

MEET PTS



The Rev. Dr. R. Drew Smith's 2017 sabbatical "was both productive and centering—things that don't always work together," he notes. He goes on to explain that it was centering because it was "full of deep reflection and prayer." It was productive because of a number of major projects he pursued.

Drew, professor of urban ministry, got an early, summer start on his first-term sabbatical activities with the seventh annual Transatlantic Roundtable on Religion and Race conference, for which he serves as co-convenor. In 2017 the conference was held in the U.S. for the first time—at Howard University in Washington, D.C. "Pittsburgh Seminary was well represented at the Roundtable this year," says Drew. "Five other faculty and staff, four doctor of ministry students, and a master's student participated as we focused on the theme of religion and globalization."

Going forward, the conference will take place every other year to give the co-convenors more time to focus on the organization's groundwork, which involves, for example, regional research groups. "In early December a Kenya-based Transatlantic Roundtable colleague and I received a grant through the Africa Theological Advance Initiative of Calvin College's Nagel Institute that will boost this regional work," Drew notes. During his sabbatical, he co-authored the \$50,000, two-year grant to do research and applied work related to assessing cultural and Christian practices of reconciliation in East Africa.

"The grant will help fund a regionally based team to do field research in Northern Uganda and Nairobi (Kenya), and with South Sudanese who, because of the conflicts in Sudan, have had to relocate to Uganda and Kenya," says Drew. "The East Africa research group will interview people affected by conflicts in South Sudan and Northern Uganda, as well as church and community leaders engaged in peace and reconciliation efforts within those contexts." The findings of this regional research group will comprise a large part of the reporting in the 2019 Transatlantic Roundtable conference, which will take place at Hekima College's Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations. Hekima, where Drew's research partner is based, is part of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, a multi-campus university in Kenya.

Drew's next big project partly related to this work will be writing a book that examines religious conflict in Africa against a backdrop of U.S.-Africa relations from the colonial era forward. "My examination will serve as a window on religious conflict both within Africa and between Africa and the U.S., but with a broader purpose of teasing out their respective conceptions of 'the common good,'" Drew elaborates. His book will consider how Africans and Americans reflect on "the common good" as a guide not only for local and national contexts but also for today's global context.

"We don't often bring these concepts of the common good to bear on measuring life together globally," says Drew. "I want to look at a number of issues involved: how social, political, and religious leaders frame an Africa-defined sense of the common good; and what forces have undermined the possibility of achieving that good (such as colonialism, Africa's contemporary economic and political relationships with the world, civil war in Africa, global expansions of terrorism and the War on Terror, to name a few). Then I'll look at how the U.S. has entered those contexts (through the governmental, private, and civil-society sectors, including the religious sector) and ways in which U.S. engagement with Africa has either undermined the common good or helped enhance the possibilities for that good to be achieved." Broadly speaking, then, Drew's book will consider how we can think about life at global levels in terms of the common good and will "highlight along the way the extent to which American Christianity has brought helpful paradigms to bear on these issues."

While Drew works on these projects, be on the lookout for his soon-to-appear book, *Black Clergy Engagement: Religious Authority and the American Public Square* (Columbia University Press) and his upcoming article, requested by the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission, on U.S. Protestant denominational responses to slavery.

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