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MTS STUDENT FOLLOWS CALL TO HEALTH AND INCLUSIVE MINISTRY

For recent graduate Leanna Lake (**MTS** '21), theological education was part of a bigger picture—a personal calling to respond to a Church in crisis.

The daughter of a Methodist minister, Leanna was born on her father’s first day of seminary. She went on to also marry a Methodist minister! Surrounded by church and ministry throughout her life, she watched as the American Church’s reputation plummeted. Very real problems in churches were hurting people and causing them to walk away.

“I eventually reached a crossroads,” she recalls. “I would either turn my back on the church as well, or else I would get in there and help create a different form of Christianity—with healthy and inclusive ministry.”

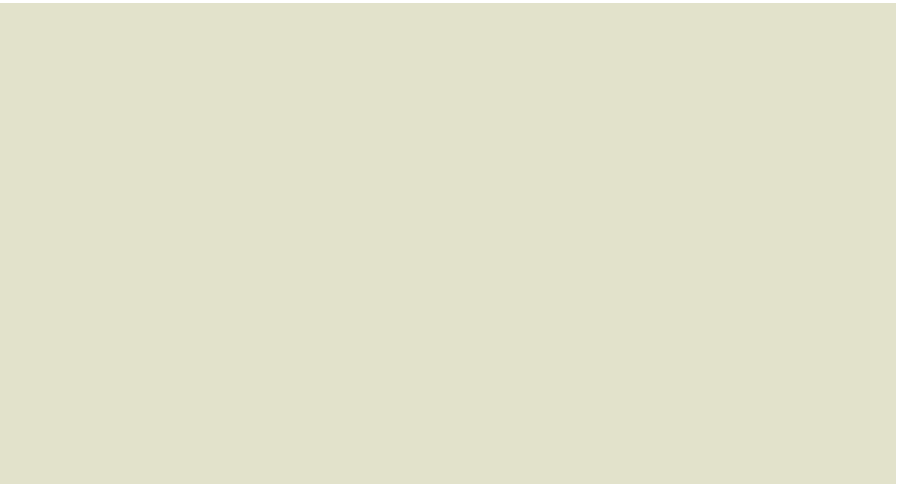
She chose Door #2, and this sense of calling took shape in holistic ministry that unites the physical, mental, and spiritual. Leanna provides physical help through occupational therapy and mental help through rehabilitation counseling. As for spiritual aid, she began to minister through spiritual direction—but she sensed that she needed theological education to build a strong foundation for her spiritual direction ministry.

At that point, the decision to attend PTS was an easy one. She was from the Pittsburgh area, she knew some graduates, and the school’s vision statement about “generous and hospitable community” and “practices of discipleship that stir our imagination” mirrored her own passions and desires for ministry. So in 2019, Leanna joined the Pittsburgh Seminary community.

Two years later, as a recent graduate, she is confident that she has received the strong theological foundation she was seeking. “Before seminary, I was intimidated by the Old Testament,” Leanna says, “but it has become my favorite subject to study. It has opened up a new world of meaning for me as I read Scripture.” She also marvels at how much she has learned about church history, theology, and writing. She was able to pull all this learning together in her thesis, which developed a practical theology based on the integration of mind, body, and spirit in ministry.

Leanna is fortunate to have a context where she can immediately implement her learning about holistic ministry. She is an associate member at the **West Virginia Institute of Spirituality**, an ecumenical retreat center, where she leads retreats and provides spiritual direction. One of her next vocational steps will be to connect to more retreat centers so that she can provide holistic ministry to more people.

The Church is still beset with controversy and crisis—what brings us hope is that Leanna and others like her are answering the call.



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