

The Commons

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DNV Notes from

President Dennis N. Voskuil

At the General Synod of last June, following a painful judicial procedure related to the issue of homosexuality, Wes Granberg-Michaelson, General Secretary of the RCA, reminded us of our denominational commitment to congregational revitalization and church growth. "Let's remember to keep the main thing the main thing."

At Western Theological Seminary the "main thing" has long been, as our purpose statement puts it, "to prepare Christians called by God to lead the church in mission." This purpose statement, of course, coheres nicely with the denomination's ten-year goal of planting hundreds of new congregations and revitalizing hundreds of existing congregations. After all, competent and committed leadership is essential for all vital congregational ministries.

I think it is important to note that Western has been in the vanguard of seminaries that are seeking to prepare transformational mission-minded leaders—those inclined to embrace efforts at revitalization and new church plants. Our Master of Divinity curriculum, for instance, encourages students to bring biblical and theological resources to identify a congregation's "mission." Students are taught to be alert to the unique contours of their ministries' culture and context. Specifically, courses in revitalization and new church development are being offered to M.Div. students. Also, Journey, our continuing education program for pastors and other congregational leaders, has focused upon congregational mission and revitalization.

Today, more than ever, it is important for Western "to keep the main thing the main thing": to prepare leaders for the Church of Jesus Christ.

Thank you for your prayers and your financial support.

Grace and peace.

Dennis

Summers of Transformation

Students from Western Theological Seminary serve Christ in a variety of ways and in diverse locations each summer. Using their spiritual gifts and seminary training, they step into the roles of teachers, pastors, hospital chaplains, mission coordinators, worship leaders, and camp directors. Whatever the role, it is sure to lead to all sorts of self-discovery, and sometimes summer internships can even reveal an entirely new direction of call.

Steven & Hope Germoso Church Planting, South Sioux City, Nebraska

Lessons in the Shade of Blue

Racing toward us exuberantly, every inch of her five year old body radiating sheer delight, Nakiah called out from her perch on the bicycle. "Wait a minute, you guys! Is there going to be Bible Club tomorrow?"

I smiled in spite of the choked feeling inside me. It was 10:00 at night outside our apartment building in South Sioux City, and my husband Steven and I were preparing to head back to Michigan to begin our third and final year of studies at Western Seminary. We had tried to explain this to Nakiah dozens of times—yet, as we stood there in the dusty, dirty parking lot, we realized that leaving was a story that needed to be told over and over again—partly for her, but mostly for us.

We had been called to South Sioux City by three RCA churches in Sioux City, Iowa, a city just across the river from South Sioux City, Nebraska. The churches, Sunnybrook Community, Peace Reformed, and New Hope



Steven and Hope met with couples in their homes to study the Bible

Community, felt called to reach the Latinos in nearby South Sioux City, a town that was over 40% Hispanic.

We spent the summer "scouting the land," prayerfully and practically learning the town and people of South Sioux City as we tried to grasp the Lord's desires for His harvest there. We attended Spanish churches, met with pastors, shopped in local shops, and worked with social service agencies. We talked to people on the streets who invited us first into their homes and then into their lives. We laughed and cried—and we knew that our lives were already a little different, and a lot richer, than when we first arrived. We had come as strangers, and we had been accepted as friends. But now the time had come to say goodbye.

It had been a summer of surprises. Steven and I had felt sure that by the end of the summer we would have gathered a group of Latino adults, eager to study the Bible and start a new church.



Nakiah and friends

(continued on page 2)

Steven & Hope Germoso, continued

Instead, we ended up with an apartment full of kids from all different backgrounds, hungry to know more about Jesus. Although we hosted adult Bible Studies all summer, the little ones were the most eager to hear more about the Lord. We started two different Bible Clubs with a total of 3 kids, and by the end of our first week over 88 children were attending. The overwhelming majority of those kids—over 70—committed their lives to Christ. Most had never before set foot in a church.

“This isn’t my bike, I’m just borrowing it. One day my Daddy’s going to buy me a bike—a blue one. Blue is my favorite color—and even if my Daddy can’t find a blue bike for me, he’s going to paint me one blue. A blue bike with a blue seat.”

