

celebrations

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary Fall 2021



celebrations

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
Fall 2021

Managing Editor

Melissa S. Logan (mlogan@pts.edu)

For changes of address, call 412-924-1388 or e-mail dkeys@pts.edu.

For other editorial matters, call 412-924-1373 or e-mail mlogan@pts.edu.

Associate Editor

Jon Mathieu (jmathieu@pts.edu)

www.pts.edu

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary prepares students 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.

President

The Rev. Asa J. Lee, D.Min.

Vice President for Institutional Advancement

The Rev. Charles L. Fischer III

Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty and Associate Professor of Pastoral Care

The Rev. Leanna K. Fuller, Ph.D.

Vice President for Finance and Administration

Thomas A. Hinds, CPA



CELEBRATING THE FUTURE

The past year and a half has tested our capacity to live and work together. We have learned to lean on technology, creativity, and innovation in order to carry forward many of the rituals and commemorations that define Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Though it has been challenging, we have still accomplished much. We graduated two classes of students since the pandemic began and welcomed two others. We've launched new cohorts of students in the Doctor of Ministry and the Graduate Certificate in Adaptive and Innovative Ministry programs. PTS has hosted meaningful programming on subjects ranging from race and mission to the post-pandemic church.

Our mission of preparing people for ministry in the way of Jesus is moving forward. We continue "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). While we discern the rapidly changing environment of theological education, I give thanks to God for our shared commitment to equipping, building, and serving in the name of Christ.

On a personal note, I am excited about my calling to Pittsburgh Seminary and stewarding the strength of this institution. I am confident in the bright future that lies ahead for PTS. My wife, Chenda, and I made the move this summer with our four daughters. We are settling into the neighborhood and certainly appreciate the warm welcome—including restaurant recommendations. (Preferably no fries on sandwiches and salads please?!)

This fall I will be inaugurated and installed as the seventh president of Pittsburgh Seminary. The live streamed service will launch a series of events during this "inauguration year." I pray that these events will afford me the opportunity to share more about the Seminary's strategic initiatives for the years ahead.

For now, I hope the stories on these next pages about our community will give you a sense of the wonderful people and programs of PTS. I'm excited to be joining them!

Gratefully,

Asa J. Lee
President and Professor of Theological Formation
for Ministry

GIVING BACK THROUGH LISTENING, LEADERSHIP, AND LAUGHS

During the difficult pandemic period of 2020 and 2021, the Pittsburgh Seminary students have bonded together to help each other through these months. One such source of strength is M.Div. student Christin Moreland.

Years ago, when her pastor encouraged her to consider vocational ministry, Christin decided, "Maybe I'll go to seminary . . . but only if God pays for it!" She began to take the idea more seriously after stepping into lay leadership at her church and entering the PC(USA) inquiry process for ordination.

Still, she thought the financial obstacles might prove to be prohibitive. While other seminaries had some scholarships available, PTS financial aid was incredible, and Christin received a full scholarship. So, depending on one's faith perspective, perhaps God was paying for seminary after all.

Christin has brightened the student community in at least three ways. First, she has leaned into classroom discussions that involve disagreement. She is interested in being able to voice different opinions, even about important topics like sexuality or the history of colonialism, while remaining in relationship. Her field education experience has helped her build these skills: "I have been serving in two



congregations where the people are very different from me. I have come to love them like you wouldn't imagine. They drive me insane sometimes, but I can see Christ in them."

Second, Christin has stepped into the role of Student Association president. She did not ask to be nominated, but her classmates saw admirable qualities in her as she faithfully participated in campus communities like the Rainbow Covenant, Women's Caucus, and Seminarians United for Racial Justice. She is humbled and honored at this opportunity to help foster fellowship and move toward greater justice on campus.

Third, there are the Zoom backgrounds (including the one pictured here)! Early in the pandemic, as a way to stave off feelings of isolation, Christin reached back to her high school years when

she was interested in making art. She began producing weekly art pieces to place on the wall behind where she sits for Zoom classes. Some are serious, some are silly, but all bring creativity and smiles to the online class environment.

Christin is not sure exactly what the future holds, but she continues to discern in community whether she will serve as a parish pastor. To that end, she will continue her field education ministry with the two congregations, and she will also pursue a hospital chaplaincy opportunity this spring. "Discernment is never really over," she says. "It's ongoing, always."

Learn More

To learn more about the Seminary's Master of Divinity program, visit www.pts.edu/master-divinity.

BRIDGING COLONIAS AND THE CHURCH

The Rev. Ezequiel Herrera, a student in the Graduate Certificate in Adaptive and Innovative Ministry program, is not shy about his enthusiasm for his studies at Pittsburgh Seminary.

"I want to shout from the rooftops how extraordinary this program is," he says.

