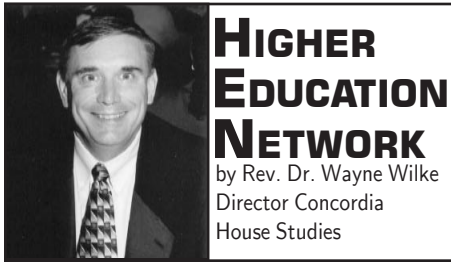


CONCORDIA HOUSE OF STUDIES

Four Years Later



HIGHER EDUCATION NETWORK
by Rev. Dr. Wayne Wilke
Director Concordia House Studies

It has been my privilege to serve as the Director of the Concordia House of Studies for four years. Grace and I moved to Florida in July of 2001 to begin the adventure of establishing this unique and challenging ministry.

When CHS began, there were a lot of unanswered questions. Over the past four years, those questions have generated a number of dynamic answers.

One of the first questions was, "Why start a House of Studies?" The short answer then, and now, is that we want to make it possible for more people to complete church work programs, that we can locally educate more workers to meet the needs of our District. To do this, we seek to overcome two barriers that have prevented many people from entering full time service in the church.

The first barrier is distance. Students generally want to go to a school that is within 200 miles of home, and the nearest Concordia University System schools are more than 1000 miles away. The Concordia House of Studies continues to provide an opportunity for Lutheran students in Florida and Georgia to receive all of the elements of a quality religious education without having to relocate.

The second barrier is dollars. Overcoming this means keeping the cost of education as low as possible for church work students. CHS is able to do this by using the resources of the state university to provide the student's general education. All of the other academic classes are offered through state colleges and universities. The Florida-Georgia district underwrites much of the cost of CHS via contributions made through *Forward Together-Servants in His Mission*.

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People were also asking, "Where is the House of Studies going to be located?" The answer is that our Board of Directors opted not to build one new building, but to offer programs in a variety of locations using the facilities of local churches. This decision has allowed us the flexibility to offer classes at numerous sites within the district: Atlanta, Fort Lauderdale, Gainesville, Jacksonville, Orlando and Tampa. New sites may also become available dependent on student interest.

Another question was "What programs will you offer?" This answer has also expanded over the past four years. Initially, CHS offered a seven-course curriculum in partnership with Concordia-Bronxville that provided the basic religion and theology courses needed for certification as a teacher, or as preparation for pre-seminary students. Students interested in becoming a Di-

rector of Christian Education, Family Life Minister, or Director of Christian outreach can complete almost 75% of the specific courses they need locally before transferring to a CUS school to complete their program.

Additionally, students can complete the entire program to be certified as a Lay Minister locally through our

partnership with Concordia - Wisconsin. This program is offered primarily on weekends. It offers an excellent opportunity for lay people to take classes for their personal enrichment, and to enhance their skills for positions in the local congregation.

Another question was, "Who is going to teach for CHS?" We have been able to identify and recruit an excel-

lent faculty from among pastors and teachers in the Florida-Georgia District. Many have advanced degrees, some have taught in Lutheran colleges and schools in the past, and all have been eager to share with our students. In addition, we provide classes that not only are academically rigorous, but also have excellent practical applications.

A question I can't answer is, "What does the future hold?" I trust that God will continue to bless the mission of CHS. We pray that students will continue to be identified in local congregations, encouraged to consider full-time work in the church, and that they will enroll in CHS classes. We also pray that God will continue to bless CHS with the financial resources necessary to underwrite this program.

I do know that we will begin classes in all six locations during the month of August. You can access our entire list of classes online at www.flga-lcms.org, click on the "House of Studies" icon and then proceed to the location nearest you for class information. You can complete all of your enrollment chores at this site.

For additional information about CHS, about classes, or about having someone from CHS speak in your congregation, please contact Dr. Wayne Wilke, Director of CHS. You can call him in Orlando locally at 407-857-5556, ext 5, toll free at 877-457-5556, ext. 5, or via e-mail at wwilke@flga-lcms.org. □

Study Suggests Prescription for Spiritual Health in College

College students with high levels of religious involvement and commitment report better emotional and mental health than those with little or no involvement, according to new research released by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute. The analysis is derived from a national study of 3,680 third-year college students at 46 diverse colleges and universities.

"College can be an unsettling time as students struggle with change and fundamental issues about themselves and the world," said UCLA Professor Alexander W. Astin, co-principal investigator for the project. "This study suggests that religion and spirituality can play a positive role in the mental and emotional health of students."

"This study underscores the positive value of Lutheran Campus ministry," said Dr. Wayne Wilke, Director of the Concordia House of Studies. "We have developed the College-Congregation-Connection program so that pastors and congregational leaders can connect their members away at college to a Lutheran Word and Sacrament ministry."

The College-Congregation-Connection is an on-line enrollment tool enabling campus pastors to be a welcoming presence on behalf of the church on the university campus.

To enroll, go to www.flga-lcms.org, the homepage for the Florida-Georgia District. The College-Congregation-Connection icon link on the front page will connect to a form which can be

completed and submitted on-line. The information will be transmitted to a Lutheran campus ministry or congregation near the college you specify, and those enrolled will be contacted and invited to participate in this college ministry. If you do not have internet access, or would prefer to enroll on the phone, please call Cindy Hammerstrom at 877.457.5556, extension 5.

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The UCLA survey also reports that college students who are highly involved in religion are less likely to feel depressed or experience psychological distress and to report poor emotional health. Specifically, non-church-going students are more than twice as likely to report feeling depressed or poorer emotional health than students who attend religious services frequently.

Participation in religious activity is positively associated with emotional health. For example, students who frequently participate in religious services are much less likely to feel overwhelmed during college. Similarly, students who do not attend religious services are more than twice as likely to report feeling depressed frequently and to rate themselves "below average" or "bottom 10%" in emotional health.

Similar findings emerged with Religious Commitment. Only 23% of highly religiously committed students report high levels of psychological distress,

compared to 33% of students with low levels of religious commitment. Religious involvement includes such activities as reading sacred texts, attending religious services, joining religious organizations on campus. Psychological distress includes such indicators as feeling overwhelmed, feeling that life is full of stress and anxiety and feeling depressed.

Alcohol consumption was less likely to occur among students who were highly spiritual, religiously committed and religiously involved.

"These results," said Astin, "once again underscore the well-established negative relationship between religious involvement and alcohol consumption."

Other findings revealed a high level of spiritual engagement and commitment among college students — but the study noted that many institutions do little to foster or encourage students' interest. Wilke pointed out that more than 75% of college students report that they pray, discuss religion/spirituality with friends and say they are "searching for meaning and purpose in life." However, 56% of students report their professors never provide opportunities to discuss the purpose/meaning of life.

"This is the 'value added' of our campus ministries," Wilke concluded. "Lutheran campus ministries provide a safe place for students to discuss not only the purpose and meaning of life, but also life eternal." □