Nakiah’s words broke into my thoughts, startling me out of my reverie. I looked down at her and smiled. She didn’t know how silly she looked. Even though it was August in Nebraska, close to 100 degrees, she was wearing velvet. A long-sleeved velvet dress that must

have been rich burgundy at one time was now faded and impossibly dirty. The dress fell almost to her feet, upon which were flip-flops much too small for her, with plastic gems stuck all over them. Pushing her unkempt hair out of her face, Nakiah continued.

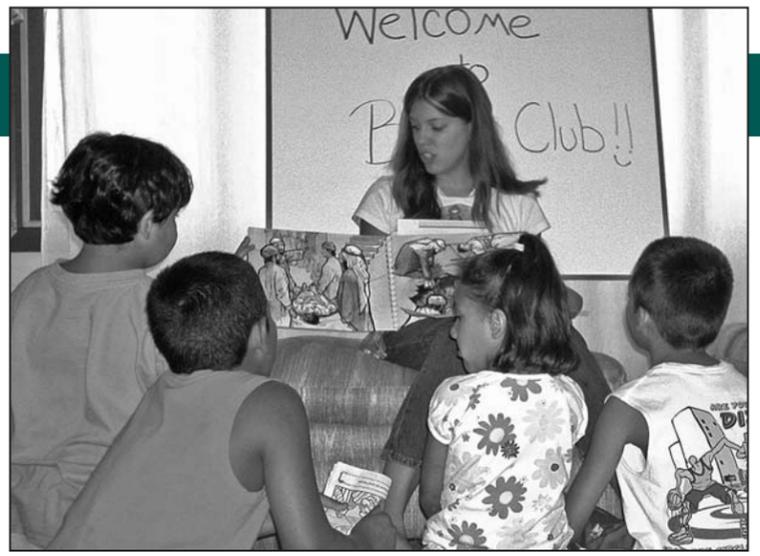
“And Daddy’s going to buy me a blue dress too—and a blue backpack to start school with. Maybe two blue dresses. And do you know what he told me before he left? That our next house—it’s going to be like a castle. A blue castle. And I’m going to live there, just me and Daddy, and I’m going to have my own room.”

“Really, Nakiah? A blue castle? I think maybe heaven is going to be like a blue castle.”



The kids gather around Steven at snack time.

Again I smiled—but as I glanced at Steve, I could tell his smile might be close to brimming over too. We had never met Nakiah’s father; all we knew was that he sometimes brought her to one of the apartments in the complex where we lived. The other kids had



Hope tells a Bible story to the children.

told us Nakiah was homeless. She and her Dad sometimes stayed in the complex with friends, sometimes stayed in hotels, and sometimes stayed in other spots. I knew that there was no blue castle anytime soon in Nakiah’s future—nor a blue dress or backpack for that matter.

How do you say goodbye to a kid like Nakiah? How do you say goodbye to a five year old with no foreseeable future, who has recently told you she wants to make Jesus her “forever friend”? How do you even begin to share her story—or the countless others that have touched your heart during a 10-week internship whose impact on your ministry will be lifelong?

How do you say goodbye to Bill, who at 7 is repeating first grade and can’t read his own name, but memorized 10 Bible

Krista Veenstra

TASC, Flatbush Dutch Protestant Reformed Church, Brooklyn, New York



Krista and TASC co-director Emily Myers with Kayla and Alicia

Experiencing life in Brooklyn, New York was very different than in Holland, Michigan: cars beeping constantly, an ice cream truck on every corner, trash on the streets, and we were the only white people in the neighborhood (besides Pastor Dan and the secretary, Ann). I co-directed Taking a Stand for Christ (TASC) at Flatbush Dutch Protestant Reformed Church. My wonderful co-

director, Emily, our summer volunteer, Mallory, and I all stayed in the very large church house. It had a basketball court in the basement with score boards for “Dutch vs. Visitor”, a huge kitchen, and an auditorium on the main level with many other rooms and offices. We stayed on the top floor in old Sunday school rooms. The church property is 351 years old. How awesome to be part of one of the oldest Reformed churches in America.