Why such high praise for the certificate? He explains, "Everything I have learned so far—everything—I have been able to immediately translate to the ministry field."

For Ezequiel, that field is the U.S.-Mexico border. In his area alone (Hidalgo County, Texas), there are more than 800 colonias, housing developments that lack basic services like drinking water, sewage, and paved roads. They formed decades ago when the soil was exhausted and agricultural jobs disappeared. Developers parceled

out and sold the land, without providing needed infrastructure, for cheap prices. For many first-generation migrant workers, these were the only properties they could afford. While their children are born in the U.S., most of the adults are undocumented.

"These people are forgotten," Ezequiel laments. "I feel called to build bridges between the people of the colonias and the resources of the PC(USA)."

The certificate program is helping him do just that. For instance, he learned from Dr. Scott Hagley (and his book *Eat What is Set Before You*) that innovative ministers must engage communities with strong relationships and clear vision, discerning their own role in light of the assets that are already present there.

Ezequiel has sought to do this in the colonias. He has partnered with local

leaders, like "Pinky," a young woman who had lost her sister to gang violence. Pinky started a non-profit to create opportunities for children to play soccer, a safe alternative to violent activities. Ezequiel has been searching out funds and supplies for Pinky's ministry, which has already brought about a sudden and visible decrease in vandalism and violence in the neighborhood.

This is just one bridge Ezequiel has been building. He is also helping to establish a partnership between the colonias and the Texas A&M School of Agriculture. This will hopefully lead to community gardens and opportunities for the residents to learn planting techniques and health benefits of fruits and vegetables. The goal is to launch the effort this fall, and in the meantime Ezequiel is working to secure plots of land while he builds excitement in the community.

Originally from the Dominican Republic, Ezequiel's mother and aunts were able to gain nursing degrees from a Presbyterian mission school and, ultimately, to break cycles of poverty. We are so grateful for Ezequiel's passion and ministry.

Learn More

To learn more about the Seminary's Graduate Certificate in Adaptive and Innovative Ministry, visit www.pts.edu/Adaptive_Innovative_Ministry. The certificate forms innovating leaders who listen to the Holy Spirit and to their communities, who convene and lead teams in discerning God's work, and who maintain individual and community practices to renew their souls, enabling deeper discernment in their own life and their community's life and calling.



CALLED TO CHAPLAINCY

Twenty years ago, seminary is the last place that chaplain Kathy Hartzell '21 thought she would ever be.

Settled into a career in customer service management, Kathy noticed that a small nudge toward ministry was developing into a full sense of calling. After learning about the work of a hospice grief counselor, she wondered, "How can I get to do that?"

Ultimately, Kathy realized she could combine two of her related passions—counseling and spirituality—in chaplaincy ministry. But turning this new dream into a reality would require work. Namely, it would require a seminary degree and ordination.

And so she, with active partnership from her husband, Paul, took on a Herculean task: obtain an M.Div. degree in Pittsburgh while still working full-time in her hometown of Cleveland. During her first semester here, twice a week the couple would pack dinners, drive to Pittsburgh, heat up their food in a break room microwave, then Kathy would attend evening class while Paul read a book or strolled around campus. Then, of course, the late-night drives home.

All along her journey, Kathy was grateful for God's provision. "God graced me every step of the way," she says, "to make my seminary education possible."



For the rest of her semesters at PTS, Kathy split time between the two cities, living in Pittsburgh three days per week. During her Friday-to-Monday stints in Cleveland, she completed a chaplaincy training at the Cleveland Clinic. This experience confirmed for Kathy that she was indeed pursuing her true calling. Her supervisor was an imam, and she worked alongside Catholic, Orthodox, and Baptist ministers, among others. She knew this was a great reflection of the diversity of chaplaincy work itself, since people in the hospital are from all faith backgrounds, beliefs, and practices.

"One of the first things I learned as a chaplain," she explains, "was not to talk churchy. I just offer my presence. I walk into each room praying that the Holy Spirit will guide me."

For her field education at PTS, Kathy wanted to expand her chaplaincy horizons beyond hospital settings, so she worked at the Allegheny County Jail. Her experience was somewhat limited by the COVID-19 pandemic, but she was able to minister to many incarcerated people in pastoral care visits.

Now graduated, Kathy has recently accepted a one-year chaplaincy residency at the Cleveland VA. Meanwhile, she is pursuing both her PC(USA) ordination and her chaplaincy board certification.

"I just offer my presence. I walk into each room praying that the Holy Spirit will guide me."

MINISTRY THROUGH FORMATION, SPIRITUALITY, AND WRITING

For recent M.Div. graduate Rose Schrott '21, one big piece of post-seminary life is wedding planning! In November, she will marry another PTS grad, Chris Taylor '19, who is an ordained PC(USA) minister and member of the Seminary's admissions team.

