

ALUM FINDS MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES AT LOCAL PRISON

Fourteen months ago, William “Biff” Carpenter ’13 began serving as vicar at a small Anglican parish in the town of Waynesburg, Pa. He started his ministry by tackling the job of learning about the town—its needs, its struggles, and where it finds joy. Over a period of about a month, Biff made phone calls and visited with various local institutions and people in an effort to find places simply to proclaim Christ. “Almost every group had some sort of ministry presence,” Biff reflects. Then he made his last call—to the Greene County Prison. “After several conversations, I had finally found an opportunity,” he notes.



“Within months I was holding services, teaching Scripture, and working on formation. Currently I’m teaching a seven-week program highlighting the Seven Virtues of the Christian Faith.” As a parish priest, prison chaplain, and college chaplain all rolled into one, over the last year Biff has worked with heroin addicts, displaced persons, the elderly, the Church, collegians, and “a myriad of other folks.”

Reflecting on his time of preparation for ministry at PTS, Biff says, “I can tell you that seminary will not offer *exact* answers or prepare you for the *exact* ministry in which you will participate. In fact, seminary can be a daunting journey unto itself. There seems to be an insurmountable amount of knowledge to obtain and filter. In the challenges of seminary, I think we graduates have all discovered that our faith is tested in unique ways. But through encountering our own human weakness we learn to accept our limitations, we learn to say that it’s okay to not have all the answers. After all, it is not through our strengths that Christ tends to perform His greatest miracles, but in our weaknesses, with encouragement through the power of the Holy Spirit. Seminary isn’t a place that contains the sum of human knowledge about Christ; it is instead a place where we embrace the reality of Jesus’ presence in Holy Scripture and the world.”

Biff concludes that, ultimately, seminary prepares a person for ministry in the world if that person is willing to accept that Christian community isn’t pristine. “The world is broken, and you will rarely find yourself surrounded by people with whom you fully agree on dogmatic positions or theological principles,” he notes. “But the mission of Jesus Christ isn’t about convincing people you are right (a lesson it has taken me years to learn). The mission of the Trinity is about sitting in the darkness of life with our fellow broken brothers and sisters and lighting a lantern by proclaiming the simplest statement we know to be true, ‘Jesus loves you,’ and adding to it, ‘so do I.’” This month on Easter Day, Biff will celebrate those truths by baptizing five inmates. “I’m just really jazzed about that!” he says. And so are we.

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