

celebrations

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary Fall 2020



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Pittsburgh Theological Seminary prepares women and men for ministries in established and emerging Christian communities around the world. Rooted in the Reformed tradition and with a centuries-old history of mission and scholarship in service of the church, the Seminary is committed to relationships of mutual learning and serving with Christ-followers from other traditions and theological viewpoints. Our faculty and educational resources cultivate theologically reflective and contextually engaged Christian leaders. Our programs nurture vocational formation for bearing witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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CELEBRATING VARIETIES OF GIFTS

Dear Friends,

It's hard to imagine a period in our lifetimes when we've needed more reason to celebrate. So via this issue of Pittsburgh Seminary's *celebrations* magazine, I'm happy to be able to share with you multiple reasons to celebrate.

These reasons have names—names that belong to members of the Seminary community. Some of them are preparing others for ministry. Some of them are deepening their knowledge and skills for ministry. And all of them are answering God's unique call on their lives to be active ministers of the gospel.

The faculty members, staff, students, and PTS alums you'll read about in the following pages represent a wide variety of personal backgrounds, Christian traditions, and contexts for ministry in the way of Jesus. They've taught and studied in our certificate, master's, and doctor of ministry programs. They've prepared in areas ranging from world mission to urban ministry, church planting and revitalization to chaplaincy, New Testament exegesis to parish and youth ministry.

So join with me in celebrating the varieties of gifts, services, and activities given to each one of them—and each follower of Jesus—in “manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:4-7) for Christian service in the world that God loves.

Thankfully,



David Esterline
President and Professor of
Cross-cultural Theological Education



TEACHING AS SHARING

Named this year to a tenure-track position as assistant professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Dr. Tucker Ferda offers strategies both for thinking critically about the Bible and for implementing academic learning in the circumstances and situations encountered in daily life. How did he form his approach?

If you ask Dr. Ferda, he credits his teachers. “I have been fortunate to study the Bible with some of the best scholars in the world,” he notes, “and they have filled me with an unending curiosity and sense of wonder about the New Testament.” He continues: “But those are not my only teachers. I have also been fortunate to sit at the feet of lay Bible study leaders who do not know a smidgen of biblical Greek or anything about the world of the Bible. Yet with their KJV Bibles, worn from cover-to-cover, they spoke with deep Scriptural wisdom born of a faithful life. All these teachers have made me who I am.”

“I think that good teaching is a kind of sharing,” Dr. Ferda notes. “I share with my students my passion for these endlessly fascinating texts, which are theologically formative as well as historically interesting, and they share with me as well.” Dr. Ferda’s classes aim to expose students to the breadth and richness of New Testament scholarship, while also “preparing them for how they will encounter the Bible in their individual contexts.”



Dr. Ferda has developed expertise in a wide range of areas in the field of biblical studies—the Gospels, life of Jesus, Old Testament in the New, history of biblical interpretation, Hellenistic Jewish literature, Dead Sea Scrolls, and the theological interpretation of Scripture, for example. Many of his interests intersect in his first book, *Jesus, the Gospels, and the Galilean Crisis* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019), available in the prestigious Library of New Testament Studies series. And he’s currently working on two more books: one on the second advent of Christ and another on portraits of discipleship in the four Gospels.

Dr. Ferda continues to be intent on finding ways to bridge the academic study of the Bible with everyday

devotional and practical aspects of reading and teaching Scripture. He serves as a member and deacon at Pittsburgh’s East Liberty Presbyterian Church, and he frequently leads studies and provides pulpit supply in area churches. Today, he is the kind of scholar-teacher-mentor that others have inspired him to become. Just ask any Pittsburgh Seminary student who’s taken his classes!

President Esterline said, “The entire Seminary community, from Board members to the faculty to students, enthusiastically supports this appointment. I heartily welcome Dr. Ferda’s continued service in the ministry and mission of Pittsburgh Seminary.”

RIGHT TIME, RIGHT PATH

Everything we have and experience is temporary except God—and there are so many ways Christians can learn and grow in their knowledge and love of God,” observes Jodie Eckenrod ’20, who received her Graduate Certificate in Ministry in May and is now earning her Master of Theological Studies at PTS. A merit scholar, United Methodist, and “life-long Yinzer,” she says God has put on her heart a desire to “become more involved in the work of Jesus.”

Jodie became aware of Pittsburgh Seminary 10 years ago while driving by the campus on her way to church. “For a long time I’d sought God’s guidance for my next steps. With my children ready for college and my career feeling less fulfilling, the time had come to pursue more education. PTS was the place to do that.”

