

MEET PTS



SOUTHERN BAPTIST TURNED MENNONITE PURSUES M.Div./MSW AT PRESBYTERIAN SEMINARY

As a Southern Baptist growing up in Texas, M.Div. student Jerrell Williams of course liked football. In fact, Jerrell played football on his high school team—and he played well enough to receive a football scholarship to Bethel College in North Newton, Kan. Not a Southern Baptist college, but a Mennonite college . . . with a Christian tradition very different from the one he'd always known. “I was used to praise songs, not hymns. The lectionary and church calendar were new to me. And I wasn't a pacifist,” he notes.

“I loved to study the Bible and theology, and when I came upon the doctrine of predestination and realized that people understood it differently, I also realized that interpreting the Bible deeply affects people's lives. So I thought, ‘Ministry's the thing for me.’”

But Jerrell also got to Bethel for other reasons. “When I was a junior in high school, I was bad at everything,” he says. “So I asked myself, ‘What do I care about enough to put some serious time and energy into?’” He did like football, but he realized the NFL wasn't going to be an option for him. He liked the sciences, but when he got to chemistry he decided that field was not for him. When he went down the proverbial list, he concluded the only thing that remained stable was his Christian faith. “I loved to study the Bible and theology, and when I came upon the doctrine of predestination and realized that people understood it differently, I also realized that interpreting the Bible deeply affects people's lives. So I thought, ‘Ministry's the thing for me.’” At Bethel he majored in Bible and religion.

At first Jerrell thought he wanted to become a youth pastor. But one experience in an internship with youth during his college years changed his mind: he got a chance to preach. From that time on, he aimed at becoming a pastor pure and simple, though he also maintained an interest in pursuing social work. After also completing a minor in human services, he graduated and 15 days later married Sierra, whose interests in social work paralleled his own. As he thought more and more about his faith in relation to the Mennonite doctrine of pacifism, it began making sense to him as a proper Christian interpretation, so he joined the Mennonite church, to which Sierra already belonged.

And then he started looking at seminaries. “I searched online for the Top 10 seminaries with joint **M.Div./M.S.W. programs**,” he says as he recalls how he found out about PTS. “I applied, interviewed by phone, was accepted, and came—without ever having visited!” And now that he's confirmed his call specifically to pastoring, Jerrell has begun PTS's **M.Div. program with Graduate Certificate in Urban Ministry**, which allows him also to develop his orientation toward social justice issues.

“At PTS I've been impressed with the community between Board members, faculty, and students. Leaders listen to students' concerns, and students help each other academically rather than competing with each other. Professors are reachable, accessible, and personal—they show their human side. They pray before class, which changes the environment—all of a sudden, it's not just a class but a place where God is. A place where God is in conversation with us.”

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