

MEET PTS



THE MILLER SUMMER YOUTH INSTITUTE KICKS OFF A RE-IMAGINED AND RETOOLED SEASON OF PROGRAMMING

“These last months have been a whirlwind of emotion and activity,” says the Rev. Erin Davenport ’05, director of the **Miller Summer Youth Institute**. Thanks to the COVID-19 restrictions, her entire family is home 24/7—including her two young children, requiring “21 meals per week and countless snacks in between.” Like so many other families, Erin’s is negotiating work, school, and home life in a completely new and different way. But she hastens to announce that “the Miller Summer Youth Institute at PTS is on!”

“Though our programming has changed—like everything else in our world has!—we’re still working with young people to answer SYI’s two key questions: ‘What is God calling you to do?’ and ‘Who is God calling you to be?’ This summer we have an incredible class of eight college interns from various states who will be working on projects from home to address those questions,” Erin explains.

Instead of pursuing residential internships in Pittsburgh this summer, the interns are entering a three-phase program. In phase one, from June 1 through July 31 all eight of them will complete a project at home in their respective fields of study, which range from environmental issues (such as microbial fuel cells) to preaching in the African American tradition. The hoped-for plan for phase one is that the interns will be able to come to Pittsburgh sometime in the 2020-2021 academic year to present their projects in person at the Seminary. “Phase three anticipates their opportunity to join us residentially in Pittsburgh in the summer of 2021,” Erin notes.

This summer’s interns, who hail from Ohio, Pennsylvania, Illinois, North Carolina, and Indiana, are enrolled at a number of schools: Grove City College and Muskingum, Waynesburg, St. Andrews, and Carnegie Mellon universities. Supported in their phase one studies by Erin, SYI co-director the Rev. Derek Davenport ’05/17, admissions counselor Chris Taylor ’19, and Seminary students Cici James and Simeon Rodgers, the interns as a group will meet weekly with the SYI staff via Zoom. Individual meetings to track the interns’ progress both personally and professionally will also take place weekly (again via Zoom) throughout June and July.

“This summer, we also hope to offer programming and support online to our alumni in the month of July,” says Erin. The usual summer SYI mission experiences in partnership with Open Hand Ministries and Garfield Farm are now planned for spring 2021. And the start of SYI’s new partnership with Westminster College and its continuing programming with Waynesburg University will be taken up in summer 2021.

So Erin’s been busy—busy re-imagining and retooling this year’s SYI activities while caring for kids missing their normal social outlets. “The latter has required an immense amount of attention and creativity from their parents (Derek and me!) who are trying to work and keep everything else in life going. We have grown to appreciate our house, yard, and neighborhood more than ever. We are loving pizza night on Friday to celebrate a work/school week completed. And we are finding joy in the imaginations of our kids, who have created a world at home to replace the worlds of school, friends, and sports that they had before the pandemic hit. As we try to envision what the future might look like,” says Erin, “we are thankful for our family, friends, and work at PTS. And we just keep taking one day at a time.”

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