Jodie continues, “I have always been a self-proclaimed nerd, but at

Pittsburgh Seminary I’ve become a Jesus nerd! My professors have ignited this passion. For example, in one of my theology classes, Dr. van Driel tied a very abstract concept to a powerful example from ministry. It brought me to tears. I never realized how emotionally moved I could be in a class that would typically be characterized as intellectual. That is the power of learning.” Jodie says her “overwhelmingly positive” year in the certificate program has strengthened her Christian faith.

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It has also, in her words, “helped me be much better-prepared for teaching at church, participating in my small group, and teaching my children”—she knows more about the context of the biblical passages and theological themes she’s covering. Jodie now wants to write and develop materials to equip Christians of all ages and stages of spiritual development. She and one of her daughters may even prepare an apologetics class for older teenagers and young adults.

“We need to keep God at the center,” she says. “God is growing me not only through my learning at PTS but also in my trust of Him for taking risks and steps of faith. Though according to the values of this world it doesn’t make much sense for me to pursue another graduate degree when I have kids ready to start college and a career to help pay for their education, I am trusting that God has put me on the right path in the MTS program. There are many questions and challenges I wish to address in thoughtful, charitable ways—and equip others to do the same.”

Learn More

To learn more about the Seminary’s master of theological studies program, visit www.pts.edu/MA-Theological-Studies. With flexibility to tailor the course of study, the 48 semester-credit-hour MTS degree is an academic program that provides a focused understanding of one or more theological disciplines for further graduate study or for general education.



CALLED FROM THE CRADLE

Self-described “cradle Orthodox” Christian, the Rev. Dr. Antony Andrews ’20 considers himself blessed by God for the early nurture he received from his local parish in Jersey City, N.J. His parents had immigrated to the U.S. from Egypt before Antony was born, and they brought him up in the Coptic Orthodox tradition. “I was always excited to attend church—I wanted to be the first one there and serve in the sanctuary as an altar boy,” he recalls.

Early in Antony’s life, “exceptional parish priests” played an influential role in his Christian formation. “My early practices of spiritual discipline served me well; ultimately, I accepted the invitation by many clergy to pursue ministry as a priest. My wife and constant supporter, Lilyan, always had a hunch that I desired to serve in this capacity,” he says.

Antony and Lilyan embarked on an adventure in ministry that started in New Jersey, took them to Australia, then brought them back to the States. In 2016, Antony became an ordained deacon at St. Mary & St. Mena Coptic OC (Rhode Island). The following year he was called to the priesthood at St. Mary & St. Antonios Coptic OC (Ridgewood, N.Y.), where he still serves, focusing on youth ministry. As an extension of his ministry, he also teaches Orthodox theology at the Queens campus of St. John’s (Roman Catholic) University.



“I learned about Pittsburgh Seminary from faculty members at St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary (Yonkers) who’d graduated from Pittsburgh Seminary’s D.Min. program. They encouraged me to pursue the degree,” Antony notes. “PTS facilitated a unique experience for me by creating a community of educators and learners steeped in the Orthodox Christian faith. My program has equipped me for better serving the youth in my care and enriched my teaching of theology at St. John’s.”

He continues: “I don’t think any other institution could have provided me with such a unique program of such a high caliber. Its Eastern Christian Focus partners with the Antiochian House of Studies to provide instruction in an Orthodox ethos from professors who are the best in their class—a rare combination. Further, that my

D.Min. cohort included students from all over the world greatly enhanced the learning experience in our collaborative intensives,” Antony observes.

He found the coursework and doctoral project components of his program exceptional and challenging. “The advanced topics covered in the coursework stimulated critical thinking, problem solving, effective writing, and more. I highly recommend the D.Min. program at PTS!”

Learn More

To learn more about the Seminary’s doctor of ministry program, visit www.pts.edu/DMin. The D.Min. program at Pittsburgh Seminary provides space for renewal, growth, companionship among peers, and rich dialogue with faculty.

GOING WHERE GOD IS

For M.Div. student Shannon Garrett-Headen, growing up in the Black church rooted Sunday worship in the “deepest core of my being. It’s part of my identity, my culture, my inheritance. In worship,” she recalls, “the walls of our church building felt alive when the choir sang, clapped, and swayed—like they breathed in our suffering and exhaled salvation. That’s how deeply we lamented, how highly we praised.”

While still in early elementary school, Shannon became “completely mesmerized” by her pastor. Hearing one of his altar calls, young Shannon knew exactly what she wanted to do. “I told my grandmother I wanted to be a preacher just like him!” That day marked the beginning of Shannon’s call to pastoral ministry. She prepared for that call by earning a bachelor’s in theology and pastoral ministry from Notre Dame College and a graduate

certificate in youth theology and ministry from Princeton Seminary. Then she served as pastoral intern and youth ministry director at Forest Hill Church in Cleveland Heights, Ohio.

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Having grown up in a multicultural, multiethnic neighborhood, it didn’t occur to Shannon until she moved away that her “normal” wasn’t everyone’s “normal.” When she began visiting seminaries to extend her theological education, PTS felt right. “I believe God directed me here to be a voice for those whose lives echo my experience. I feel uniquely suited to be a bridge builder between races, cultures, and generations,” she observes. And as 2020-2021 Student Association president, she’s providing leadership in just that way.

Shannon brings a rich variety of seminary experiences to her position. She’s traveled to Cuba, South Africa, and Colombia on World Mission Initiative / Metro-Urban Institute intercultural trips—“some of my most vivid and transformative experiences at seminary,” she comments. She founded Syngeneia, PTS’s student group for seminarians of color, to “celebrate and honor the richness of our diversity and seek ways to weave our voices, traditions, and stories into the fabric of the PTS community.” And most recently she served on the chapel team, where she got to “combine my two favorite things: theology and writing. As a former slam poet and lover of literature, preaching gives me life,” she says.

On track for ordination in the PCUSA, after seminary Shannon will seek a pastoral placement with a congregation that shares her passion for racial reconciliation and social justice. She’ll also pursue doctoral studies in sociology, “because truly to seek God, one must go where God is—and God is with the people,” she says.



CALLED TO THE SERVICE

United Methodist minister the Rev. Timothy (Tim) Bowser '07 was born and raised in Clarion County, Pa. At the age of 12, he became a member of Perryville UMC in Parker, Pa., and four years later began discerning a call to pastoral ministry. At the same time, his father received licensure and an appointment in the Western PA Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Tim went on to major in liberal studies and minor in history and psychology at Clarion University, then entered Pittsburgh Seminary to earn his M.Div. He had always felt called to serve others, and it was no surprise that he sought to become a pastor. For 15 years—both as a student and a commissioned pastor—he served in local churches and their communities, including Mars (Pa.) UMC and Valley Chapel UMC (Juneau, Pa.). But from the start, Tim had sensed his call was to serve not only those in the church, but also those outside the local church. “So as a pastor, I always felt as though I should and could be doing more,” he reflects.

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“PTS prepared me well to discern, follow, and serve in the role to which God has called me.”

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A couple of years ago, God began placing another call on Tim's life, one that had been a lifelong dream for Tim. And on June 6, 2018, Tim reported to the Chaplain Basic Officer Leader Course at Fort Jackson, S.C., to train to become a U.S. Army Chaplain. He entered with rank of Captain (O3) and was commissioned to Active Duty upon arrival at CHBOLC. After graduating three months later—to the date—he was stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C., where today he serves as an Army Battalion Chaplain of the 2nd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd BCT, 82nd Airborne Division.

Tim comes from a long line of family members who have served in the U.S. military—in fact, both of his older brothers were born on Army installations. His deep respect and admiration for the men and women

in the armed forces—and for their families—make his extraordinary yet humbling call from God a fulfilling ministry for Tim. He celebrates his journey to and in that ministry by noting, “PTS prepared me well to discern, follow, and serve in the role to which God has called me.”

Learn More

To learn more about the master of divinity program at Pittsburgh Seminary—which prepares students for ordained pastoral ministry in both new and historic congregations; to become chaplains in military, hospital, hospice, and prison settings; to manage non-profit organizations; and to pursue further education—visit www.pts.edu/master-divinity.

CALLED TO SERVE THOSE INCARCERATED

Emily Sprouse grew up in a small village in rural Ohio—Crooksville, where “there are more churches than people, really,” she says. Nevertheless, Emily wasn’t raised in a religious home and didn’t come to faith in Christ until college. Now a junior at Muskingum University, whose campus she “fell in love with” on a visit to her sister, Emily’s majoring in criminal justice and psychology. “I hope to use these two majors to work as a counselor in a prison or jail, where that type of work is so needed by so many who need it most,” she says.

So how did Emily discover PTS and the Miller Summer Youth Institute internship program she enrolled in this summer? Short answer: by going on a mission trip with Muskingum. “We stayed at PTS, and there we were introduced to SYI,” she says. “I was skeptical at first, because I never saw myself as someone being involved

with seminary, but throughout my stay at PTS I fell in love with the community and the work they were doing. I felt so touched and thought, ‘I need to be part of this.’”

With her vocational goals in mind, Emily began her SYI project planning to study the effects of counseling on the behavior of incarcerated individuals. But she learned that the profound effect of counseling on inmates’ progress is often hampered or even halted by sparse community mental health services after their release. So she refocused her project to study how communities can help those formerly incarcerated. “Communities are failing their citizens suffering from mental illness and addiction. I’m looking into ways that small communities, like my hometown, can help these individuals.”