While the two began their wedding planning, they also got the chance to work together at the Miller Summer Youth Institute college internship program. The program, which was fully online for the second year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, virtually brings together college students from near and far—this year, SYI welcomed an intern from Botswana, Africa! The internships are designed to help students engage with two major questions: who is God calling me to be, and what is God calling me to do?

Rose got the chance to work with both halves of the internship program. One component, led by two M.Div. students, focused on community-building and spiritual health. The other, led by then SYI director the Rev. Erin Davenport '04 (along with Rose and Chris), guided each student through a unique summer-long project to help them with their two questions for discernment. Each project's focus and format was tailored to the individual student. A project could be a research paper about contemplative practices, a podcast series about housing discrimination, or a theatrical play about faith and medicine.

This summer's work with the SYI interns was right in the wheelhouse of one of her great passions—ministering to people in areas of formation and spirituality.

Rose's other ministry passion is writing. She is already exploring her gifts in this area with several freelance projects. Rose currently serves as an editor for The Upper Room's daily devotionals and writes Sunday School curricula for the National Council of Churches. In September, Rose became interim associate editor of *The Presbyterian Outlook*.

She was able to cultivate her writing skills during her Seminary studies through two independent study courses—one called Reading and Writing the Spiritual Life, and one focused on Public Theology and Creative Writing. These courses not only brought Rose's education together with her sense of calling, they also prepared her for the creative work she is now pursuing.

She hopes to one day fuse these two passions, writing and spiritual discernment. Rose explains, "I hope my writing will offer the world an opportunity to reflect. Who is God? How do we see God in the ordinary? How do we experience God in our daily lives?"

Learn More

To learn more about the Miller Summer Youth Institute and the opportunities it offers college students to engage in internships and rising high school seniors and first-year college students to earn college credit through the academy, visit www.pts.edu/SYI.



MISSION AS EMBODIED BY JESUS CHRIST

It always feels good to reach a finish line, and World Mission Initiative Director the Rev. Dr. Hunter Farrell and Associate Director the Rev. Balajiedlang Khylllep are now finishing an important project seven years in the making. Dr. Farrell explains, “This book, *Freeing Congregational Mission*, is the result of multiple surveys and conversations with more than 1,400 mission leaders across U.S. Christian traditions—mainline Protestants, evangelicals, and Roman Catholics.”

Across these diverse traditions, similar patterns were playing out. “Many congregations seemed to be engaging in the same mission strategies: child sponsorship, short-term mission trips, prepared meal-packaging events, and support of orphanages,” Dr. Farrell says. “Billions of dollars go to these types of mission work each year, yet these strategies are often extraordinarily ineffective and inefficient. When we’re tempted to ‘send money’ or offer our volunteer time to do for families what they could do themselves, our mission strategies may be building on colonial assumptions,” he explains, “or the more recent focus on self-transformation (‘selfie mission’) that short-circuits mission as embodied by Jesus Christ.”

“In contrast,” he explains, “Jesus spent 30 years learning from the people around him before he preached his first sermon. His mission wasn’t a task list, but a spreading circle of human relationships that



changed the world. We need to take that seriously.”

Through their many interviews and conversations, the two authors found that mission leaders feel disconnected from each other and that they desire to learn best practices for drawing their people more deeply into God’s mission. So the project took shape as a guide that addresses the most frequently identified needs in local church mission engagement. It offers three foundational stones—a mission theology of companionship, an invitation to cultural humility, and the power of co-development—that congregational mission leaders and churches can implement in every mission activity.

The book also includes a “toolkit” of seven resources designed for congregational mission leaders to use

with their congregations. These tools were designed to accompany and apply the concepts lifted up in the book. In this sense, the book aims to offer suggestions and equip mission leaders in both theory and practice.

The two authors have had the chance to take it on the road, using parts of the book as they were being written to engage in real training and dialogue with church leaders and mission teams. The results have been fruitful and encouraging.

Their book, titled *Freeing Congregational Mission: A Practical Vision for Companionship, Cultural Humility, and Co-Development*, is slated to be published by InterVarsity Press-Academic in January 2022.

WRITING ABOUT FAITH TO AN UNCHURCHED PUBLIC

For D.Min. student the Rev. Scott Paul-Bonham, the vocational journey has been an unpredictable adventure that has taken him from parish ministry to death row chaplaincy, and now to professional writing.

Scott completed seminary at 25 and began looking for a job. A lifelong Michigander, he took an interview for an associate pastor role in Arkansas purely to practice his interviewing skills. But Scott and his wife—a Canadian who thought *Arkansas* might be in the foreign mission field—soon moved to the South.

