

KATIE RIEHLE FINDS A HOME AT PITTSBURGH SEMINARY

Senior MA student Katie Riehle didn't grow up in the Presbyterian church. Or Methodist. Or Baptist. Or any other mainline denomination. She is Mormon, yet felt called to attend Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

"My basic story is that I am a Mormon woman, and there is no ordination for women in the Mormon faith," she says. So people often ask her about why she's attending seminary. "Matter of fact," she says, "I ask myself the same question. To be honest, I haven't the first clue. But I'm not the one who sent me here. That I know."

For many years Katie was interested in studying religion. Then life happened—she's the mother of eight—so she delayed formal education. After graduating with her bachelor's in psychology, Katie knew she wouldn't ever be able to pursue graduate studies at a Mormon school. So it made sense to look elsewhere. At about the same time, her husband wanted to make a career move. "When we came up to PTS for the spring open house, we both knew what to do next," she says. "We were home." They moved their troops (their seven kids still at home, two dogs, and a snake) north to call Pittsburgh home.



Even though things were falling into place, the first year was not without challenges. "I was really nervous about what people would think about my faith. I took a 'don't-ask-don't-tell' approach. Some students did ask, and it was uncomfortable to disclose to a classroom of people I'd never met."

The second year Katie reconsidered her approach to disclosing her religious affiliation. "It all started with a particular discussion about how a gay student was treated during his years at seminary. He discussed his fear of disclosing this essential part of his identity. Everything he was saying was clicking for me," she said. "I had so many of the same thoughts about my religious identity as this other student did about his sexual identity. I decided for the most part that I wouldn't hide anymore, but also that I couldn't throw it into people's faces either. It was a relief just to be myself."

Since Katie became a student at PTS, students have witnessed and responded to different kinds of discrimination in the world and locally. "Those on the margins are always in our hearts," Katie says. "We honestly desire to pull the outsider in."

Katie is unsure what she'll do with her degree after graduation. "But I take away so much more than whole bookshelves full of mainstream Protestantism. There are all these people who are good and wonderful, and with such purpose. I get to call them friend. And they know me as the Mormon woman who went to a Presbyterian seminary with no particular goal in mind. That's right—that's me! And now I say it with much more confidence than I did the first day I walked in the door."

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