



HOLDREGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOUNDATION

Giving Back to Education

HHS Alumni Recognition Feature!

Dear HHS Alumni and HPS Foundation Supporters,

Holdrege High School is fortunate to have many very successful graduates. We are excited to continue sharing the stories of some of those HHS Alums thanks to the journalistic talents of Kristine (Long) Jacobson, Class of 1990.

We also welcome your suggestions and comments.

Sincerely,

*Teresa Kroll, Chairman
HPS Foundation Committee*

Daren Popple - Class of 1987

Broken Path Leads Popple To Become Funk Minister

By Kristine Jacobson

Outside the old junior high building, Daren Popple spent his summers playing basketball with friends who would eventually win a state basketball championship.

Before his junior year, Daren decided to spend more than just summers with his dad in Holdrege. And, he wanted to "be part of something special" as a Duster basketball player.

Two years later, Daren graduated with the class of 1987 and started down a broken path that included drinking and jail time. Eventually, his path straightened, and he was led right back to the Holdrege area again to be a part of something even more special - to serve as pastor of Fridhem Lutheran Church in Funk, where he thrives in helping people through their pain and ministering to not only his church members but to his "hometown" community.

As a child, Daren split his time between living with his mom (in Kansas and South Dakota) during the school year, and with his dad, who lived in Holdrege, during the summer. His passion for basketball led to daily summer pick-up games and friendships with Holdrege teens.

He became a Duster in 1986 and enjoyed playing Duster basketball and singing in the choir. He worked at Pizza

Hut throughout high school, and his strong work ethic landed him the role of shift supervisor.

Daren's goal after high school was to become a carpenter like his dad, Brad. He started school at Kearney State College in the fall of 1987 but dropped out after the second semester after heavy drinking caused his grades to flounder. He maintained a job in Holdrege, but he found himself in jail on more than one occasion for various alcohol-related crimes.

In 1992, after five years of living with addiction, Daren decided it was time to change. "I just got tired of the trouble," he said.

He was court-ordered to a 30-day alcohol treatment center in Hastings, where he found himself drawn to spiritual readings that caused him to reflect on his life.

A short while after leaving the treatment center, a friend invited him to a Bible study comprised of college students who were home for the summer. It was led by Trinity Evangelical Free Church pastor Kevin Lund.

The night of the Bible study, there was a major windstorm occurring outside, while a major transformation was taking place inside of Daren. "That was the night God gave me a spiritual heart transplant," Daren said. "It was nothing that Kevin said or the group of people who were there. It was the Holy Spirit who changed me that night."

Daren had attended various churches at times while growing up, but "it was more of just something to do," he said. "Now, it's part of my identity. It's not just something to do. It's something that shapes us and forms us."



Daren Popple - Class of 1987

Daren began praying and slowly addressing behaviors that he needed to change. And, he began praying that God would lead him to a Christian wife.

Several months later, Daren's friends Doug and Jill Reed invited him to a Twila Paris concert. They also invited their friend, Jeana, a young woman Daren had previously noticed at a youth ministry event.

Their "blind date" went well, and Daren and Jeana started dating. But, there was one major problem. "She (Jeana) thought all her life that her husband would be a pastor or missionary," Daren said. "I was the opposite of who she thought she would marry. But, she just saw in



me a love for Jesus and a passion and love for people."

They married December 10, 1994, and her dream eventually became a reality. In 2004, Daren and Jeana became Youth for Christ missionaries in Holdrege. They served in that role until 2009 when Daren decided to attend the Denver Seminary to become a minister.

They moved to Denver with their young son, Benjamin, and Daren immersed himself in studying and soul searching. While he felt underqualified when it came to some of the academic parts of the seminary, he discovered his strength in making people feel loved. He also discovered a talent for preaching.

When it came time for Daren to give his first sermon as part of a preaching class, he volunteered to go last because he was so unsure of his skills. But, when he finished his sermon, he noticed there was hardly a dry eye in the room. A fellow student told him, "I felt like the rest of us, when we talked, we stood on the bank of the river and preached to the crowd down in the river, while you stepped down into the river first and then checked the temperature for us and then invited us into the river with you."

In 2012, Daren graduated with a Master of Arts degree in Christian Formation Soul Care and returned to Holdrege with his family, which by that time included two more sons, Jayvi and Anthony.

Daren didn't have a job or a plan when they returned, but both he and Jeana felt they were supposed to serve in the Holdrege area. Two weeks after they moved home, a chaplain job opened up at Holdrege Memorial Homes. It was the perfect fit for Daren.

Two years later, in 2014, he was selected to lead the flock at Funk's Fridhem Lutheran Church, which averages about 80 parishioners on a normal weekend.

But, Daren has discovered that his ministry extends beyond his own church members. With his history in Holdrege and his outgoing personality, he knows nearly everyone in the county. And, people - regardless of their faith background - feel comfortable coming to Daren with their problems. And, he listens. "Most people don't feel comfortable with other people's pain, but I really am," Daren said. "I realize that's how God wired me. That's really my sweet spot."



Daren & Jeana Popple with their sons - Benjamin, Jayvi, and Anthony

When he makes his ministry rounds at the Phelps Memorial Health Center, he finds time to visit with many friends and relatives who are experiencing pain or suffering. When he's fishing in the park with his sons or getting groceries at the store, he makes time to stop and listen to people who need to speak to him.

When he's not ministering to the community, Daren enjoys competing in disc golf tournaments (he's one of the top master's level players in the state!) and fishing and camping with his family.

"The most important role I have is as a husband and father," he said.

About Us

The mission of the HPS Foundation is to support and enhance the educational efforts of students and teachers of Holdrege Public Schools by providing funding for innovative and challenging programs, learning experiences, and activities.

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