As the co-director of TASC, I was privileged to facilitate youth group mission trips. The first group of high school kids came from Hamilton, MI. As a work crew, they built bunk beds, scraped and painted the huge iron fence sur-

rounding the churchyard, and did many other odds and ends. The rest of the groups came from West Michigan and Canada to work with the kids at Fairweather Bible Camp. We had the same 60 children all summer—all African American kids from the neighborhood, ranging from 4 to 10 years old.

Monday through Friday we spent mornings with the little ones singing songs, eating breakfast, doing arts and crafts, Bible stories, games, tutoring, and finally lunch time. It was such a beautiful picture to see the racial barriers come crashing down. The kids fell in love with the “Michigans” and never wanted them to leave. We were all one body of Christ!

In the afternoons we took the high schoolers into Manhattan to immerse them in the culture and show its variety. We’d go everywhere from South Street Sea Port to Ground Zero, to ChinaTown, to the Staten Island Ferry, to Central Park and Times Square, and back to Flatbush.



Singing with the kids at Fairweather Bible Camp

On Wednesday evenings the kids held a street side service on Flatbush Avenue. They planned it all by themselves and stood on the streets reading Scripture, praying, and mostly dancing and singing for Jesus. It was incredible! People would stop and watch. Some would sing or dance as they walked by,



verses and teaches them to all his friends? How do you say goodbye to Malia, who at 4 has offered to pay you a dollar to tell her a Bible story?

Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it. It's funny, after two years of learning much in seminary; we thought we had a lot to teach others about the kingdom of God. We thought our internship would be a time to showcase our skills and demonstrate our ability to lead. That was all until we met Nakiah and others like her, who turned our notions upside down and showed us that maybe the kingdom of God isn't only about the lame being healed and the captives being freed, but it's also about the Lord of Lords knowing you intimately enough to paint your bicycle blue.



One of the Bible clubs



Street side service on Flatbush Avenue

and, of course, we had some negative responses too.

I led devotional times each evening, and my favorite part of every week was the Thursday night devotions on the roof of the church house. We washed each other's feet as Jesus washed his disciples' feet. The kids were scared at first, but every week some sort of transformation occurred. It was like the group actually became whole and became a true community.

God worked in mighty ways in and through all of us this summer. God transformed me more into the person I was created to be. I was reminded of how much I love working with kids of all ages, and what a blessing that there does not have to be an "us" and "them" but a "we" instead. I couldn't have made it through the summer without God's strength and grace—it was so wonderfully freeing to give up control. I changed in more ways than I can put into words. God is still working through my summer in Brooklyn. Praise God!



Tom Merchant

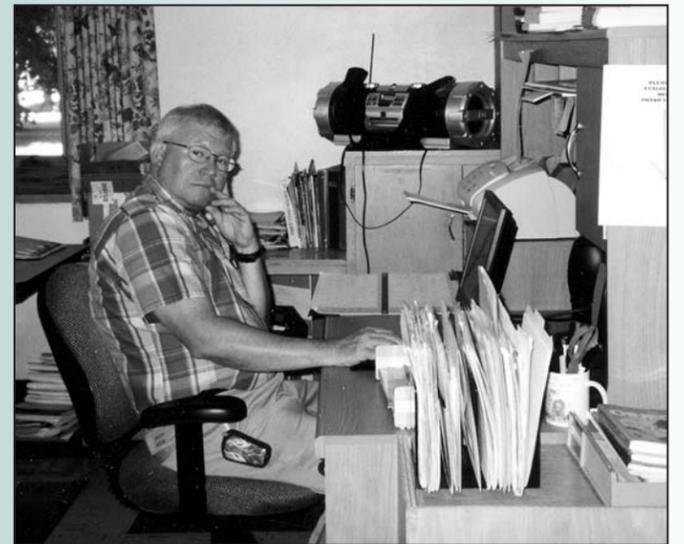
First Reformed Church
Edgerton, Minnesota

A Summer Where the Buffalo Roam

It was not my idea to go to First Reformed Church in Edgerton, Minnesota. In my mind I thought I would do a street ministry in Grand Rapids for my internship. I came to WTS feeling called to full-time ministry with prisoners either as a chaplain or working in a post-release program. As time has gone on, I have been encouraged to follow my gifts in preaching and teaching. I also have been challenged that I might better serve the Lord by equipping the

saints for all kinds of ministry as a pastor in a church.

