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THROUGH VALENTOUR FELLOWSHIP JON CHILLINSKY EXPLORES SUFFERING IN GLOBAL CONTEXTS

Thanks to funding from the Seminary's Valentour Fellowship, in 2017 Jon Chillinsky '18 spent six weeks visiting England, Greece, and India to explore the church's response to suffering. Why those countries? "Oxford, England, is a place where the world—East and West—meets," says Jon. "Also, people in the UK understand suffering differently from Americans."

Jon also visited Thessaloniki, Greece, because its people are dealing with economic instability and the influx of refugees fleeing conflicts in the Middle East. And he visited Bangalore, India, where many people suffer from oppression, poverty, and Christian persecution.

"Through observation of the daily life of the indigenous peoples/churches I realized that Christians in America have much to learn from people of other cultures, who generally respond to suffering differently. Suffering comes in many forms, and engaging those who suffer requires listening carefully to their voices," Jon notes.

But little did Jon realize that on his trip he himself would experience serious suffering! "An 'exciting' first day in India left an everlasting mark on my life: I almost died. My allergy to tree nuts has taken me on many trips to the emergency room for anaphylactic shock," he explains. "But I wasn't prepared for this experience in India. My restaurant waiter emphatically assured me there were no nuts in the meal I ordered, but he didn't reveal (or perhaps know) that nuts were used to thicken the sauce. After eating the entire spicy dish, I noticed my throat closing. Getting to the 'hospital' took more than an hour—I arrived nearly delirious. The healthcare personnel poked me with several needles while I laughed and made jokes. I didn't care that I might die. Perhaps in a small way I learned how sufferers for their faith in Jesus feel. Suffering brings to the surface the trust, hope, and love for God that otherwise would never be known," he reflects.

Jon has put his listening to action at Calvary Church (Irwin, Pa.), where he became community life pastor in 2014. "I annihilated two rows of pews with a reciprocating saw and replaced them with handicapped-accessible seating. It's one thing to think about including people on the margins and another actually to do it," he says. As a pastor while a PTS **M.Div. student**, Jon found that "learning in the context of a classroom while simultaneously experiencing the context of that learning leads not only to a better grasp of the material but also to an immediate application of that material."

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