

MEET PTS



SEMINARY OFFERS INTERFAITH EVENTS THROUGH CONTINUING EDUCATION

“Successful interfaith relationships require three things—curiosity, respect, and compassion,” says Helen Blier, director of continuing education at PTS. “Humility to recognize that we don’t have all the answers is also helpful to the conversation.”

This past June, Helen joined others from across the city for a Shabbat interfaith panel. Representatives included Muslims, Jews, and Christians. Those in the standing-room-only audience represented additional groups, including Hindus, “nones,” and “dones.” The event was held June 7 preceding Shavuot, the Jewish Festival of Weeks commemorating the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. During this holiday, people often gain knowledge for better participating in communities—including those different from their own.

“Faith differences can be disruptive,” explains Helen. “But the hallmark of cooperation across differences is to identify shared concerns in communities, including the well-being of neighbors, and being an ally.”

The Seminary’s Continuing Education Office will host a number of events this academic year to encourage conversation between different faith traditions and divisions within the same ecclesial family. Starting in October, the Seminary will offer a five-part Conversations and Community Series addressing the American religious landscape. During two sessions, participants will join PCUSA retired pastor Jim Gilchrist to learn about religion in the U.S. context. In the other three sessions, the group will tour a house of worship (Sri Venkateswara Temple [Hinduism], Rodef Shalom [Judaism], and Muslim Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh [Islam]), converse with the worship leaders at each location, and enjoy a meal together. Participants can attend one or multiple sessions—all free of charge, though a free-will offering will be collected as a thank-you to host sites.

“Together we’ll learn about these religious communities. In doing so, we hope people will see points of familiarity and ultimately see these groups as their neighbors,” explains Helen.

Additionally, the Seminary will offer the annual Henderson Summer Leadership Conference in June 2020. During this event Valarie Kaur, a civil rights activist, lawyer, award-winning filmmaker, educator, author, and Sikh American, will kick off her book tour. Kaur developed the Revolutionary Love Project to champion love as a force for justice and wellspring for social action. Based at the University of Southern California, the Revolutionary Love Project produces stories, tools, curricula, conferences, films, TV moments, and mass mobilizations that equip and inspire people to practice the ethic of love. Their current projects focus on racism, nationalism, and hate against Sikh, Muslim, Arab, and South Asian American communities.

These are just two of the Seminary’s continuing education offerings this academic year. As Helen explains, “the theme across our events this year is coming together around areas of commonality and concern.” **[Check out the full calendar of events and join us!](#)**

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