

MEET PTS



# M.DIV. GRAD ANSWERS MISSIONAL CALL TO MINISTRY AS CHAPLAIN

Unfolding. That is the word Marlaena Cochran '19 uses to describe her call and path to chaplaincy. This month, Marlaena became a community chaplain for the West team of Pittsburgh's Family Hospice—the non-profit organization through which she earned a clinical pastoral education unit during her last year of seminary at PTS.

But Marlaena's new chaplaincy position is only the latest development in the unfolding of her missional call to ministry. A Pittsburgh native, Marlaena majored in history and pre-law at Grove City College, then earned her JD from Duquesne University. From there she began working for Pittsburgh non-profits and churches in administrative roles ranging from accounting to non-ordained ministries. "A pastor of one of the churches I worked for said to me one day, 'Marlaena, I think the ministry might be in your future,'" she shares.

So Marlaena pursued a discernment process between seminary and spiritual direction.

"I decided I wanted to pursue spiritual direction—coming alongside people in a listening and prayerful way," she notes. Over the next several years she earned three two-year certificates in spiritual direction.

"As a spiritual director, I was helping people grow through being with them amid transitions, uncertainty, crises, and their own personal darkness. I increasingly found myself being asked to fill that ministry of presence with others." Then, continued visits to her mom over an extended hospitalization gave Marlaena a glimpse into hospital chaplaincy.

"I was in the habit of going on an annual, eight-day silent retreat with the Jesuits. During my next fall retreat, I spent a lot of time praying about what kind of presence God wanted me to bear in the second half of my life. After several days of walking the retreat grounds and prayerfully holding this question, I heard God's answer clear as day: chaplaincy. My first response was, 'But God, that means I have to go to seminary.' I knew chaplaincy would require me to have an M.Div. and to be ordained."

Marlaena continues, "I resolved to hold this decision in prayer during Advent that year, and I also began talking to various people in my relational realms. Most of them responded that it seemed like a natural next step for me." So she applied to PTS during the Christmas season. That summer—the summer of 2015—she started her program.

During Marlaena's second year of seminary, she took a field education placement at Children's Hospital to test her call to chaplaincy. "I had such a meaningful experience there that I went back to Children's for a second year," she notes. Wanting a different kind of experience in her site placement for CPE this past year, she chose Family Hospice, which provides holistic services to people with life-limiting illness or injury. When a chaplaincy position came open in early May, just before Marlaena's graduation at the end of the month, she applied. And 10 days later she was offered the job.

"As I look back over my life, I am grateful for the space God has provided for my call to chaplaincy to unfold—from spiritual direction training to this kind of ministry in the local church, then a more concentrated experience at Children's Hospital, and now in fuller form at Family Hospice," Marlaena reflects. She'll be spending all of her time working in the community—visiting with patients at home and in various health care facilities. "It feels like I've been slowly and steadily walking into this call. My path has unfolded as I've taken—and continue to take—each step."

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