A few years later, in a solo pastor role, Scott's next major vocational twist was brought on by burnout. Scott was overworking, which caused ongoing illness and exhaustion. But then a

prison associate warden who attended Scott's church recruited him to become a federal prison chaplain. Engaging in this new work was not only deeply meaningful in its own right, but the regular hours and weekends brought renewed health to Scott's body and mind.

Scott's family eventually wanted to move closer to home, but the only prison near Michigan with a chaplaincy position open was a penitentiary with death row inmates. Scott wasn't sure he could even take the job, given his personal convictions against capital punishment. But the regional chaplain convinced him, saying, "No one needs a pastor more than someone on death row. And if you were one of these inmates, would you want a chaplain who was for or against the death penalty?"

He arrived to a death row filled with infamous prisoners from the news headlines and began to lead worship services for them. But when three of the men in his care were executed, it was too much. "Their deaths were incredibly draining—emotionally, spiritually, and mentally," Scott says. "I couldn't do it anymore."

So Scott soon shifted his ministry focus and began a program to help imprisoned people prepare for release. The program was fruitful and helped drive down the recidivism rates of those who participated.

In 2017, Scott retired to focus on his health. Yet his "retirement" has been quite eventful. He is a transitional pastor at a church in Michigan, and he has recently written a book of daily devotionals for his daughter.

His pastoral role also includes writing religious articles for the local newspaper. So when he first read about the Creative Writing and Public Theology D.Min. focus, it was an easy decision. He says about his current leg of the journey, "Writing about faith to an unchurched public is the direction my life is taking."

We're glad that direction has brought Scott to our PTS community!

Learn More

To learn more about the Seminary's Doctor of Ministry in Creative Writing and Public Theology, visit www.pts.edu/Creative_Writing_and_Public_Theology_Focus.



AT THE INTERSECTION OF URBAN THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

While 2020 brought many hardships and challenges, it also provided some good things, like Ruth Boykin's arrival as associate director of the Metro-Urban Institute. MUI engages positive systemic changes at the intersection of urban theology and social justice.

"I have had a unique and varied career," Ruth explains, "and it has led me to serve in this role."

Before beginning that career, Ruth gained an important foundation in childhood. She is a first-generation college graduate in her family, which migrated to Pennsylvania from segregated Alabama. Her family was firmly rooted in the Black Baptist tradition. They instilled in her three fundamental values: moral character, service to others, and a strong work ethic. Ruth's father, for instance, had perfect attendance during his 38 years working in a regional steel mill!

Ruth obtained an M.Ed. in language communication and an M.A. in communications and rhetoric. She then worked in leadership positions in education, government, corporate, and international sectors.

One day on a cruise ship, her worldview was drastically changed.



Ruth was serving as the first Black assistant to the academic dean at Semester at Sea, a semester-long study abroad program then sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh. The program carried more than 500 undergraduate students and 60 faculty to 13 countries. One of those countries was racially segregated South Africa during apartheid. Ruth was informed that South African law required her to declare herself an "honorary white person" to disembark.

Ruth refused.

Her refusal ignited several protests at the University of Pittsburgh. As a result, Semester at Sea did not return to South Africa until apartheid was dismantled. While the experience was traumatizing, it ignited a new level of passion in Ruth for social justice.

That passion brought Ruth to leadership in community development and now to MUI. She says, "I'm appreciative for Dr. R. Drew Smith's leadership and support as the director of MUI and that of my counterparts throughout the Seminary." Ruth's responsibilities as associate director include managing the Institute's fiscal operations, facilitating community engagement initiatives, and advancing communications with the program's growing network.

Ruth's hopes for MUI are bright. For her, this work is personal: "On many levels, I have lived this experience through my career and as a long-term resident of a distressed community. I want to change the cries of pain to shouts of triumph."

PODCAST AS PULPIT

The Rev. Porsha Williams Gates twice planned to pursue a Ph.D. in English. Both times she ended up following God's leading in a different direction—and we're so glad her path brought her to the PTS community!

The first change in plans came when Porsha graduated from Spelman College. Just as she was about to apply to doctoral programs, she received an epiphany. A lifelong practitioner of Afro-Christian diasporic tradition, she would attend seminary to explore a possible vocation in ministry. Her full scholarship to divinity school confirmed her new step forward.

After receiving her M.Div., Porsha again set her sights on an English Ph.D. But the program she dreamed of—a study of the theological perspectives of authors like Toni

Morrison and James Baldwin—didn't seem to exist. So instead, she followed other passions, serving as an ordained Baptist minister in youth ministry and parish settings.