The street ministry in Grand Rapids didn't work out, and the position in Edgerton was available, so we went, in part to discern if we are being called to a pastoral ministry. I say "we" because my wife Terry was not sure whether



Tom ponders a sermon he is writing.

she is cut out to be a pastor's wife any more than I am sure that I am cut out to be a pastor after being an engineer for 27 years.

Edgerton is in southwest Minnesota, with the largest buffalo herd in North America only a few miles away. I envisioned a nice little church in a small town; I could probably handle that by myself. First Reformed, Edgerton, has about 260 families, and Sunday morning attendance is in the 200+ range. I planned to preach mornings and evenings and use my business background to help organize. I got the preaching part right, but I found a church where members have risen to the task of not having a head administrator. What they needed was a pastor—not an organizer. There was lots of sickness, surgery, members in the nursing home, shut-ins, and some folks that simply needed a visit. So, I became their pastor for ten weeks.

Anointing with oil has been a significant part of my life, so I brought it with me. They had not experienced this in Edgerton. For the ill and especially those facing surgery, anointing can be a ceremony that helps to make the presence of the Holy Spirit very real. I shared scripture, and we prayed together for healing and a sense of peace.

At our farewell party, I expressed my thanks to the congregation for the warm welcome we had received. I felt like I had been able to minister to them and that, in turn, they had ministered to us. This was the way ministry was supposed to be: a mutually beneficial relationship.

So, as my senior year begins, my sense is that I am being called to pastoral ministry. Terry's sense is that she can be a pastor's wife. In a small town where once only buffalo used to roam, a community of believers showed me that the unexpected can happen. God truly moves in ways I do not begin to understand. All I can do is to continue to be faithful to the call on my life. Amen.

Genesis

by *Richard Heusinkveld*



In March of 2006, I will lead my last Genesis event. For me, Genesis has modeled what the RCA is all about—a covenant family working together to nurture the faith of our own children in order to send them out into the world as faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ.

In 1977 the Synod of the Great Lakes began sponsoring “Genesis”, a discipling event for the high school youth of its churches. The bi-annual weekend event involves general sessions, seminars, reflection time, and recreation. I got on board as a seminar leader for the first two events. Meanwhile, in my position as Coordinator of Youth Ministry for the Synod of the West, I was working to put together a similar event for RCA youth west of the Mississippi. The end product of my efforts was Rocky Mountain High, which continues to play a significant role in youth ministry programs of the synods of the Heartlands and Far West.

When I moved into the Synod of the Great Lakes in 1984, I became involved with Genesis once again, and in 1986 I began serving as the chairperson. Through the years it has been a tremendous honor to work with the youth leadership and young people who have served on the team. Leading Genesis has allowed me to utilize administrative gifts in ways I never could have in my congregations.

From its inception, the purpose of Genesis has been to move young people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and equip them to live out their faith in their families, schools, and world. The 40 hours spent at Genesis have been life-changing for thousands of youth and their adult leaders.

I have watched youth culture change dramatically, and that change gets reflect-

ed in how we communicate to the youth—more visual information, for instance, as well as drama and expressive music led by worship leaders rather than performance bands. One thing remains constant, though—the basic need of the young people to know they are loved and valued, their life has purpose, and they can make a difference. All of that can be found in a relationship with Jesus Christ, and that is what Genesis has been all about: bringing youth to a full awareness of the claim and call of Christ upon their lives and an understanding of the depth of His love for them.

In my 29 years of leading Rocky Mountain High and Genesis, one story stands out above all others. At Genesis 2002 a 15-year-old boy, a foster child from a family that lived across the road from a youth group leader, came to accept Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. Tragically, five hours after the Genesis event ended, he was struck by a car and died. As tragic as it was, his conversion experience at Genesis brought hope and peace to his family and friends, and the testimony of his brief but passionate relationship with Christ led many of his peers to the Lord.

At a time when large youth gatherings seem to be on the decline across the country, Genesis remains strong. Many of the leaders in RCA churches look back on their Genesis experience as a milestone in their spiritual formation. We have signed contracts for hotel space as far out as 2010. Genesis will continue to transform lives and build leadership for Christ’s church.

