

Celebrating Tory Bonners' ministry at Glennon Heights

By Ryan Koch, MSMC Moderator and Glennon Heights MC Pastor



Let me share a bit of unsolicited advice: having an intern during the middle of a pandemic is hard; being an intern in the middle of a pandemic is even more impossibly difficult. How do you learn how to do ministry, how do you build community without the sacrament of presence? How do you explore your gifts and wrestle with the chaos of seminary with your community when anxiety is high, energy is low and most everyone retreats into survival mode?

Never could we have imagined when we created an internship for Tory Bonners at Glennon Heights in 2020 that the majority of it would be done in the middle of the pandemic. Never could we have imagined that this internship would mean learning how to preach to a screen, filling your life with zoom meetings, trying to build relationships with people you don't know well without actually spending time together, without breaking bread or enjoying a cup of tea. Never could we have imagined that this internship would mean not getting to see many of the blessings that come alongside ministry, the unexpected friendships, the blossoming of relationships with colleagues, the lingering conversations following worship about

your sermon or a prayer that you prayed, the chance to journey with those you love by simply being bodily present through life's seasons of uncertainty and confusion.

It was definitely not the internship which we desired nor the internship that Tory deserved. Sadly, this is the reality of most of life over the past 16 months. And yet, I am so thankful for Tory's gifts, for her joyful spirit, for the way she adjusted to the unknown and made the best out of an impossible situation. I'm so grateful for Tory's ability to find a way to relate to anyone and how she was able to build relationships at a distance. And I'm thankful that Tory pushed herself to work on preaching, worship leading, creating innovative worship services - like leading outdoor Bible Studies and prayer times. Tory has deep gifts for preaching, for spiritual development, for mentoring and her vulnerable spirit instantly breaks down boundaries and pushes people to be vulnerable, genuine and honest too.

This May, Tory Bonners graduated with a M. Div. from Denver Seminary. After completing her internship at Glennon Heights, this spring she spent most of the semester exploring chaplaincy work at Denver Health. Here, finally, she was able to explore her gifts of compassion and care by being able to be present with people during some of life's darkest moments. I'm not surprised that she flourished during this time and that this experience enabled everyone to witness Tory's God-given gifts of building relationships of love and peace. This fall, Tory will be heading down to Colorado Springs to complete a second chaplaincy internship at Memorial Central. After this, she will be exploring chaplaincy residency programs.

While we will miss Tory Bonners very much at Glennon Heights, we wish her the best and we are thankful that our paths crossed and that Tory was able to share her wisdom, her passions for peace and justice, her gifts of preaching, and just herself with our congregation these past three years. I'm going to miss all the walks we were able to take, the chances to talk theology together, her friendship and the chance of working alongside a colleague. We pray that one day she finds herself again in the Denver Metroplex; but we also know that wherever she ends up she will be a blessing to the communities there. For she just naturally brings beauty and life into whatever community she is part of. Tory does have a deep love and giftedness for preaching; if any of our churches are ever looking for a guest preacher, Tory's great.

Thanks again Tory for all the gifts that you brought to both Glennon Heights and Mountain States Mennonite Conference these past three years. We can't wait to see how God uses you in the months and years ahead.



Tory leading communion at her CPE graduation