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Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

THE URBAN COLLABORATOR

Metro-Urban Institute



August 2022

Director's Message

**By Metro-Urban Institute Director
the Rev. Dr. R. Drew Smith**



As summer gives way to autumn and to a new academic year at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, the MUI team extends our hopes and prayers for a safe and productive year for the entire PTS family and network.

It has been an active several months for MUI, filled with informational events, field research, and community engagement. MUI was delighted to host two workshops exploring connections between creative arts, spirituality, and social justice. A March 18 workshop featured painter and creative artist Trenita Finney and a June 16 workshop featured quilter and textile artist Tina Williams Brewer. Both artists have extensive following in Pittsburgh and beyond and both were enthusiastically received by the national audiences participating in the virtual workshops. These workshops are further detailed in an article below.

MUI also has been systematically engaged in neighborhood listening and dialogue events related to our work on urban redevelopment effects and responses within local neighborhoods in Pittsburgh and Indianapolis. During 2022, MUI has facilitated focus groups and surveys in multiple Pittsburgh contexts in conjunction with local community partners, including in several Pittsburgh Housing Authority complexes (with the assistance of partners such as Barbara Coffee, TaShawna Patterson, and other key staff persons at PHA); in two senior housing complexes in Pittsburgh (assisted by LaShaun Tipton at

Trek Development); among leaders and residents in Mon Valley (assisted by North Braddock Council member Lisa Franklin-Robinson '14) and among leaders and residents in Sharpsburg (assisted by Sharpsburg pastor the Rev. Scott Shaffer). Several focus groups were also held in the Indiana Avenue neighborhood in Indianapolis (with assistance from Dr. Leslie Etienne, director of Africana Studies at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis). Moreover, MUI has benefited greatly in these efforts from research fellows and assistants who joined the MUI team in recent months, including Dr. William Ackah who is visiting PTS from Birkbeck-University of London (see article below); Asha Smith (an Indianapolis native and Old Dominion University Ph.D. student); Adama Jalloh (an undergraduate senior at Indiana University); Derail Holcomb '19 (serving on the outreach ministry staff at East Liberty Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh); and the Rev. James Lee (PCUSA supply minister who is also serving as temporary Metro-Urban Institute/World Mission Initiative administrative assistant). We are deeply grateful for the support each of these persons and networks have provided in recent months.

Let me also extend a special word of welcome to incoming PTS associate professor of ethics, culture, and moral leadership, the Rev. Dr. AnneMarie Mingo. We look with anticipation toward the many ways Dr. Mingo will enrich the PTS faculty and to all she will bring as well in her role as acting MUI director. I am grateful to have served 10 years in various MUI leadership capacities and look forward to continuing to support MUI's work through my ongoing research, writing, and teaching.

Arts, Spirituality, and Social Justice

During the spring of 2022, MUI presented two workshops focusing on the arts as a way to navigate social justice issues. MUI's interest in arts in the public sphere was conveyed through a five-member panel held in October 2021, on the theme "Urban Artistry, Aesthetics, and Social Ministry." Based upon the enthusiastic response to this panel, two specific art mediums were highlighted in spring 2022. In March and June 2022, painting and quilting workshops were presented due to the hands-on aspects of the work, their general popularity, and ease of learning.

Celebrated local community-based artist Trenita Finney conducted the painting workshop online. Registrants received swag bags in



Trenita Finney

advance for these projects containing brushes, sample paints, and stencils portraying themes and visuals relating to community and justice. Participants reported the workshop to be a refreshing exercise in creativity and one that helped them feel uplifted in spite of the current negative news cycle. Some also discovered themselves to be more creative and artistic than they

had originally thought. The artistic process also helped attendees pursue proactive ways of processing highly stressful incidents.

The June quilting workshop was led by Tina Williams Brewer, a widely-known and celebrated creator of story quilts, and a long-time resident of Pittsburgh. Tina used symbolism, textiles, and fabrics to lead workshop registrants in creating fabric collages to reflect their personal journeys through lenses of spirituality and cultural meaning. Hundreds of persons participated in the virtual workshop from locations spanning 25 states.



Tina Williams Brewer, photo by Martha Wasik

Participants were diverse in the personal stories and histories they brought to their engagement with this topic. One person from Washington belongs to the Pacific Northwest African American Quilters group and lives on the land of the Salish Indigenous people. Another participant was a teaching artist at The Lab School of Washington, D.C. Yet another participant was a poet teaching in West Virginia. Participants engaged with this content from a variety of starting points in working with creative arts mediums. As one participant remarked: "Thank you for a completely new art form for me, but one I can see using with my students next year in my creative writing classes." Another offered that she felt she was given "permission" to learn quilting and had "ordered a book to learn more [about African symbolism]." Another participant stated: "I appreciate support here for having the courage to create and share." Although quite varied in their backgrounds and positioning, the workshop participants shared a common interest in arts as a public platform for emphasizing spirituality and social justice.