During her six years in full-time ministry in Connecticut, where she lives with her husband, Jamal, and their dog, a new passion and dream emerged. Porsha began to reimagine the concept of the pulpit. Who gets to preach? Who is allowed to share the Word? Porsha's reimagined pulpit, one that would amplify the sounds of humanity, started as a podcast and developed into a corporation: Porshanality Media. Now featuring podcasts like Womanist Salon and Say it Out Loud—and others, along with several more on the way—the company is a seedbed of creativity, art, and public theology.

Just as Porsha was shifting her ministry focus fully to media, she discovered the PTS D.Min. program's Creative Writing and Public Theology focus. This was it! The doctorate that had not yet existed when Porsha had graduated from seminary! "This program is the perfect fit," she explains. "It combines my loves of literature, writing, and theology—and it also marries so well to my work with Porshanality Media."

The program not only aids Porsha in her current work, but it also equips her for future projects. Someday she would like to focus more on her writing, perhaps publishing a novel, a book of essays, or a collection of poetry.

We are excited for Porsha's future work, but for now, we are grateful for her presence in our community. You can also catch her insider's perspective of the D.Min. program on her podcast Doing It Different, where she talks to PTS faculty, staff, and fellow students.

Learn More

To learn more about the Seminary's Doctor of Ministry program, visit www.pts.edu/doctor-of-ministry. Cohorts include Christian Spirituality, Creative Writing and Public Theology, Eastern Christian, Intergenerational Black Church Studies, Missional Leadership, Parish: Risking Faithfully, Reformed, Risking Faithfully: Disruption as Revelation and Resurrection, and Science and Theology.



FINDING COMMON GROUND

Each semester, the Seminary offers several elective courses to provide students with a broad range of learning opportunities. Every so often, a class occurs at the intersection of the professor's expertise, the students' ministry needs, and the pressing events in our neighborhoods and our nation. Earlier this year, one such class was "Police, Prisons, and the Justice of God," taught by Dr. Derek Woodard-Lehman.

The course, a follow-up to "God-Talk and Public Leadership" (which covered the history of racial justice movements), focused on public theology related to justice and safety in a democratic society. To do so, it integrated dogma and data, exploring how Christian beliefs, practices, and discipleship relate to real stories and statistics from the American criminal justice system.

This is, of course, a topic filled with disagreement and tension. Issues of policing have become increasingly polarized in our country. This is reflected in the push and pull between public safety and social justice, between the rhetoric of "the New Jim Crow" and "the Thin Blue Line," and between social order and civil liberties.

There are no easy answers, but the course did seek to discern effective solutions. "To my surprise," Dr. Woodard-Lehman describes, "things are rather different from what our hashtags and headlines led me to expect. On one side, the cause of

mass incarceration is violent crime (60 percent of incarceration) more so than nonviolent drug crime (20 percent). On the other, policing is not nearly as dangerous an occupation as agricultural or industrial labor. This means that, if we can find common ground politically, there are readily available practical steps to release nearly 500,000 prisoners and reduce police shootings by nearly 50 percent without significant risk of increased crime or officer endangerment."

The students worked to integrate this data with the rich history of Reformed Christian theology of state and society, law and order, public justice, the common good, just war, political violence, and civil disobedience. They used Scripture to construct norms, principles, and ideals for criminal justice within their own congregational and community contexts.

The two-part course created excitement around campus, as students buzzed about how much they were learning about both the theology and practical facets of justice. "This was one of the best courses I took in seminary," Jason Dauer '21 explains. "Dr. Woodard-Lehman balanced Scripture, church tradition, and current events in a way that taught me how to lead difficult conversations with my own congregation."

"Dr. Woodard-Lehman balanced Scripture, church tradition, and current events in a way that taught me how to lead difficult conversations with my own congregation."



HERE FOR THE LEARNING

Five years ago, Dr. Wendy Farone walked into church for the first time in 15 years.

That church wasn't a good fit, and neither was the next one, but she soon found herself at Bethlehem Lutheran Church. "It smelled like my childhood church," she says. "I immediately sensed that I was home."

Wendy's renewed desire for Christian community came on the heels of professional burnout and retirement. She had worked in education for 30 years, most of that time spent teaching teachers about the science of reading so they could better educate students with dyslexia.

When she found her new church home, she quickly dove into adult classes and Sunday School programs. The idea of seminary was intriguing, but as someone who had already earned a Ph.D., she wasn't sure she

needed any more degrees. Yet she wanted to learn, so she decided to try one class. The verdict: "I was hooked."

During the first lecture, at one point Wendy turned to a classmate and whispered, "Do you have any idea what he's talking about?" The classmate said, "I was about to say the same thing to you!" The two became study partners and are still close friends today, and, despite their initial confusion, loved that first class together.

In the spring of 2021, Wendy received her Graduate Certificate in Theological Studies, but she knew she wasn't finished with theological education. Through conversations with the PTS admissions department, her pastor, and her bishop, she decided that the Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies program was her next step.

