterwards Donna quit her government job, enrolled in seminary, and upon graduation received a preaching award.

After a number of years in the pastorate, she began wanting to learn more about spiritual formation—“for my own nourishment and for guiding others spiritually,” she notes. “The Certificate program allowed me to attend to my restless heart seeking to rest in God. And the experiences and training I received have enriched my pastoral ministry with a collection of resources for deepening spiritual practices,” she comments.

But Donna wasn’t done. “I love to ask questions,” she insists. And after 10 years in the church and two as a stay-at-home mom, she enrolled at Vanderbilt University and earned a Ph.D. in homiletics and liturgics. “I believe it’s vitally important that pastors continue to study and learn—for their own growth and the growth of their congregations,” she concludes.

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