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“At PTS I fell in love with the community and the work they were doing.”
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Emily has looked particularly into how local churches can offer AA/NA meetings to help those who need such support—and she’s encouraged the local churches in her context to do so. “Smaller communities typically have a place of worship, so by offering AA/NA and/or providing counseling, the church can greatly benefit both the individuals who need those services and the broader community, which often lacks facilities dedicated to those purposes,” she observes. And Emily should know—she lives in a town that offers no mental health services in a state that’s at the center of the opioid crisis.

While Emily still plans on a counseling career in the criminal justice system, her SYI internship has “opened her eyes” to the benefits of spiritual counseling as well. For “the mission of the church and our mission as individual Christians involves helping others.”

Learn More

To learn more about the Miller Summer Youth Institute and its programs for high schoolers, college students, and youth leaders, visit www.pts.edu/SYI.



RESPONDING TO RACE- BASED IMPACTS OF COVID-19

Pittsburgh Seminary's Metro-Urban Institute has received a \$150,000 grant from the Henry Luce Foundation to team up with church-sector and community-based organizational networks in metro-Pittsburgh to gather stories and data to illuminate COVID-19's impact on Black and Latinx communities. MUI will work to reinforce capacities within and between ministries and organizations to bridge resources. The title of the project, which began in May, is "Sharing Technology and Sharing Stories: Listening, Learning, and Responding to Differential, Race-based Impacts of COVID-19."

Professor of Urban Ministry the Rev. Dr. R. Drew Smith—the project's lead investigator—elaborates: "We gathered stories from at-risk communities to create four video narratives, each focused on a particular area of the virus's impact in Pittsburgh's Black and Latinx communities: access to health care, access to technology, the learning needs of children, and the situation of essential workers." Produced and disseminated in conjunction with Pittsburgh-based media organizations, the videos are being disseminated in conjunction with virtual Town Halls and via the networks of the Gamaliel Foundation (chaired nationally by the Rev. Dr. John Welch '02) and the Transatlantic Roundtable on Religion and Race (co-convened by Dr. Smith).



Co-investigator of the grant the Rev. Dr. Deirdre Hainsworth (founder of Techtelos training and consulting firm) comments on the project's concern with bridging resources: "Though remote teaching of Pittsburgh public school students was delayed till April 20, thousands of students still needed computers at the start of classes. Our grant project collaborates with local partners to help provide funding for computers for students in need. Additionally, we are providing direct funding and technical assistance to local agencies supporting youth access to technology and learning." This aspect of the grant receives expert guidance by Dr. Hainsworth and senior grant consultant the Rev. Dr. Denise Thorpe, interim director of the Seminary's Doctor of Ministry Program. "This grant addresses the problem that Black and Latinx populations fare noticeably worse than white and other

ethnic groups on important health and educational indices," notes President David Esterline. He celebrates that the one-year project furthers the Seminary's commitment to local ministry in the way of Jesus.

The Henry Luce Foundation seeks to enrich public discourse by promoting innovative scholarship, cultivating new leaders, and fostering international understanding. For 80 years, it has advanced its mission through grantmaking and leadership programs. For more information, visit www.hluce.org.

Learn More

To learn more about the Metro-Urban Institute and its current research and programming, visit www.pts.edu/metrounban.

A TALENT FOR TEACHING

Pittsburgh became home to Camilla Helenkamp when she was about five. With the Civil Rights Movement well underway, five years later life became even harder when her mother died. “My father taught us to be independent and pursue an education,” says Camilla. So after graduating from high school, she trained to become a licensed practical nurse.

In the mid-1980s, Camilla moved to Illinois, where she “received the gift of salvation” while attending the East End Church of God. She worked at the Veterans Hospital in rural Danville. But after four years in Illinois, she missed Pittsburgh so much that she decided to move back and enrolled in the pre-nursing program at Community College of Allegheny County. “I did well until my clinicals, when I began to discern that nursing wasn’t the direction I should go,” she

observes. “God was calling me to change how I earned a living, which required me to trust Him for the outcome.”

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“For a long while I didn’t consider myself a spiritual leader. But I’ve realized that I must see myself as God sees me.”

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Taking a position for the Social Security Administration instead of a nursing position initiated the change in Camilla’s call, though for the

next seven years she continued to complete her bachelor’s in nursing at the University of Pittsburgh. After graduating, she began volunteering at her church, then became its full-time secretary, and soon its volunteer coordinator.

