

MEET PTS



KORI ROBBINS PURSUES MDIV AFTER SERVING AS A PC(USA) YOUNG ADULT VOLUNTEER

“I’d been thinking about seminary for several years but always thought it was for someone else—someone more ‘out there’ with her faith, someone better at praying than I am, someone more ‘faithful,’ more ‘perfect.’ I didn’t think I was good enough to share God’s love in the way that I was taught it should be shared,” reflects first-year merit scholar and M.Div. student Kori Robbins.

Last year, Kori worked as a PC(USA) Young Adult Volunteer in New York City—and she expected a lot out of her experience. “I wanted a placement that was hands on and a project to do. I wanted something that was flexible, located in a neighborhood other than my own—something that got me talking to people, working with the neighborhood in community. And I wanted to experience church in a way that was different from what I knew,” she says. Kori got what she asked for—but not necessarily in the ways she expected.

One of Kori’s placements involved cataloguing the mission work of the Presbyterian churches in NYC. Her job was to interview—by e-mail, phone, or in person—churches and pastors across all five boroughs: Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island. Instead of working in an office, she worked from home, in coffee shops, or at the library. “So I had the flexibility and time to visit all 103 churches on my list,” she notes.

Kori’s other placement was with Church of the Living Hope in East Harlem, where she helped conduct a neighborhood storytelling project. “We asked people to share their stories of the neighborhood, the bits and pieces of their lives that make up who they are. We asked to photograph them in their homes or other favorite places and to open up, be vulnerable, and share parts of themselves they might not have shared with their neighbors.” So Kori got her wish to work with a neighborhood in community with other people.

As to a church experience that was different from what she knew . . . “Every time I tried a church in NYC, I would come away with an excuse as to why it wasn’t perfect, why I didn’t enjoy it, or why it wasn’t right for me. At some point I realized that I was searching for the church community I had left back home! I wasn’t really searching for something different after all,” Kori notes.

So instead of trying to fit church into a neat little Sunday morning box or feel guilty about being nontraditional, she decided to embrace the diverse times and spaces that gave her the opportunity to worship God. “Once I made that decision, I could hardly believe how much church I was experiencing—traditional services sung in Latin, with lots of processions and organ playing, Sunday morning concerts via Hillsong, crazy jam sessions at First Presbyterian in Jamaica, Queens, and many more!”

In the process, Kori learned that the whole church is her family. “I focused less on doing church ‘right,’ and more on having authentic encounters with people, making space for people to try new things, welcoming people wholeheartedly into a community. I found what I was missing.”

Kori’s year with YAV set the stage for pursuing her M.Div. at Pittsburgh Seminary in a way that is enriching her studies via a vision for context and for what ministry is and can be. “As a student at PTS, I’m intent on staying present, on being in the moment,” she adds.

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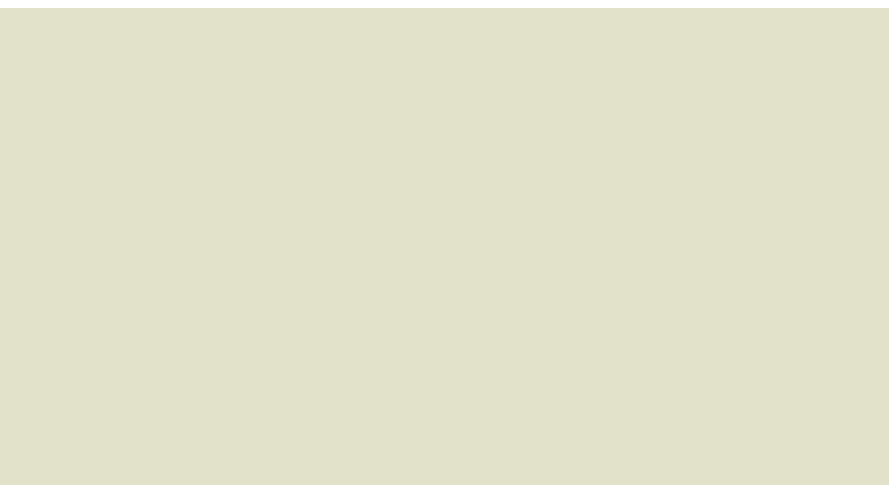
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