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Encomium for Dr. Robert Weise

Matthew Behrens

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, BehrensM@csel.edu

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Encomium for Rev. Dr. Bruce Hartung

Over the last nine years, Dr. Bruce Hartung has been a gift of our heavenly Father for me personally, my immediate family, and my church family. At various times, he has been for me a teacher, counselor, pastor, father figure, colleague, and friend.

I've got to tell you, especially because I'm writing a tribute to a man that values "communities of authentic encounter," that I hold paradoxical emotions in tension at Bruce's retirement from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. On one side rests sadness and a bit of fear (or in Bruce's language, anxiety) because I don't know how his retirement will affect our "walking together" in an immediate sense. Nonetheless, the other side bubbles over with joy and appreciation for my beloved brother in the Lord as we celebrate his service at Concordia Seminary and beyond. It is my joy and honor to reflect on how Bruce has challenged me, walked alongside me, and loved me.

Bruce has challenged me, and all of his students at Concordia Seminary, and I will use his own words to describe what I believe to be the impetus for this challenge: "Don't keep everything inside. Get your emotional reactions from the inside to the outside. In baptism, we are brought into a new relationship with God and into new relationships with each other. God has put us together for mutual support. Use it!"¹

My first extended encounter with Bruce occurred while a second-year student here in the Concordia Seminary community. Our initial conversation was required as part of the coursework for one of Bruce's elective classes, Pastoral Care and the Human Experience. Bruce challenged any overly idealized notions of pastoral ministry when he assigned books like *Trauma and Evil*, *Healers—Harmed and Harmful*, and *Clergy Killers*. Uniquely, Bruce also asked students to meet with him for an extended conversation as requirement for the course. Bruce oozed authenticity as we sat across from one another at the now familiar round table in his office. He challenged me even in that first meeting. As I remember it, toward the end of our sixty-minute conversation he confessed that he was surprised that I was not as aloof and disinterested a student as his initial impression of me. *Thank you, Bruce, for your authenticity!*

My ensuing journey with Bruce has not only been filled with utility, but also surprising beauty. Bruce encouraged and maybe to some extent, pushed me, a left-brained, analytical type, to begin to peer into the aspects of my life that would have otherwise gone unnoticed or uninspected. While formerly I may have predominantly rationalized the bulk of situations and emotions in my life, Bruce encouraged and equipped me to wrestle, to consider, and to process. I'm not certain how to say it more eloquently, but he has ministered to me and affirmed me as a whole human being—head and heart, body and soul.

In this spirit, Bruce has embodied and personified incarnational ministry as he has walked alongside me and other professional church workers in the body of Christ. Again, I'm going to use Bruce's own words here: