



# Road to Ministry Leads SC Grads to Garrett

Just completing their first year on the campus at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary are (clockwise, from back left) Brandon and Kristina Cunningham '05 '06, Ross and Amanda Baker '05 '05, and Donelle Sommer '97. Seated with Donelle are her husband, Brandon '97, and their children—Eymber, Anthem, and Orion. Not pictured is Adam Thompson '06.

For some of the students, the choice was a logical next step in a career path. For others, the choice meant uprooting family and occupations in response to “the most profound and peaceful moment of my life.”

But for all six of these first-year students at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary near Chicago, the journey began at Southwestern College.

Six members of Garrett's 2006-07 first-year class are Moundbuilders, an unusually high percentage of a class that includes only 125 or so master of divinity students.

“It's really rare to have six people—especially of such caliber with two married couples—coming from the same undergrad in the same year,” says Laura Fernando, associate director of admissions at the seminary.

Included in the group are Donelle (Bergeson) Sommer '97, Adam Thompson '06, Ross and Amanda (Bennett) Baker '05 '05, and Brandon and Kristina (Crape) Cunningham '05 '06.

“It has been great having other SC grads here on this pathway to ministry; we can moan and groan together and give each other encouragement,” Sommer says. “Everyone knows who the ‘Kansas’ people are and they can't believe that we didn't plan it this way!”

Sommer was called to ministry in 2001, a peaceful moment during a United Methodist Church mission event. With a young family and roots in Winfield, though, it was several years before timing was right to respond to the call.

“I visited several other seminaries, but when my husband, Brandon '97, came to Chicago for a visit, he loved the city and asked if there was a United Methodist seminary here. I came for a visit and knew it was my seminary, just like I felt when I came to SC,” Donelle says. Now Brandon teaches in a public school in downtown Chicago, and their three children (Eymber, 9, Orion, 7, and Anthem, 4) are sharing the adventure.

Brandon and Kristina Cunningham have felt well-prepared for their Garrett experience, Brandon says, with undergraduate degrees that prepared them to enter their graduate studies confidently.

“My (SC) professors helped me establish a Biblical faith foundation on which to build and enabled me to feel safe asking tough questions, because they communicated to me that God is present and active in our searching and struggling,” Kristina explains. “My professors also taught me how to think critically and look beyond the informal fallacies people often use to make their opinion convincing.

“They also taught me to give people the benefit of the doubt and know that most of the time, people are just trying to do what they think is best. This has helped me to take the thoughts of others more seriously and engage in respectful dialogue.”

Now the seminary students are putting their faith and education into action, including Brandon's position as student minister at an AMIA (Anglican) ministry on the Northwestern University campus. This ministry is mainly to Northwestern undergraduate students, but the weekly worship is also attended by Garrett Students and persons in the Evanston community.

“I will likely be facilitating small group

Bible studies with Northwestern students, preaching, and planning outreach/missions projects, or whatever else the congregation needs,” he explains.

Ross and Amanda Baker also are serving in the ministry while they attend Garrett, as part-time co-pastors of Ingleside United Methodist Church.

All are building on an SC foundation as they continue their path to full-time ministry.

“Because of the ministry and academic opportunities I had at SC, I have not come up against a challenge here that I have not been able to handle,” Brandon Cunningham says.

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*Brandon Cunningham '05*

## Halls of Fame Induct New Members April 20



**SCHOLARS HALL OF FAME** - E. Dale Dunlap '43 (accepted posthumously by daughter Peg Dunlap) - David A. Nichols '60 - Daniel “Danny” Callison '70



**BUSINESS HALL OF FAME** - Ralph Hanna '78 - Ron Denton '79 - Rod Strohl '66



**EDUCATORS HALL OF FAME** - Minerva Van Arsdale '69 - Linda Weir-Enegren (Marilyn M'Neish Special Education Award) - Hazel Dole '52 (accepted posthumously by Jim Dole) - Elizabeth Baumgart '60