

Ministry to the dying teaches Logsdon student life lessons

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ABILENE—Lynsi Johnson learned much about theology and ministry from her professors at Hardin-Simmons University and Logsdon Seminary. But she has learned about life from the people she serves as a chaplain and the people she meets on the streets.

“The dying and the homeless are two populations that could teach the world a lot about humility and compassion for life,” she said. “Ask a dying person, ‘What’s one thing you would change about your life?’ They’ll always say something about spending more time with their family or friends. It’s not about money or fame or popularity. It’s about things that really matter like meaningful relationships.”

Johnson has been a chaplain at Hendrick Hospice for a year and expects to graduate from Logsdon Seminary with her dual master’s degree in family ministry and clinical counseling/marriage and family therapy in May 2020.

Divine appointment

Johnson recalled an incident when one out of 15 patients on the hospice unit was not accepting of chaplains. On the way to a session, Johnson forgot which room number she was supposed to visit.

“I just kept hearing ‘104, 104,’ and so I thought, ‘I guess that’s the room I’m supposed to go to.’ I walked into room 104 and introduced myself as the chaplain,” she said.

“I was in that room for about an hour and a half, and we facilitated a family

prayer. There were so many tears. It was such an emotional experience. They got a bunch of stuff off their chests. They expressed fear that they hadn't been able to talk about."

After leaving the room, she discovered she had visited the one room that had requested "no chaplain."

When Johnson went to apologize, the family thanked her for giving them what they needed, even though they didn't know they needed it.

Not about having all the answers



Lynsi Johnson, a student at Logsdon Seminary and chaplain with Hendrick Hospice, enjoys a light moment with her husband, Chandler. (Courtesy Photo)

Even so, Johnson says she has had to learn to admit that she doesn't have all the answers.

“The humanness of their suffering is much more meaningful when you admit, ‘I don’t know, but I’m here for you.’ It’s a lot more impactful to them in their grief than trying to give some answer that sounds good,” she said.

Johnson said her “Providence and Suffering” class at Logsdon helped her develop a theology of death and suffering.

“I got to develop my providential theology of why I think there’s suffering in the world when we have a good God,” she said. “Being able to be encouraged to explore theology and my faith to find where God is in the face of suffering, death, dying and fear has made this job a lot easier. If I hadn’t taken those classes, then I wouldn’t be in a place where I could offer any support.”

Johnson says she is grateful to Logsdon for professors who encourage her.

“With any helping profession, it’s easy to doubt yourself and feel like you’re not making a difference,” she said.

Johnson praised faculty mentors who offer “a strong support system that can help you find your strengths and push you to fulfill God’s purpose for you and care for people.”

“I feel like if I didn’t have that support system of professors who genuinely invested in me, I wouldn’t be as good at relating to people spiritually,” she said.

Meaningful conversations with homeless people

In addition to her ministry as a chaplain, Johnson has a heart for the homeless in her community. While she doesn’t work with any specific organization, she makes a point to talk to any homeless individuals she

meets. She always asks them their name and how they got to be where they are now.

“That’s all you ever have to say, and they’ll be willing to share their story,” she said. “A lot of them don’t have a safe place to go anymore, because there’s no safe option for anything to get better. So, I hope (talking with them) gives them the encouragement to keep living.”

Johnson says visiting the homeless affects the way she interacts with others.

“I think it changes the way you interact with all people, because if you’re willing to hang out with someone on the side of the road who hasn’t showered in weeks, you can talk to your classmate who looks depressed. They’re all just people,” she said.

Future plans

After graduation, Johnson hopes to be a marriage and family therapist. One day, she would also like to be on Hendrick’s board of directors of hospice to make family therapy an integral part of hospice services.

“As of now, they do an incredible job at serving patients, but a lot of times the family doesn’t get the care they need,” she said. “They don’t have any family therapists at any hospice locations. They don’t focus on how families process grief and to heal systemically from that loss, because it’s not a part of the hospice mission.”

She would like to see the mission of hospice chaplains expanded to include surviving family, as well as patients.