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MDIV STUDENT CHRIS TAYLOR IS FINDING THE INTERSECTION OF GOD’S CREATION AND MINISTRY

Chris Taylor’s path to ministry has always involved not only his personal sense of call but also other people’s affirmation of his gifts. “Ministry related to the church has been part of my life since I can remember,” he says, “and voices of affirmation have consistently reinforced my vocational aims.”

One of those voices came from a church youth leader when Chris was in high school. “Because of his influence, I participated in the **Miller Summer Youth Institute** the summer before my senior year—the first year that Erin Davenport ’05 and Derek ’05/’17 Davenport directed the program. SYI (which I’m still involved with as a seminary intern) put full-time ministry in the back of my mind,” Chris reflects. And it stayed there through his years as a history major at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, where he involved himself in Presbyterian Campus Ministry.

So after graduating from college, Chris moved to Maine, where he worked in Acadia National Park with A Christian Ministry in the National Parks. “I put in 40 hours a week in the gift shop, then on Sundays served as part of a team that led two morning worship services and a sunset service at different points in the park,” he explains. After that summer in Maine, Chris moved back to Raleigh, N.C., to do youth ministry. Because he enjoyed serving in that role, he also spent his time “being intentional about where to go to seminary.”

“I was born in Pittsburgh but moved to North Carolina when I was seven years old,” Chris says. “I decided to look at Pittsburgh Seminary for my theological education but didn’t think I’d end up enrolling here, even though returning to Pittsburgh was a real draw for me.” Surprise!

“A number of factors influenced my choice of PTS, but one of them was that, though this seminary is rooted in the Presbyterian tradition and enrolls a lot of Presbyterian students, other Christian traditions are also widely represented, both in the student body and on the faculty. Here Presbyterianism is prominent but not overwhelming,” Chris notes.

Another factor influencing Chris’s decision involved his ability to explore pursuing a creative ministry related to the outdoors. “I’m in the ordination process,” he says, “but I’m still discerning exactly what ordination is leading me to.” He goes on, “My relationship with and understanding of God have been significantly shaped by my outdoor experiences, especially in the Western U.S.—such as living on a 120-foot schooner on Puget Sound. So I’m interested in finding the intersection of experiencing God’s creation and doing ministry. For example, people who hike the Appalachian Trail (something I myself aspire to!) often say that doing so was a spiritual journey for them. What does that mean? And how can churches—including urban churches—cultivate the environment they’re in for spiritual formation?”



At PTS, Chris has been able to explore these questions via independent studies, such as the eco-theology course he’s pursuing this semester. He’s also been able to shape final projects for curricular courses in ways that focus on creation and the outdoors. And through “really eye-opening” **World Mission Initiative** trips to Colombia—“my first truly international trip, which allowed me to experience and expand my understanding of God through a different language and culture”—and the Philippines, which in January will focus on the environmental crisis, Chris is able to blend his vocational interests and his program of study.

“I may find my ministry niche in a church setting, or perhaps with a non-profit organization, doing educational programming for youth or adults,” Chris says. “I’m open. But my own experiences of God’s creation will surely continue to play a big part in my discernment process.”

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