THANK YOU!

Thank you for your support of Concordia Seminary’s International Adopt-A-Student program. Your generous contributions have made it possible for Sam Thompson and Tom Omolo to engage in doctoral studies. When they return home to the India Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya (respectively), these men will be training the next generation of pastors and missionaries for their church bodies. Tom and Sam wish to express humble gratitude for the opportunity which you have provided them. They look forward to using their advanced theological education to further the cause of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

E-news

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Tom Omolo

Tom has been in the PhD program at Concordia Seminary since the summer of 2010. Many of the classes which Tom has taken are topics with which he already had some familiarity, although now he is studying them in more depth. However, he found the “History of Philosophy” course to be a challenge. This class exposed him to many new ideas and concepts and was a challenge. Tom is confident that what he learned will be quite useful as he continues his studies. A topic of particular interest to Tom is the Office of the Ministry and also the Office of the Bishop. This may form the basis for Tom’s doctoral dissertation.

For the doctrinal theology concentration of the PhD a Tom has to master three languages – Latin, German and one additional language which will be relevant to his research and study. Of course coming from Kenya, Tom already knew three languages. His native language is Luo, the language the third largest ethnic group in Kenya. As a kindergartener he began the study of English, and he also speaks Kiswahili (Swahili) which is the national language of Kenya. Tom studied Latin this past summer with seminary professor, Dr. David Maxwell. He is looking forward to mastering German in the Spring Quarter under the tutelage of seminary public services librarian, Eric Stancliff.
Tom is a professor at Matongo Lutheran Theological College in Kenya. MLTC has 55 students currently on campus in its Diploma in Theology and Diploma in the Diaconate programs. They have six Kenyan professors, (only one of whom has a PhD), two Finnish professors and an American professor. The student population represents some 42 different ethnic groups and many languages, but classes at the seminary are taught in English.

Tom feels that his study at Concordia Seminary will have a tremendous impact on Gospel outreach in Kenya as well as other parts of Africa. He himself cannot reach all the places where his students will go. He considers it a privilege to train pastors and deaconesses who will spread the Gospel throughout the continent.

What has Tom found interesting about life in the United States? Academically he has not found a big difference in our teaching methods, but he is very appreciative of the quality and high level of education that he is receiving here. Culturally he finds that Americans are less relational that Africans. In Africa when one arrives for a meeting he will spend some time visiting before getting down to business, not as much here in America. This is not to say that he has not been able to develop relationships with his fellow students here at Concordia Seminary. Students enjoy mealtimes together and can often be found in the Commons or library studying together.

One thing that Tom discovered in America is snow! And this year St. Louis has had twice the usual amount of snowfall. Imagine Tom’s surprise one morning when he got an automated phone call to tell him that the seminary was closed. He thought, “How can they close the seminary in the middle of a quarter?” He did not realize that the closing was just for the day.

Sam Thompson

For nine years, Sam Thompson was a pastor for the India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC). He served people as they dealt with the cultural and religious pressures Hinduism placed on them. He also went on mission trips throughout India. In the summer of 2010 he came to Concordia Seminary in St. Louis to pursue a PhD.

The biggest difference Sam has discovered between our two cultures is the individualistic nature of the United States culture. He says individualistic, but not in a negative sense. Instead, he says, “Your individualism as a culture helps you achieve a mixing between yourself and your family and community. In India, the community and family are most important. So, it has been interesting to see how you use your individualistic tendencies within your family and community.” Another difference, specifically within the academic setting, is the relationship between professors and students who are in the M.Div. program. It’s almost democratic, because the professors make the students feel as if they are
equal. Whereas, in India, no matter what level of degree you are pursuing, professors are authoritative in their relationships with students.

It has been somewhat of a challenge for Sam to adjust to the culture of greater St. Louis. As a student, he has adjusted more easily to the community and culture at the Seminary, but knowing how to get around and interact in the St. Louis area has presented challenges. For example, Sam says that the road system is very complex! Trying to figure out where to go and how to get there has been difficult for him.

Sam has enjoyed all of my classes so far, but there are two assignments which he found particularly interesting. In “Creeds and Confessions” class, he compared the views of incarnation within Hinduism and Christianity. Naturally, this was an excellent exercise considering it will apply to his ministry back in India. He also enjoyed an assignment about the implications of Martin Luther’s sacramental theology for unbaptized believers in India.

Right now Sam has not given much thought to his dissertation topic. He is just enjoying his classes and everything that he is learning. Fortunately he still has quite a bit of time to figure out a topic, but he does know it will be in the field of Systematic Theology.

When Sam returns home he will become a professor at the IELC’s seminary. Concordia Theological Seminary in India has not had a systematics professor for some 25 years now. The last professor retired and had to return home in the United States. You see, in India, new missionaries are no longer allowed to stay for extended periods of time. So, there has been no possibility for someone to come to India to teach systematics since that time. Sam will be the first qualified professor to teach Lutheran Doctrine for 25 years. Although he anxious about the responsibility this places on him, he is also excited to help Lutherans in India know more about their faith.

Like Tom, Sam’s most memorable experience so far in St. Louis is SNOW! He now understands why people long for a “white Christmas.” The first time Sam saw snow was on Christmas day!

Share the Vision

Thanks to your generous support, Sam and Tom have sponsors. However, there are many others from all parts of the world who are waiting for funding so that they, too, can pursue advanced theological degrees. The Graduate School of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis is anxious to work with our partner church bodies to train these men and form them as teachers and leaders, but we rely on you to help us share that vision. We ask that you please share this newsletter with others who might be interested in helping us to reach our goal of providing the highest level of theological scholarship to share the message of salvation in Jesus with all the world.

For questions, more information, or to donate call Seminary Advancement at 1-800-822-5287 or email adoptastudent@csl.edu. Please indicate that you are interested in “International Adopt-a-Student” and mention that you received this newsletter.