

# MEET PTS



# ALUM'S MASTER'S PROGRAM FOCUSED ON SPIRITUAL FORMATION, PASTORAL CARE, AND FORMING HER OWN THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

An Anglican of Australian upbringing, Joanne Spence '18 spent more than 30 years trying to “get back” to graduate studies. “Standing between me and furthering my education were important things, such as raising three children, working in the field of mental health, running a yoga studio and small non-profit, chronic pain, and the challenge of funding graduate school,” she notes.

Finally, the timing seemed right. “The children were mostly raised; I had sold my studio Yoga On the Square, my work life was at a place I could ‘step out’ of temporarily; and I was healed and well. That just left the financial part,” she recalls. When she applied to the M.A. program at PTS and was offered scholarship support, the “financial part” fell into place as well.

“At last I could begin fulfilling my long-held dream of graduate study. My prayer from the start was that the experiences of those 30 years of living and working on three continents would allow me to bring wisdom and maturity to my seminary education,” she says.

In her program at PTS, Joanne focused on spiritual formation, pastoral care, and forming her own theology of the body. Her master’s thesis—an integrative essay titled “InHabit Your Body”—tackled the intersection of Christian contemplative practice, practical theology, and breathing practices for middle-school-aged children. She calls participating in **World Mission Initiative** trips to Russia and Israel/Palestine “unexpected highlights” of her seminary experience. “Multiple ways of preparing for my further vocation contributed significantly to my discernment process,” she notes.

Having graduated last June and now serving as 2018 Class Representative on the PTS Board of Directors, when Joanne began her master’s program she was uncertain how she would use her degree upon completing it. “I only knew that God had brought me this far and trusted there was a post-graduation plan. So I listened often and carefully to discern how I could best serve God when I finished.”

The result? Returning to her work as a certified yoga therapist, both at her new yoga studio (Urban Oasis Pittsburgh) and in schools and hospitals—including at Pittsburgh’s VA, where she teaches therapeutic chair yoga to veterans seeking inpatient behavioral health treatment. Specializing in the use of breathing exercises and gentle movement, Joanne employs yoga to address people’s symptoms of depression and anxiety. “Determined to remain God’s open vessel,” Joanne envisions future work that may also involve teaching at the graduate level, writing books, and missional work locally and in Asia.

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