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FINDING AND FOLLOWING HIS CALL

All preachers struggle at times to find inspiration for new sermons. For PTS student Richard Norris III, experiencing that struggle as a teenager ironically led to affirmation of his call to ministry.

“I was supposed to preach at church, and feeling discouraged that I couldn’t write a new sermon. I had preached a sermon a while ago called ‘Real Love’ based on 1 Corinthians 1:18, so I decided to preach it again,” he says. “And then after the service a woman came up and told me how meaningful the sermon was to her, because she was at a place in her life where she needed to hear and feel that God still loved her. The sermon really spoke to her.”

Before that moment, Richard wasn’t sure if he was actually called to be a preacher or if it just seemed like “the right thing to do” because he comes from a family of preachers in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. His father, the Rev. Richard Norris II, serves as pastor of Bethel-Hosanna AME Church just outside of Philadelphia. His grandfather is the retired AME Bishop Richard Norris. And his great grandfather, the Rev. David Norris, once served as the editor of *The Christian Recorder*, the official publication of the AME Church.

With this family legacy, Richard admits he grew up thinking that becoming an AME preacher was his only option. “All of my life there was this kind of weight on me, like it wasn’t a choice,” he says.

But that weight has turned into what he defines as “a blessed struggle” as he continues to work out his own unique calling. Having just completed his first year at PTS, Richard believes he’s called to serve God by shepherding a congregation and serving in AME leadership roles. He currently leads the Young People’s and Children’s Division of the Women’s Missionary Society of the AME Church as its international president. He intends to be bi-vocational, also working in technology development for PNC Bank—which he has done since graduating from the University of Pittsburgh with a bachelor’s in information science.

So far, Richard has welcomed the ways in which professors and classmates at PTS are helping him to think critically about his calling and his theology. He knows choosing to attend a seminary in the Reformed tradition rather than an AME seminary was an unconventional decision, but he believes it’s a great opportunity to be stretched and challenged—and to challenge professors and classmates with his own probing questions.

“Being a religious studies minor [at the University of Pittsburgh] prepared me for being comfortable with asking questions about doctrine and dogma,” he admits. “I appreciate the open-mindedness of my professors, because one thing that bothers me sometimes is that we as Christians can be resistant to telling the complete truth as to how it is we’ve formed our different belief systems. We’re at a particular time in history where that can no longer be the case.”

Virtual learning during his first year made these conversations more challenging, but even so he has found PTS to be a tight-knit and loving community. He hopes to experience that community more this coming year by being on campus for more classes, building deeper relationships, exploring the Student Association and affinity groups, and participating in worship in Hicks Memorial Chapel. He believes all of these experiences will work together to shape a sound theology and provide inspiration for the next chapter of his call—including new sermons!



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