

# MINISTERING to Future Ministers

by Erika Marksbury

Kristin Saldine, Princeton Seminary's new minister of the chapel, says her first love in academics is history. This passion for the past led her to the Smithsonian National Museum of American History immediately after graduating from college, where she did an internship in curatorial techniques. She had deferred seminary for a year (still wavering on whether that was the path she wanted to follow) to work at the Smithsonian, and one day realized, "I'm at the greatest institution in the world. This is the fulfillment of my dreams! But I don't get to wrestle with faith here; it's just not part of the daily conversation." And that's when she knew she was ready to commit to the church.

So she did. An internship during her study at San Francisco Theological Seminary (SFTS) fostered her excitement for church work, thanks to the encouragement of an internship supervisor who used to tap her on the shoulder and simply say, "You have to think about the parish." After her graduation from SFTS in 1986, Saldine spent nine years pastoring in the Northwest—at the First Presbyterian Church in Portland, Oregon, and then at Anacortes Westminster Presbyterian Church in Anacortes, Washington.

She headed to Princeton in 1995 to begin her Ph.D., though since then she has taken time off to teach for a semester at Columbia Theological Seminary and for



The Reverend Kristin Saldine

Photo: Erin Dunitigan

a year at her seminary alma mater, also serving as interim chaplain there.

Throughout her Ph.D. studies (she's in the process of writing her dissertation on Jonathan Edwards's use of landscape imagery—combining homiletical theory with visual rhetoric), Saldine has felt called to serve at the seminary level in practical theology. "In my wildest dreams I never, ever thought there would be a job that combined pastoral skills and academic vigor," she says. "Usually you're asked to choose one or the other."

But that job came to her in the form of minister of the chapel. Now she serves as a pastoral caregiver to a diverse seminary community and as a visible liturgical presence in the chapel. She preaches every two or three weeks and believes her job is to nurture worship and to find a way to encourage students in spiritual disciplines.

Saldine began her ministry to the PTS community in a trying time. Her first community-wide service as minister of the chapel was on Tuesday, September 11, at 3:30 p.m. After the horrific events unfolded at the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, Saldine asked President Gillespie if a special service could be organized for that afternoon. Everyone at Princeton Seminary was invited and encouraged to come. "It was amazing to stand on the steps of the chapel and watch people from all over campus—facilities workers, professors, students, administrators, everybody—walking slowly toward the chapel," she recalls. "I've never seen anything like it. We sang hymns, read Scripture, and then I encouraged the community to voice their prayers. People prayed from many different perspectives."

Saldine values the way the community can support each other during such difficult times, but thinks it's crucial to come together on the average days as well. "I believe the greatest spiritual discipline is regular worship in a community," she says. "And when you commit to that, you commit not only to the mundaneness of it, and the days when it doesn't 'do anything' for you, but you also commit to the belief that God works in the everyday as well as in the miracles."

Fortunately for PTS, itself rich in history, Saldine left the museum and is now daily bringing her passion for worship and ministry to Princeton's living community of faith. ■

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## Why did you take this job?

*KS:* My first response is that the Holy Spirit knocked me over. Seriously. I got blindsided by the Holy Spirit. I'm still in awe about it. And I didn't take the job—the job just claimed me. It took hold of my imagination, and I couldn't imagine being anywhere else right now.

## What's unique about ministering to people preparing to be ministers?

*KS:* The relationship is different than a pastor-congregant relationship. There's a sense of urgency; I only get to know people for three short years before they leave. Their experience here is crucial, and I want it to be a blessing for them, as both a challenge and a comfort.

## What's the biggest challenge in ministering to this community?

*KS:* Trying to find ways to worship that are inclusive for all and exclusive to none. That's the community's responsibility, but I get to be right in the middle of the conversation. That's the creative part of my job, but it's also the hardest part. That's my vision, and to me it's not naive and it's not impossible.