

CHS Alum Continues Pastoral Studies



HIGHER EDUCATION NETWORK

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of Studies

This column often introduces some of the students of the Concordia House of Studies. By hearing their stories, it is hoped that others may be moved to challenge themselves — to ask if perhaps God is calling them into full-time service in His Kingdom.

In January of 2004, I interviewed Eric Estes of Orlando, who was taking CHS courses to see if God was calling him into full-time service. Eric has since completed his CHS courses as



Eric, Jen and Benjamin Estes

well as the first two years of study at Concordia Seminary-St. Louis. He is serving his one-year vicarage at Shepherd of the Coast-Palm Coast, FL. Eric and his wife, Jen, are the proud parents of Benjamin. I thought it would be interesting to see how this student is progressing on the path toward becoming a Pastor.

Eric, how long have you known that you wanted to become a pastor?

The idea crossed my mind when I was in high school, but I chose to explore other fields of interest. I have known for certain since about 2001 just before I received my undergraduate degree.

Where did you and your family live prior to attending the Seminary?

We lived in Orlando and were members of Prince of Peace.

What was your career prior to attending the Seminary?

I was an Application Support Specialist for the Information Technology department of the Peabody Hotel Orlando.

How were you active in the church prior to coming to the Seminary? How did this activity influence your decision to apply to the Seminary?

I was a regular communion assistant and reader at my home congregation, and I attended Bible class. I really enjoyed assisting in worship and found that I felt comfortable doing it. I had a growing appreciation for the Scriptures and I wanted to learn more. I always looked forward to helping at church on Sunday and to studying the Bible each day. After some time I realized I had much greater interest in theology and the Scriptures than I did my current work. This helped in making my decision to go to the seminary.

Eric, you are starting your vicarage. How has the seminary prepared you to this point?

The seminary prepared me well for my vicarage. The theological training has prepared me to preach and teach, while the practical application that many professors included has been a great blessing. The seminary requires field education at a congregation, so that experience has helped prepare me.

What are your feelings about the future of your ministry?

The Lord will place me at the congregation where my gifts and talents can be of best service to His people. I enjoy working with diverse groups of people and all age groups, so I hope wherever I am called will reflect that. I foresee team ministry, but I am not ruling out a sole pastorate either. My wife and I hope we can return to the Southeast part of the country.

What is your best advice to someone considering enrollment at the Seminary?

First and foremost pray about your decision. Ask the Lord for His guidance and wisdom as you prepare to enter the seminary. If you are married discuss the decision with your wife and pray about it together on a regular basis. Also, talk to and pray with your pastor and the leaders of your congregation. Prepare for the competency exams by studying both the Old and New Testaments and Lutheran Doctrine. Concordia House of Studies offers courses in each of them and they were an incredible help for me.

What words of encouragement would you share with a prospective student?

Remember that the Lord is with you and will be your guide throughout your lifetime of ministry. He is molding you to serve His people through your congregation, pastors and professors. Trust in His care as you prepare for service and when there are challenges and difficulties always remember that you are a forgiven and redeemed child of God.

Jen, how did you and Eric arrive at the decision to go to the Seminary?

While Eric and I were dating, he mentioned that he might be interested in becoming a pastor. We talked about it from time to time and when Concordia House of Studies came to Orlando, I encouraged him to take some classes to see if he was really interested. Eric found that he really enjoyed his classes and we planned a trip to St. Louis to visit the Seminary. While we were there, we really felt that we belonged there. So we began planning our move and Eric began the application process soon after we returned home.

Jen, you and Eric recently had your first child. How have you managed to juggle your work, the new child, with Eric's role as a student? What kinds of things do you do to insure that you have family time?

I had to return to work when Benjamin was 10 weeks old. Fortunately, Eric was finishing school for the summer soon after so we took Benjamin to a sitter during Eric's classes and exams. Eric was able to spend the summer months with Benjamin at home while I worked. Now, on vicarage, I am able to stay home with Benjamin. Our big challenge will be returning to the Seminary next fall since I will be returning to work full time and Eric will be back in school full time. Making family time has to be a priority. We have to plan it in to our week or we will get so busy with day to day things that the week passes us by. Eric and I try to spend quality time together every day reading devotions and relaxing

while watching movies or playing board games. Occasionally, we go out on a "date" to have some time to be together as a couple and not as "mom" and "dad."

Eric, how would you describe life at the Seminary?

It is very busy, but very exciting and encouraging. It is likely that within the first week of class a student will have plenty of reading assigned and possibly some papers to begin. The students are always ready to help one another and encourage each other in their studies. There are chapel services each morning so we are strengthened by God's Word and Sacraments every day as we study. There are always plenty of things to get involved in with different clubs, intramurals and activities.

What aspect of the Seminary experience surprised you the most? How does the experience differ from what you imagined earlier?

I was expecting that most of the men would have gone straight through the Concordia University system and would have known that they wanted to be a pastor for a long time, but I was incorrect. There are men of different ages and backgrounds from so many different parts of the country who come to the seminary. Some of them did come through the Concordia system and others did not. All of them are a blessing. I have learned so much just by talking with the other students and making friends. Our professors encourage that we rely on one

another for support and learn from each other's experiences. This was a surprise and a blessing.

What has been your biggest challenge at the Seminary?

Time management is likely the most common challenge at the seminary. There is a lot of work to be done and little time to prepare us before vicarage assignments and later on call-day. Balancing classes, work and family has been a challenge, but it is excellent preparation for what life will be like once I am in full-time ministry. The seminary offers a time management course that I found very helpful.

How would you describe the financial support that you have received?

My home congregation has been an incredible support over the past two years. Also, the Florida-Georgia District and LWML have been a blessing in offering scholarship money. The Adopt-A-Student program which funds the grants that cover the rest of tuition has been a blessing as well. It is overwhelming how congregations, district and synod work together to prepare so many men to be shepherds of the Lord's flock.

If you feel the Lord may be calling you into full-time service in the church, or if you would like additional information about how the Concordia House of Studies may be helpful to you, please contact Dr. Wilke 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. □

Changes at Concordia-Austin

Recent approvals are paving the way for Concordia University-Austin, TX, to move from its current land-locked location.

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's Board of Directors authorized purchase of a 385-acre site in Austin, sale of the University's current 22-plus-acre property and refinancing for the acquisition and development of the new property.

At the present time, the parties involved in the transactions are in "due diligence." A rationale statement prepared for the Board's consideration notes that "occupancy of the new site would occur during the summer of 2008."

The buyer of the current campus has an agreement with the University that it will lease the land back to the school until its relocation.

Concordia, Austin, is moving ahead with development of a campus design for the new location, which currently has six buildings with about 195,000 square feet. That property includes a 250-acre nature preserve. Financing for the project will be provided by the Lutheran Church Extension Fund, with loans to the University of up to \$25 million. Concordia, Austin, also is considering tax-exempt financing. □

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