Three years ago Camilla enrolled in the M.Div. program at PTS. An evening student with 24 years of government service, she works full time at Veterans Administration Hospital, Oakland (Pa.). “For a long while I didn’t consider myself a spiritual leader. But I’ve realized that I must see myself as God sees me. During my time at PTS I’ve discovered that I have a talent for teaching. I’m growing in my thirst to understand what I believe, why I believe it, and how I can proclaim intelligently to others what God has done in my life.”

After seminary, Camilla will seek to “do ministry that uplifts, empowers, and gives voice and purpose to people by sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.” She has a particular passion for women’s ministries: “God has positioned women in the church to serve the people of God and society. The gifts of women in ministry remain strong and powerful spiritual forces in our churches today—more frequently than not from below the pulpit, and often unmentioned, uncrowned, and unnoticed. I look forward to joining the endless number of women who have forged a path so that others may follow in power, strength, prayer, service, and wisdom.”



SURPRISE!

First introduced to a possible call to ministry as a young teen, Jonathan (JJ) Lynn answered with a resounding, “No thank you.” After high school, he tried out various ventures—college, automotive service, food service, towing and recovery, and construction. And he continued working in the last two industries while resuming his higher education, which culminated in . . . seminary. A graduate of Trinity Lutheran Seminary (Columbus, Ohio) and ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Rev. Lynn is now the full-time solo pastor at Emmanuel LC of Etna (Pa.). Surprise!

“My call to ministry is typical in that it was a long and winding journey primarily composed of my attempts to decline and hide,” JJ says. “As it turns out, instead of simply waiting around for me to get my head in the game, God used my journey to prepare me for ministry.” Thus JJ began seeing affirmation in the places he was trying to hide. “In fact,” he observes, “I think God was most creative when I was working out my call in unlikely places by sending a variety of people and experiences to affirm the internal call I was seeking to decline. Looking back on the process, I see the genius of God’s patience, persistence, and use of whatever we do for the work of the gospel.”

When JJ enrolled in the Graduate Certificate in Church Planting and Revitalization program at Pittsburgh Seminary, he was seeking core competency in leading congregations into revitalized ministry. “I began with the expectation of discovering a quick and easy fix, a step-by-step



program to implement a strategy for congregational revitalization. Instead, what I found was an edifying exploration of the theological process of congregational discernment coupled with an intense journey of expansion of the mind and theology. The end goal of both endeavors involved re-centering our work on the gospel through the act of listening for God’s call in our context.”

JJ’s conclusion? “The program integrated my work in ministry. Rather than focusing outside my ministry setting, it invited the work of my congregation as the course matter to be completed.” And the result? JJ’s enhanced pastoral leadership has seen his congregation “return to being a thriving community with revitalized ministry in ‘Working to care for all God’s people.’”

In short, says JJ, “The CP&R program added value and depth to my ministry by challenging, stretching, and continuing my formation as a congregational pastor.”

Learn More

To learn more about the Seminary’s Graduate Certificate in Church Planting and Revitalization, which equips non-ordained leaders as well as ordained pastors who sense a calling to revitalizing community anchor churches or planting contextually-based church communities, visit www.pts.edu/CPandR.

PERCEPTION AND PERSISTENCE

Initially feeling called to ministry at a time when women were not well received as pastors, about five years ago Beth Meier '20 began to discern her calling anew. "I gave my life to Christ when I was 12, and not long afterward I sensed God was going to use me in some type of ministry," she recalls. So during her senior year of college, she began exploring the requirements for ministry within The United Methodist Church. After working through the process, graduating, and being accepted to seminary, she was ready to move forward. But "since women were still not well accepted in ministry, my pastor strongly discouraged me from pursuing it," she reflects. Thirty years later, Beth knew no one could dissuade her from pursuing God's renewed call.

God spoke through several people in directing Beth to learn more

about PTS. "When I visited, I knew I was called to enroll" in the M.Div. program. "My time at PTS was a gift. I appreciated the Seminary's diversity of theological traditions and insights. The atmosphere encouraged me to think through my own beliefs in the light of what others brought to the table."

"During my second year," Beth continues, "I traveled to Egypt with the World Mission Initiative. It was a life-changing trip I will never forget. We witnessed the flourishing of Christianity in a country where it is strongly discouraged. Egyptian Christians must overcome obstacles just to attend seminary, let alone to actually establish churches in their communities. I saw and perceived what it took to fight for one's faith, never give up, and persist in following God's call." Beth's own journey toward ministry made her particularly attuned to their struggles.

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"I saw and perceived what it took to fight for one's faith, never give up, and persist in following God's call."
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Her experience with WMI, coupled with the diversity of PTS students and professors, gave her a broader outlook on ministry. "Though I was much older than most students, I was accepted and affirmed for who I am and what I offer from my life's experiences. Learning alongside those students encouraged me to discern what I myself believe to be true."