Wendy chose MAPS because of the program's flexible and practical nature, which will allow her to pursue her current passion in ministry—addiction recovery. Motivated by both the national opioid crisis and the effects of alcoholism in her own family history, Wendy wants to help equip clergy. She explains, "Often ministers sit down with people who are struggling with substance use. But do these pastors understand the spiritual malady of addiction, the underlying causes of these behaviors, and the resources and supports that are available within the church and community?"

As Wendy explores the best ways to educate and support clergy in this vital area, she is in no hurry to finish her MAPS degree. "I'm here for the learning, not the grades or degrees. As far as I'm concerned, the longer it takes, the better!"

Her advice for other lifelong learners is this: "Just put your toe in the water. Try one class and see how it goes."

Learn More

To learn more about the Seminary's two-year Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies, which provides grounding in core disciplines and allows students to select from a variety of ministerial electives to suit their interests and vocational needs, visit

www.pts.edu/MA-Pastoral-Studies.

The Seminary also offers certificates in Adaptive and Innovative Ministry, Ministry, Missional Leadership, Theological Studies, and Urban Ministry. Learn more at www.pts.edu/Certificate_Programs.



LEADING ADAPTIVE AND INNOVATIVE MINISTRIES

Sometimes we embark on a journey without knowing its destination.

This was the case for Rick Mason '18, who entered the PTS Graduate Certificate in Adaptive and Innovative Ministry program in response to a transition in his church. It was 2017, and Mosaic Community Church was preparing for its longtime pastor to retire. Rick was part of the church's session (its governing body), and he hoped the certificate program would equip him to help the church navigate the upcoming season of change.

Meanwhile, some people were urging Rick to consider the mantle of pastoral leadership at his church. Many of his classmates were learning how to adapt their current parish or community ministries, and Rick was figuring out which context would be the best fit for him to serve Mosaic and the world.

Rick concluded that while he has some "pastoral" gifts, like connecting with people and leading them toward a shared vision, he simply could not see himself preaching sermons week in and week out. This was important learning for Rick's journey of discernment—but his time at PTS did quite a bit more for his leadership at Mosaic. Rick was serving on the church's pastoral search committee,



and as it turned out, a friend he made in the certificate program ended up becoming Mosaic's next pastor!

"The relationships I built at PTS played a huge role in my ability to help our church through that decision," he explains. "Of course, it's where I built a friendship with our next pastor, Josh Fischer, a PTS grad and fellow AIM student. Through our relationship, he came to understand Mosaic, and I came to trust him." Beyond that specific connection, the entire network of Rick's PTS colleagues from across the country—many of whom had experienced similar situations of pastoral transition—shared their wisdom and encouragement with him.

"Being in this program made all the difference," he says.

Growing up, Rick never loved school, but the structure of the AIM certificate program resonated with him. During their intensive gatherings, his cohort would travel together to witness, participate in, and gain hands-on learning from local churches and non-profits.

The lessons from these visits have borne fruit in Rick's continued ministry journey. Earlier this year, he became the executive director of The Pittsburgh Project, a non-profit committed to sharing hope, empowering youth, and building community. Like many organizations, the Project is emerging from a difficult season—and Rick is ready to help guide it into an adaptive and innovative new chapter.

OFFERING GRACE

While every PTS student's experience is different, some activities just seem normal: studying in the nooks and crannies of the Barbour Library, making friends at the tables of the Kadel Dining Hall, or attending worship in the spacious Hicks Memorial Chapel. But those who enrolled in the fall of 2020, like M.Div. student Hannah Ostlund, are still waiting to find normal.

Hannah describes her first year in seminary as “challenging but formative”—marked by the pandemic, but also generating important self-learning. “My first semester, I really burned out,” she explains. “But second semester, what changed things for me was the assignment in spiritual formation class to create a rule of life. I learned what it looks like to give grace to myself in practical ways, like

incorporating time to exercise or to read for fun.”

Now continuing to give herself grace daily, Hannah is excited for the world to reopen, including the Seminary's physical environments for study, worship, and community. In fact, she is so thoroughly convinced of the importance of student connections, whether meeting in person or over video calls, that she decided to run for office in the PTS Student Association. She is now serving as the Association's secretary and says, “I want to help revamp student relationships and bring life back to campus!”

Hannah knew during her undergraduate study (and her work at the Montreat Conference Center) that she wanted to attend seminary. What drew her specifically to PTS was the World Mission Initiative. For a college project, she had created a

short-term mission guidebook that acknowledged the ways these trips have often been harmful and that sought to gain a deeper contextual understanding to create healthier missional engagement. When she discovered WMI, she felt an instant connection. She also sensed a strong, vibrant community among the students—another reason she is excited to discover a new normal on campus.