Workshop participants were asked to take photos and provide descriptions of the quilting artwork they produced as a result of their participation in the workshops. Here are two examples:



"The black and white pictures are of my grandchildren and mother and her sister. The photos are printed on fabric with a grid-like pattern. The grid is the symbolic fence to keep them safe. The netting over the stickers of the church and school are symbolic of the barriers (fences, metal detectors, security guards, etc.) erected to keep these places safe. The bullets of high-powered rifles have penetrated all the barriers. We wrap our children in cocoons and pretty blankets to keep

them warm and safe. They are still targets. The rifles are pointed at each other because we are killing ourselves. And the band plays on as we continue to sanction the right to own weapons of mass destruction. A Higher Power is watching how America cares for its children and elders. That Higher Power is weeping." - Eleanor Davis

"Our DNA celebrates a rich culture and history surrounded by nature - at our fingertips, plenty abounds, and the freedom to enjoy the land and serve one another brings peace. The Eban Adinkra symbol (bottom/left) solidifies the design with the prospect of a secure fence of love, safety, and security." - Diane Williams



These and other pieces submitted by the quilting workshop participants will be featured on the MUI website in the months ahead. Thanks again to our workshop presenters Tina Williams Brewer and Trenita Finney for their inspiring and generative workshops.



Bridges from London to Pittsburgh

By Dr. William Ackah

Birkbeck-University of London

MUI Visiting Research Fellow

It is a real pleasure to be back in Pittsburgh, my first opportunity to

return after the pandemic and to reabsorb the sights and sounds of a city that has grown so close to my heart. In 2016-2017 I spent a year at the Seminary as a Fulbright Scholar researching the impact of gentrification and neighborhood change on African American congregations in the Hill District and Larimer. I was able to return in 2018 and present some of my findings to an audience at the Seminary hosted by MUI, but since then COVID-19 has meant that I have not been able to return until now to see what has changed and what has remained at the sites of my original research. Alongside continuing my previous work, I am also working on a book project for Bloomsbury academic press entitled *Black Space Matters: Resisting the Erasure of Black Cultures and Communities* (due out February 2024). Part of the inspiration for the title comes from my time spent in the historic Hill District and reflecting on the genius of August Wilson and other brilliant artists, performers, and activists whose work derives from living and operating in predominantly Black spaces.

There is a saying: you don't know what you have until it's gone or no longer with us. Pittsburgh's Black space is a 'gem of the ocean' even with the ravages of past landgrabs and horrendous discriminatory practices perpetrated against it. My time here lets me know there are still lights shining on the Hill, still freedom and justice necessary for communities in Larimer and East Liberty, and that Black Space Matters whether in Pittsburgh, U.S.; London, UK; Johannesburg, SA; Kingston, JA; or Salvador, Brazil. Who we are and what we represent matters and needs to be protected before it is gone. Black Spaces are necessary not just for survival, but for empowerment, thriving, and human flourishing.

Accreditation Self-Study



PTS Board Member the Rev. Allan Irizarry-Graves '17 explains why accreditation is important.

Accreditation is a process by which peers and colleagues from schools similar to Pittsburgh Theological Seminary evaluate how well we, as PTS, are living up to our mission statement, our professed values, and our strategic priorities.

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education, our secular accreditor, will visit in the Spring of 2023. Our guild accreditor, The

Association of Theological Schools, will visit the following year, and because of their similarly contextual approach, we are able to conduct one institution-wide self-study to meet the requirements of both accreditation processes.

For months now, staff, faculty, administrators, and students have been researching the institution, learning about how PTS operates, and making connections about how things are working. The Self-Study team has circulated the draft report for internal feedback and is wrapping up the report now.

[Learn more.](#)

Looking Forward at PTS

Missional Leadership in a Time of Disruption / W. Don McClure Lecture and World Mission Initiative Conference / with Eugene E. Cho, President/CEO of Bread for the World / Oct. 7-8, 2022 / In person and Online

The Art of Transitional Ministry - Part 2 / with Janet Nolting Carter and Paul Rhebergen / Oct. 6, 13, 20, 27, Nov. 3, 10, 17, 2022 / Online

Wise Women's Work - Community and Conversation Series / with Kendall Vanderslice, Becca Stevens, Laura Everett, Jennifer Bailey, and Hedda Sharapan / Oct. 27, Nov. 17, 2022, Jan. 19, Feb. 16, March 9, 2023 / Online



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