As a student, Beth served two congregations; she is now pastor of three rural UMC churches! She says she is "a better pastor today because of PTS. I encourage men and women of all ages to explore all that Pittsburgh Seminary has to offer. From the staff to the professors to the students, I experienced acceptance, kindness, and support."

Learn More

To learn more about the World Mission Initiative—dedicated to developing mission vision, nurturing missionary vocations, and cultivating missional congregations by helping Christians understand how God is at work in the world and how they can share in that work—visit www.pts.edu/WMI.



MAKING AN IMPACT IN MYANMAR

Though Myanmar citizen Saw Tha Lay Hlaing '20 has, in his words, "been a devoted Baptist Christian since my childhood," as a child he never imagined going to seminary. But God changed Tha's mind after he finished middle school. He developed a desire to pursue theological education in preparation for ministry and for serving God as a Christian educator. Having received that call as a youth, however, he was then too young to serve as a Christian minister. So after graduating from high school, he pursued a bachelor's in engineering at Technological University, in his hometown of Hinthata.

"After graduating, I became a youth leader in my local church for two years," Saw relates. "Then I enrolled at Myanmar Institute of Theology to earn my M.Div." Still following the call he'd received as a youth, Tha began serving as a lecturer at Hinthada Karen Baptist Bible School. "HKBBBS enrolls many people from a particular ethnic group in Myanmar—the Karen. The school has prepared and produced many pastors, Christian educators, and local Christian leaders," he explains.

Tha taught Bible and theology to HKBBBS students for three years; then he applied to Pittsburgh Seminary's master of theological studies program to gain further theological education himself. "Thankfully, I received an international student scholarship that covered my educational and living expenses," notes Tha. "So while studying at PTS I didn't need to worry



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"I didn't need to worry about finances—I could focus on the schoolwork I was there to do."
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about finances—I could focus on the schoolwork I was there to do." In his program, Tha concentrated in New Testament studies. He expanded his knowledge of Greek to deepen his understanding of the New Testament Scriptures and wrote an exegetical thesis on the phrase "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11) from the Lord's Prayer.

"With the guidance of my PTS professors and the support of the specialists in the Seminary's Writing Center, the MTS program helped me both in my knowledge of the New Testament and my research skills. When I return to Myanmar, these abilities will help me serve more effectively as a lecturer in New Testament at HKBBBS as it continues to upgrade its academic programs," says Tha. "Moreover, since HKBBBS is one of the member schools of the countrywide Myanmar Baptist Convention, I will be better able to make a significant contribution to improving theological education throughout Myanmar."

With a continued desire to expand his own theological education, Tha adds that "the MTS program was good preparation for Ph.D. work in New Testament studies!"

A PLACE AT CHRIST'S TABLE

There are many roads to seminary. For master of divinity student Jon Mathieu, the journey was a challenging one.

Jon had served for five years as a campus minister and six more as a staff member, elder, and ordinand at a large church. But as Jon entered into meaningful relationships with people who were different from him—feminists, Black people, and members of the LGBTQ community—many of his long-held values and beliefs didn't seem to fit anymore. And so, while still serving in the church that had been his home for more than 10 years, he began the seismic faith processes sometimes called “deconstruction” and “reconstruction.”

Two truths were clear to Jon at this critical juncture: he could not navigate these processes alone, and he could not remain in his church context long-

term. So Jon searched for communities and resources that could aid him in his journey, and God led him to the Newbigin House of Studies. He was accepted to a one-year fellowship designed to “train and mentor a new generation of missional leaders in a rapidly changing world” through theological education. Jon noticed that this fellowship had four seminary partnerships—and one of them was PTS, less than a mile from his apartment in Pittsburgh.

Before he knew it, he was enrolled full time in the M.Div. program. His first year was a lot to juggle, between his seminary studies, Newbigin fellowship, and winding down his role at the church. “It was exactly what I needed,” Jon notes. “At Pittsburgh Seminary, I was introduced to perspectives and practices from across a broad ecumenical spectrum. At the Newbigin House, I was in a

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“It is so important to me that everyone has a place at Christ's table. We must work together to create peace and justice for all God's children.”

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cohort of 17 fellows—and I was the only straight man. The entire year was an exercise in decentering the white, male, Eurocentric theology I had come to accept as ‘normal.’”

Jon is trying to prepare for an unknown future. This is a stressful but energizing proposition. He is currently exploring ordination within the United Church of Christ, but he wants to remain open to whatever and wherever God will lead him next. Regardless of his future denomination, location, or type of role, there are some bedrock principles that will shape his ministry. “It is so important to me that everyone has a place at Christ's table. We must work together to create peace and justice for all God's children.”