Now that she is a year into seminary, she is also feeling a pull to youth ministry. For this reason, she is thrilled to begin her field education, which places her with a congregation in a role focused on youth ministry. This experience will serve as an important discernment tool for Hannah, who is considering two different paths forward: serving as a youth pastor in a church setting or pursuing a Ph.D. in missiology.

Whichever road she chooses, we are confident Hannah will bring ample grace, both for herself and for all those God brings into her journey.

“... what changed things for me was the assignment in spiritual formation class to create a rule of life. I learned what it looks like to give grace to myself in practical ways, like incorporating time to exercise or to read for fun.”





During the annual Alumnae/i Days 2021, the Seminary honored four alums for their many years of distinguished work in the areas of mission, specialized ministry, pastoral ministry, and academia, respectively. We also recognized a fifth graduate with The Fred McFeely Rogers Award for Creative Ministry. Read about these outstanding alums on the following pages.

THE REV. DR. CHARLES (CHARLIE) E. COTHERMAN '12

THE FRED McFEELY ROGERS AWARD FOR CREATIVE MINISTRY

After obtaining his M.Div. degree from PTS, Charlie Cotherman earned a Ph.D. in American church history from the University of Virginia. He and his family then moved back close to his hometown in Pennsylvania and planted Oil City Vineyard church. "Young leaders who are willing to roll

up their sleeves and love their town have emerged," Charlie explains, "and God has opened doors of influence and connection with other churches, town leaders, and local government."

OCV started in 2016 with eight people in the Cothermans' living room. (Charlie's spouse, Aimee Cotherman '11, is also a PTS grad.) Within the first two years, the group had outgrown multiple meeting spaces. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the church was accommodating a regular Sunday attendance of more than 100 people at the local YWCA.

Charlie also serves as the administrative director for The Project on Rural Church Ministry, funded by a five-year Lilly Endowment grant, which focuses on the unique circumstances



of pastors serving rural and small-town communities. The project works with pastors to facilitate their collaboration with one another and with college faculty and students to strengthen local ministry in rural and small-town contexts. Charlie is also the author of *To Think Christianly: A History of L'Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement*.

THE REV. MARY CATHERINE (KAY) DAY '97

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNA IN MISSION

Kay Day, a teaching elder and honorably retired mission co-worker with the PC(USA), spent 14 years in Africa—first in Malawi, and then in Rwanda. She now serves as pastor of First PC Castle Shannon (Pa).

Arriving in Malawi in 2006, she taught at the Zomba Theological College. In addition, she became training chaplain and administrator at the country's

Chigodi Women's Center, focused on equipping Christian women with practical skills and biblical knowledge. She served as part of Pittsburgh Presbytery's partnership with Blantyre Synod, Malawi; her duties included working to provide clean water access for impoverished communities.

Four years later, Kay moved to Butare, Rwanda, where she worked to prepare people for pastoral ministry at the Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences. There she taught English and theology to students from five different denominations, and she also pastored an English-speaking congregation near the Institute. Rwanda is a country longing to heal after genocide. While the government worked to remake the buildings, Kay and her colleagues focused on the people's relationships.



Before her time in Africa, Kay had excelled in education and ministry. After earning advanced degrees in both English and divinity, she taught high-school and college-level English. She also pastored several congregations for more than a decade.

THE REV. SARAH J. HEPPENSTALL '92

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNA IN SPECIALIZED MINISTRY

Sarah Heppenstall began taking classes at PTS while earning her MBA from Carnegie Mellon University. She was a "lapsed Catholic" at the time, considering an M.A. degree from PTS. Once she discerned a calling to ordained ministry in the PC(USA), with the gracious partnership of her husband, Tal, she transitioned to full-time studies in the M.Div. program.

After graduation, she accepted her first and only full-time call to parish ministry at New Bethlehem PC. While serving there, Sarah discovered a new and primary calling—a ministry of hospitality. For Sarah and her husband, this ministry has taken many forms: a family of adopted children, welcoming people in crisis into their home and lives, and partnering with domestic and international ministries for financial and mutual prayer support. Sarah has tutored international students at PTS and has even audited Greek and Hebrew classes with them to ensure they succeeded in their studies.

Sarah has remained an active part of the PTS community in several other ways, including continuing education events, the Alumnae/i Council, and annual Phonathons. She also volunteers with local organizations



that seek to break down institutional barriers to overcoming poverty. For 15 years, Sarah served as part-time pastor of Tidal PC in Templeton, Pa. Since retiring in 2016, she continues on occasion to lead worship.

