

STUDENT LEARNS LESSONS FROM THE GLOBAL CHURCH

Every journey begins somewhere.

For Keith Sandell, a senior M.Div. student at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, his journey as the 2015 Valentour scholar began in conversation with the previous year's travel award recipients Brian Lays and Brendan Ashley. The more stories he heard the more interested he grew. Keith became curious about the global church and what ways churches in the United States could learn from them.

So off went Keith for two months, traveling to India, Ethiopia, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Brazil, focusing his studies on pastoral leadership across cultures. He observed how pastors use their time and how they interact with their congregation, and he gained insight into the pastor's vision of what they do.



A major realization was the focus on spirituality. "Virtually every pastor I spoke to spent some time in prayer every day. For many of them it was a very specific time they would devote to prayer. It wasn't ever, 'I pray when I get to it today', but rather 'every morning at 8', or 'half an hour before going to bed.'"



Keith also asked the pastors what were the three most important traits or skills a person needed for ministry. He was expecting something similar to the characteristics emphasized in the United States context: being a good preacher, a good teacher, and having good administrative skills.

"What I found was virtually none of the global pastors said those things. They said pastors have to pray a lot, they have to love God, love the people, and be humble."

These global pastors also said that we must have a greater expectation that God is at work and God is going to show up in our daily lives. "They had a greater understanding that God was doing something in the neighborhood and their church," says Keith.

One cannot embark on a journey like this without being changed. Keith has been motivated to deepen his prayer life. Ministry and a strong relationship with God are contingent upon constantly being guided by God through prayer.

Keith also seeks to be more aware of God's presence. "The people I met on the trip would see God in every day experiences. They had the expectation that God was at work in their neighborhood and was going to show up."

For Keith, his journey has only just begun.

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