Learn More

To learn more about the Seminary's partnership with the Newbigin House of Studies, visit www.pts.edu/Newbigin-House-of-Studies-Partnership.



LEARNING IN—AND OUT OF—THE CLASSROOM

Rudeene's life changed at summer camp. As a college student, Rudeene (Rudee) Jackson took a job at a Christian summer camp. She spent the season mentoring the high school students who worked there. Prior to this transformational experience, she knew she wanted to be a social worker, with perhaps a volunteer role as a youth leader on the side. But Rudee's summer at camp—with all the ups and downs of connecting with young people in the midst of their joys and struggles, experiencing God through a ministry of sitting and being—added something new and undeniable to her sense of calling.

She was also going to be a pastor.

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary was a natural fit because of its joint degree program with the University of Pittsburgh, offering students the chance to receive the master of divinity and master of social work joint degree. Rudee is now enrolled in the program and has been thrilled about other learning opportunities that have emerged in her time at PTS.

For one, Rudee has decided to also pursue a Graduate Certificate in Church Planting and Revitalization. This wasn't part of her original plan, but after visiting a Church Planting Initiative meeting, she discovered how excited she was about new visions for what church can be. She recalls about that first meeting, "I realized



.....
**"I realized you
don't really need a
building to have a
church."**
.....

you don't really need a building to have a church." In addition, she has taken two trips overseas with PTS, to South Africa and Colombia. These travels proved to be instrumental in her development: "The first time I ever preached was in Colombia. I didn't speak the language, but I had a translator. It was an amazing experience."

Rudee is thrilled about her vision for where God might lead her. If you ask her about her future, she will describe

with contagious energy her passion to start a "safe haven" program for at-risk youth within a church context—perhaps a church she will plant. She has been inspired by a new church, which she learned about in the Church Planting program, that is located in a skate park! Rudee, who is also pursuing ordination in The United Methodist Church, may not have a skate park in her future. But she can't wait to provide a space for families to come receive nourishment and support for their social and spiritual needs.

Learn More

To learn more about the master of divinity / master of social work joint degree program with the University of Pittsburgh, visit www.pts.edu/MDiv-MSW.

A NEW WORLD OPENED

For Catherine (Cathy) Bowser '20, the experiences in programs of learning at PTS have changed her "thinking, sharing, and consciousness." She first came to know the Seminary through our continuing education offerings. She then applied to one of our master's programs. "But my journey took a different turn due to perplexing yet intriguing situations that began to open up for me," she notes.

A new path began for Cathy at a World Mission Initiative workshop titled "Precious, Gorgeous, and Beloved of God." Of about 20 women in the room, she was the only white woman. As the presenter shared what she called "Core Standards of Black Women," Cathy found it enlightening and disturbing to have her eyes opened to social perceptions of Black women. A statement by one of the attendees particularly jarred

her: "When I wake up in the morning and look in the mirror, I see Black." Catherine recalls, "I was startled and thought, 'When I look in the mirror in the morning, I don't see white. There's more going on than what I know.'"

That experience moved Cathy to adjust her focus in ministry: she enrolled as a Graduate Certificate in Urban Ministry student. "In my journey through the program, I found that sharing thoughts or opinions may not always be welcome. We are created with differences and live in different contexts, and I discovered that stepping back and being open to someone else's view changed my own way of thinking. It revealed a need to strengthen my listening skills and adjust my actions. Not taking offense was essential."

The GCUM program enhanced Cathy's service in new ways. "From the

.....

"I discovered that stepping back and being open to someone else's view changed my own way of thinking."

.....

beginning in 'Teaching Bible Study in the Church,' I acquired new skills and confidence in leading the adult Sunday school program at my church. Through the eyes of the early settlement of immigrants in Pittsburgh, I learned more about my own background and became aware of why and how I make choices because of it. Understanding the basis for today's different contexts opened a new world to me. And importantly, in the 'Contextual Analysis' course I explored and delved into support for the local community."

Cathy is now enrolled in the Seminary's Graduate Certificate in Church Planting and Revitalization program. She continues to serve on the Transformation and Renewal Team for the PennWest Conference of the United Church of Christ with the aim of educating peers and sharing her experiences.

Learn More

To learn more about the Seminary's certificate programs, including Graduate Certificate in Church Planting and Revitalization, Ministry, Missional Leadership, Theology, and Urban Ministry, visit www.pts.edu/Certificate_Programs.



