

A Field Guide to Family Life at the Seminary

Mrs. Gretchen Roberts

I grew up at the seminary in St. Louis and started my family at the seminary in Fort Wayne. In all those years, two things stand out: one, my dad and my husband were often very busy; and two, my mom taught me how to cherish our family life, so that we always would have quality, if not quantity, time together.

A good family life is important no matter where you live. At the seminary, with the big, sometimes scary changes involved in moving and starting a new life, the emotional anchor family provides is doubly important. What's more, your years at the seminary will lay the groundwork for life in the parish, and the foundation of a happy family life will last through your years serving the church. Here are four ways to keep your family life healthy and happy at the Fort and beyond.

- 1. Have realistic expectations of how much time you'll have together.** Fifteen credit hours may seem like Easy Street compared to a full-time job, but don't forget the old rule of thumb: study three hours for every credit hour, and suddenly fifteen hours turns into sixty. If you're headed into seminary for a second career in the ministry, study time may be even longer as you flex your brain back into school mode after several years off.

Then there's socializing. To the uninitiated, a group of men sitting around drinking beer and debating whether John 6 is sacramental looks like slacking off. Wives, you may even think your husband is wasting precious time he could be spending on chores at home, playing with the kids, or taking advantage of quality time with you. But put away the "honey-do" list: that time is really well spent. Much of a seminarian's education happens outside the classroom—in the halls, in conversation, in heated debates over the nuances of theology. When he's out in the parish, feeling isolated, those very men he drank beer with at *Gemütlichkeit* are the ones he calls and e-mails for brotherly support.

You'll be much happier if you adjust your expectations of how much time your husband really needs for school, so you can make the most of the time you have with him.

- 2. Protect and enjoy your family time.** Certainly school must come first—that's why you're here, right? But don't forget about the other vocations God may have blessed you with, including husband and father.

I could tell you about all the things there are to do in Fort Wayne, but that isn't the point. What really matters is that the time you have together is full of joy and love. Years ago, men weren't allowed to have families while at the seminary. When you're stressed and busy and thinking of family time as another chore, instead thank God that you have your wonderful wife and children to help you through these challenging years.

Wives, life can get stressful for you at seminary too. You may be working to support your husband through school or staying home to raise the kids (feeling quite alone sometimes). Remind yourself to embrace and enjoy the moments you all have as a family, focusing on the many gifts God has given you instead of the pressures of your own day or the ways your husband may have come up short.

- 3. Keep your marriage alive.** Martin Luther called his wife, "my lord Kate," and Katherine was mistress of the original Lutheran parsonage. She put up with an awful lot—frequent unannounced visitors, Luther's bouts of depression—but when Luther got out of line, Katie didn't hesitate to let him know. One evening at the table, Luther was teasing her about having more than one wife, since women can only have one child a year, while men can have many. He went on for awhile, until Katie finally said, "Before I put up with this, I'd rather go back to the convent and leave you and all our children."

Of course, we Lutheran women can't threaten to run back to the convent, but we can follow Katie's example and put our own feet down when our husbands lose sight of how wonderful we are, which is bound to happen when they're engrossed in memorizing Hebrew verbs. As our husbands' helpers, we have the duty and privilege to support him in everything (that's why you're moving to Indiana, right?). Men, don't forget your side of this: Ephesians 5:25 says "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Luther may have married Katie to set an example of marriage, but you have the honor of setting an example of love.

- 4. Wives, get your own life.** When we first arrived at the seminary, I had a hard time as the trailing spouse. We'd moved for my husband; I had to quit my job and leave my family and friends to come to Fort Wayne. Our new social network revolved around his Greek study group, and it took me awhile

to make my own friends and find a job. In the meantime, I had too much time on my hands, and it was easy to resent my husband, who from day one had a whirl of activities and commitments.

It wasn't until I got involved in the Student Wives Association, taking classes on Tuesday nights and meeting other women, who would become my lifelong friends, that the resentment melted away. Suddenly I had things to do while my husband was holed up studying. Having your own thing, whatever it is, will help you focus less on what you don't have, and focus more on the blessings God has provided you during your time at the seminary.

How you cope with, and hopefully embrace, your seminary years will likely carry through when you're settled into the parish. Set a good precedent now for healthy family balance, and you'll have a happy family life in the future too. Your family is a wonderful gift from God. Revel in it, enjoy each other, and always remember to keep Christ at the center.

Mrs. Gretchen Roberts is a freelance writer who has contributed to Women's Day, Redbook, and Better Homes and Gardens. She publishes The Smart Woman's Guide to a Simple Life, a weekly dose of simple wisdom at www.smartsimplewoman.com. She is married to Rev. Derek Roberts who serves First Lutheran Church in Knoxville, Tennessee.