

MILLER SUMMER YOUTH INSTITUTE REMAINS RELEVANT 20 YEARS LATER

Since 2005, the Rev. Erin Davenport '05, LSW, has co-directed the **Miller Summer Youth Institute** with her husband and fellow SYI alum, Derek '05. Now—some 20 years after the program was established at Pittsburgh Seminary—they are giving SYI new life through initiatives that build on the strength and vision of the program and its participants.

Created in 1997, SYI began offering teenagers interested in ministry as their primary vocation a summer experience similar to what students with other interests might get at science camp, orchestra camp, robotics camp, or the like. “Because of much student interest then, programs similar to SYI were being created nationally,” notes Erin, “and in 2000 SYI joined with many of them as part of the Lilly Youth Theology Network.”



“The goal of SYI is that all participants develop a better understanding of who God is calling them to be and what God is calling them to do,” Erin says. And since 1997 more than 400 teenagers have done just that as participants in the program. Further, “we’ve been very intentional about keeping in touch with our alums,” she notes, “and our SYI graduates now range in age from 18-35 years old. They are college students and college professors, they are pastors, nurses, doctors, teachers, and stay-at-home parents. Through our continued contact as well as the training they received at SYI, we want to help them understand whatever they do in life as a calling.”

By keeping in touch with SYI alums, it has become clear to Erin and Derek that the program’s graduates, who are now adults, are still asking that same question of how to interpret their life’s activities as a calling, and they still want to engage the PTS community in looking for answers. So in 2016 the co-directors will implement new ways of reaching a growing number of people with vocational training. In fact, they piloted some of those ways this past summer when six PTS professors and program directors joined the Davenports in teaching 34 students both on and off campus.

“SYI is going on the road!” explains Erin. “We’ll be offering theological vocational training to church youth groups; we’re working on partnerships with local universities to offer college credit for our summer programs; we’re offering Youth Ministry Conversations **online** on key topics that pertain to youth and youth ministers (a new one will be added later this month); and we’re working with our alums to celebrate 20 years of ministry by offering online and on-campus events that will call us all to consider Being Church, June 5-11, 2016. Keynoters include Eric Law, Rachel Held Evans, and Nadia Bolz-Weber. You are all invited to join us!”

“Through creative programming that faces the tough questions of the 21st century without fear,” says Erin, “SYI is looking ahead to a bright future that significantly helps the Church grow into people who, with all their being, live faithfully to the calling God has placed on their lives.”

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Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
616 North Highland Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15206
Phone: 412-362-5610



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