THE REV. DR. JOAN PRENTICE '05/'11

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNA IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

Joan Prentice, an ordained American Baptist minister, served for 15 years as staff pastor to new disciples at Pittsburgh's Mount Ararat Baptist Church. There she focused on pastoral care and spiritual counseling, as well as on curriculum development and volunteer training.

Since 2013, Joan has also served as executive director of The Ephesus

Project, a Pittsburgh-based nonprofit, an organization she founded and to which she now devotes her full-time professional attention. Joan first envisioned the purpose, name, and style of the ministry while pursuing her M.Div. and D.Min. degrees at PTS. The Ephesus Project is a "church without walls," a non-traditional environment where clergy, laypersons, community leaders, and seekers can unite.

At The Ephesus Project, Joan is dedicated to spiritual and educational excellence, and she approaches her ministry in light of the postmodern context of our time. A key example is her New Paradigm trainings, which first took shape during Joan's D.Min. dissertation. In these workshops, Joan equips emerging leaders to understand and participate in contextual ministry.



The primary aspect of the Project's ministry is its Grace Space gatherings. "Grace Spaces" are small community gatherings where people worship together—but they're not places for people to just passively receive ministry. Instead, every worshiper is invited to contribute ideas, ask questions, and experience holistic healing.

THE REV. DR. MICHAEL L. SPEZIO '96

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS IN ACADEMIA

After obtaining his M.Div. from Pittsburgh Seminary with a concentration in Christian ethics, Michael completed his Ph.D. in cognitive/systems neuroscience at the University of Oregon's Institute of Neuroscience. He then served as a postdoctoral fellow, first at The M.I.N.D. Institute at the University of California at Davis, then at the Brain Imaging Center at the California Institute of Technology.

Since 2007, he has been a faculty member of Scripps College in Claremont, Calif., where he currently serves as associate professor of psychology and neuroscience. He is also in his tenth year as a visiting researcher in neuroscience at the Institute for Systems Neuroscience in Hamburg, Germany.

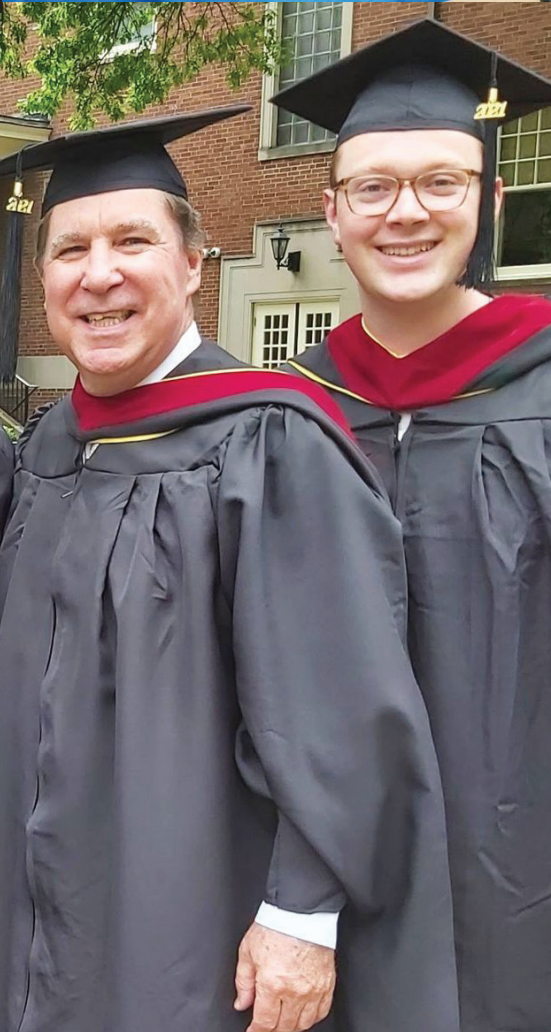
Michael's research focuses on how the brain makes complex decisions about other people, providing new understanding about virtue and moral decision making. Some of his studies look specifically at the brain activity of people with disorders of social cognition and emotion. His teaching spans many aspects of neuroscience and psychology, including research methods, EEG and MRI/fMRI analysis, data science ethics, depression, and the autism spectrum.



This work has garnered Michael multiple awards and grants, and he currently serves as editor of the journal *Philosophy, Theology, and the Sciences*. An ordained PC(USA) pastor, he also volunteers as a chaplain at Pasadena's Huntington Hospital and serves on its bioethics committee.

On May 28, 2021, we celebrated our 225th Commencement. Check out photos and videos from the online graduation events: www.pts.edu/graduation_2021. The Seminary also honored a number of students with graduation awards.







PITTSBURGH
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY

616 North Highland Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15206

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Pittsburgh, PA
Permit No. 1438

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 February 2022, look for Lenten devotionals as well.

Artwork by Eleanor T. Hawkins