RECOGNIZING CAMPUS COMMUNITY SERVICE

Director of Information Technology David Middleton received the Seminary's 2020 Calian Award for Campus Community Service. The award honors an exemplary member of the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary community who demonstrates excellence in carrying out responsibilities and volunteer assignments and also expresses a caring spirit of goodwill and hope, essential in life together as a community.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and in a matter of just weeks, the Seminary shifted from in-person to remote teaching and learning—"and that wouldn't have happened without Dave's extraordinary leadership and care," said President David Esterline.

But while Dave deserves this award for that feat alone, he deserves it for much, much more. First as junior network administrator and now as IT director, he's ably served the Seminary community for the last 15 years and counting. During that time, he's served on committee after committee and led multiple initiatives.

"And he does it all with genuine patience and a quick wit," said Esterline.

Middleton grew up in a small town called Watsontown, near Williamsport,



Pa. He earned his bachelor's in data communications and networking and a minor in business management from Pennsylvania College of Technology (a Penn State affiliate). More recently, he added his MBA in IT project management from Western Governors University.

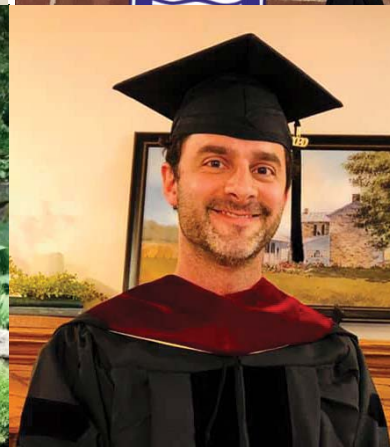
With Dave's credentials, skill, and easy collegiality, he could have found work virtually anywhere. But a decade and a half ago, he chose to serve at PTS. "I felt that the Seminary was large enough to provide me with opportunities to learn and gain experience in a variety of areas. It also offered me the opportunity to relocate to Pittsburgh—an important personal goal, as my girlfriend, who eventually became my wife, lived here!" he adds with a smile. Dave goes on to comment, "The Seminary has offered

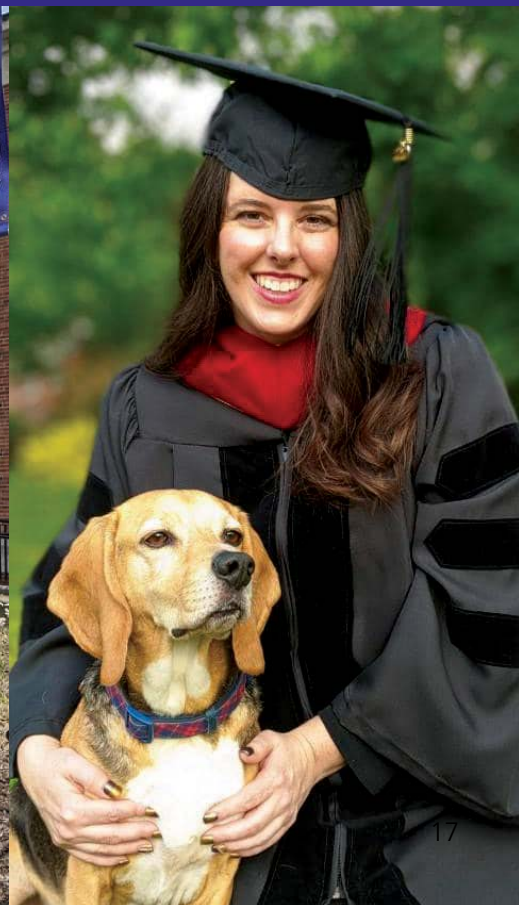
me tremendous opportunity to grow both personally and professionally in a variety of ways. PTS is truly a blessing."

In the wider professional world, Dave is president-elect of C-CUE, a regional association of colleges and universities committed to developing and expanding the appropriate use of computing and other information technologies in undergraduate education.

The Calian Award recognizes that all members of our community are important to the success of the Seminary. Dave Middleton has proven that point time and time again.

On May 29, 2020, we celebrated Pittsburgh Theological Seminary's 224th Commencement with virtual festivities. Lasting approximately 40 minutes, the video includes remarks from President David Esterline, reading of each graduate's name, announcement of this year's graduation award recipients, and well wishes from faculty and staff. See more online: www.pts.edu/Graduation_2020.







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ADVENT DEVOTIONAL AVAILABLE ONLINE

Pittsburgh Seminary will observe Advent again this year with an online devotional and resource kit. We invite you to read or listen to daily messages from alumnae/i. Access the devotionals in these ways:

- » Read online or print and share
- » Receive daily e-mails
- » Follow along on Facebook and Twitter
- » Download our free Android or Apple app
- » Request your printed copy

Visit our website (www.pts.edu) and click on the Resources tab for free worship planning resources and music for your youth to perform. Beginning in January 2021, look for Lenten devotionals as well.

