

## SEMINARY TRAINS CHURCH PLANTERS

# PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY EQUIPS PASTORS TO JOIN THE 1001 NEW WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES MOVEMENT.

By Christopher Brown



Right now, in Pittsburgh, seminarians are dreaming of planting new churches. A pizza-and-ice-cream shop might use recipes from local households in the hope of building community and seeing a new church sprout from those relationships. A house church called the Porch might seek stability in a tumultuous neighborhood. And a group of animal lovers could pray together while walking their dogs and meeting in one another's homes for worship and Bible study.

These aren't the newest ministries in the 1001 New Worshiping Communities initiative, but they could be soon. These ideas are actually the result of a new MDiv option at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary: a **church-planting emphasis**.

From March through May of 2014, a team of church-planting leaders joined Jannie Swart, Pittsburgh's associate professor of world mission and evangelism, to teach Planting and Leading New Churches. Our team included Vera White—the Presbyterian Mission Agency's associate for 1001 New Worshiping Communities—and local church planters BJ Woodworth '07 and Michael Gehrling '08. We weren't your typical seminary teachers, and this wasn't a typical seminary class.

As we planned the course together, we agreed that we wanted to see the students grow in attentiveness and discernment. That meant helping them listen more intentionally to the Holy Spirit and to their community.

To create space for such listening and reflection, our students were placed in cohorts and sent to various neighborhoods around the city. Each group's assignment: identify the makeup and needs of the neighborhood, listen deeply to its people, pray while walking its streets, ask what God is already doing there, and then dream about what a new Christian community could look like in that place.

The existence of this class at Pittsburgh Seminary is itself the result of such discernment. A few years ago, the seminary noticed that so many of its graduates were planting churches that it had acquired a reputation for forming new leaders.

Recognizing that the Holy Spirit was up to something, the seminary responded with the creation of a church-planting emphasis within the MDiv curriculum.

This year the seminary took even more steps to prepare leaders for mission. A new clustering of innovative offices has brought the **World Mission Initiative**, 1001 New Worshiping Communities, the **Metro-Urban Institute**, **Continuing Education**, the **Miller Summer Youth Institute**, and the newly formed **Church Planting Initiative** all within earshot of one another.

As a result, students are going forth with a new openness to God's mission in the world, whether they find themselves ministering in pizza shops or traditional churches or on porches and sidewalks.

*Christopher Brown is the coordinator of the Church Planting Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and co-pastor of the Upper Room.*

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