

MEET PTS



STUDENT FROM PUERTO RICO STEPS OUT OF HER COMFORT ZONE

After 13 years of working in the area of public health—one of two fields in which Eileen Rivas already holds a master’s degree—the now-Th.M. student at Pittsburgh Seminary sensed the call of God to ministry. That call came in 2008, so Eileen started studying at Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico. After earning her M.Div., the Rev. Rivas became pastor of a PC (U.S.A.) church on the island. She felt—and she was—at home.

“I loved this church,” Eileen reflects, “but, at the same time, in my first month of being a pastor I sensed that God was telling me not to get too comfortable—I wouldn’t be there for long—it wasn’t my place—I needed to move out of my comfort zone. Then God put it in my heart to continue my studies.” When that happened, Eileen began looking for another seminary to attend—one that would expand her experience . . . outside her comfort zone.

During her search and application process to seminaries in the eastern U.S., a friend in Puerto Rico (the State Clerk, in fact) suggested she apply to a Presbyterian seminary. And after speaking with representatives from PTS, Eileen passed her interview in English (Eileen’s second language), moved to Pittsburgh with her husband Ismael in August 2017, and began her Th.M. program in preparation for pursuing a Ph.D. in New Testament studies.

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“Even before we came, and especially now that we are here, I can see the heart of Pittsburgh Seminary very clearly. The faculty, staff, and students are so supportive. They always ask how we are doing, what we need, and how they can help,” says Eileen. “I am taking classes in English for the first time in my life, and the faculty and administration have taken practical steps to help me develop my English language skills and allow me the necessary time to complete my program. I have really felt the hand of God in this place.”

Eileen’s first term at PTS was especially difficult for her emotionally because of the two hurricanes that hit Puerto Rico. “During that time, I was still getting used to living in a new place, having to push myself to speak English (not just listen to and read it), and adjusting to the academic workload here. Then, on top of all that, I couldn’t talk to my family for two weeks because of the devastation back home,” she recalls. “It meant so much to me that the Seminary community sent greatly needed provisions to my family, including a generator. The supplies arrived the day after Christmas!”

An honors and academic-award-winning M.Div. graduate, as well as a TA at her seminary alma mater, the Rev. Eileen Rivas clearly has not only a heart for Christian ministry but also a mind for scholarship in service of the gospel. At PTS, her Th.M. thesis will focus on the discipleship of women in the Gospel of Mark—a theme she plans to expand in her future doctoral work. Eileen’s exemplary courage and faith in stepping out of her comfort zone to follow the call of God on her life challenges and inspires us all not merely to sense but also to heed the nudging of the Holy Spirit in each of our lives as well.

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