



Michael P. Ballman '92
Alumni Award for Christian Service
October 6, 2017

When Christ spoke about “fishers of men” in Matthew chapter four, he might have been thinking about 1992 Houghton graduate Mike Ballman. Throughout his two decades of pastoral ministry, Mike has intentionally sought out the brokenhearted and dispossessed, demonstrating the love of Christ wherever he goes.

As the pastor of both Cornerstone Community Church and Plymouth Bethesda Church in Utica, New York, Mike is deeply invested in the city. His ministry extends beyond typical pastoral duties into his work as founder and director of the Oneida Square Project, an independent, nonprofit program that seeks to improve Utica through social enterprises. One such initiative, Oneida Square Public Art & Design, employs individuals who have been incarcerated, or have struggled with addiction, or lack a high school diploma – all issues that have made finding a job difficult. By providing these individuals a second chance, Mike empowers them and helps them succeed through the creation of works of mosaic art that are displayed throughout the Utica area – including at Houghton’s new extension site, where Mike also serves as adjunct professor.

Houghton friends speak of Mike’s deep convictions, admiring his “honorable, strong, humble” nature. James Treadwell, a former roommate and fellow 1992 graduate, recalls watching Mike interact with now-wife Pam Vanderworken and “demonstrating strong, Godly conviction” with gentleness and maturity. Classmate Tom Noyes “admired how [Mike] lived his life purposefully, with a stubborn, unrelenting faith,” and wishes that he had acted on all the good advice provided by Mike and Pam.

Mike is also known for his playful side, one beloved by his friends and family. At Houghton he loved to play floor hockey and basketball, hold political and sports debates with friends (including 1991 grad Stephan Schilke), watch Star Trek and Jeopardy with all the first-floor Shen Men, and play Atari. Noyes claims that “Mike’s love for Pam was matched only by his love for Magnum P.I. re-runs and peanut butter crackers.”

Mike, you have demonstrated time and again your aptitude as a “fisher of men,” sharing the Good News with those around you. Your eagerness to share God’s love with others is matched by your desire to help those in need. You fully embrace Christ’s charge to live as examples of those saved by grace and loved by God. For this, we are pleased to present you with the 2017 Christian Service Award.