I have reached the point where I believe it is time for someone else to have the privilege of leading the design team, someone younger who will bring a new perspective and take Genesis to an even higher level. It has been a blessed experience, one I will surely miss.

Richard Heusinkveld '77 is the pastor of Immanuel Reformed Church, Lansing, MI

One thousand students from thirty-eight churches in the Synod of the Great Lakes are already registered for Genesis 2006 in Traverse City, MI. The event has expanded to two weekends just to accommodate all who wish to participate!

Western Announces New Endowed Chair

On October 25, friends of the seminary gathered to celebrate the inauguration of Dr. Vernon Sterk into the Richard C. Oudersluys Chair of Missiology and Evangelism. The seminary extends its gratefulness to two anonymous donors who made this new chair possible.

Dr. Oudersluys, who turns 99 this month, addressed the crowd to express his appreciation for the honor bestowed upon him. Dr. Oudersluys

taught New Testament at the seminary from 1942-1977. In “retirement” he taught Greek at Hope College and continued to teach at Western as needed, culminating in 1996 with his classic course, “The Gospel According to John,” offered in his 90th year!

Dr. Sterk spoke on “Building Bridges or Barriers: Missiological Factors in the



Dr. Richard Oudersluys and Dr. Vernon Sterk

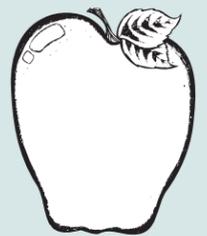
Communication of the Gospel in the 21st Century.” Vern Sterk and his wife Carla have served as RCA missionaries for 37 years in Chiapas, Mexico. They helped establish the Tzotzil Bible School and coordinated the translation of the first complete Bible in the Tzotzil language. Response to persecution is a major part of Dr. Sterk’s work in Chiapas, and he continues to coordinate the Chiapas Mission Agency.

Dr. Sterk is serving a three-year appointment at Western. He hopes that this Chair of Missiology and Evangelism will initiate new courses and study opportunities in the important areas of cross-cultural ministry and communicating the Gospel.

“One dream I have is to develop a dual competency program, making it possible for students to do Master’s level work in missiology while earning a Master of Divinity degree,” says Dr. Sterk. “My overriding goal is to motivate all Western students to be involved in ministry across cultural barriers, so they will be ready to reach out to the multicultural world all around us.”

Fall Harvest

Each fall I enjoy picking apples with my family. My daughters and I each try to find the perfect apple and then we see who can make it the shiniest. I can hear the crunch of that Golden Delicious even as I write.



My colleague Bruce noted recently that everyone likes to pick the fruit, but not many plant the seeds. Why is that? Because planting requires an investment, and since it takes many years for a tree to grow and bear fruit, the farmer may never see the fruit. Even so, he plants.

The same is true for the Church. G.T. Smith said, “Donors don’t give to institutions, they invest in ideas and people in whom they believe.” Every year people invest in the future of the church by investing in the ideas and people being prepared for ministry at Western Seminary. These people may never see the fruit from the seeds they have planted, but one thing is for sure, if the seed is never planted, the tree will not grow. So they plant for the future.

Will you invest in the ideas and people that are Western Seminary? As you enjoy that crisp apple this fall (or apple crisp as the case may be), think about who planted the seed that grew to become that apple, and consider planting a ministry seed through a gift to Western Seminary. Will you sow seeds for the future ministry of the Church?

Ken Neevel

Director of Advancement & Communications

with David Stubbs

What is something surprising about you?

When I was in college, I wanted to be an astronaut.

What stopped you?

Eventually, I found out I was too tall! There are hardly any astronauts over six feet. I thought I would pursue aeronautical engineering as a way of moving toward it, but that changed too.

What happened?

After my second year of college, I toured with a Christian rock band for a year playing keyboard and guitars. We averaged seven concerts a week, mostly in churches. At one point in our three trips around the U.S. we played at an Urbana Missions Conference. There I became convicted that being an astronaut was selfish. I thought, "Well, then what should I do with my life?" I went to all the booths at the conference and found out they needed doctors and civil engineers. I decided to be a civil engineer, do development work overseas, and be a "tentmaker" spreading the Gospel on the side.

How did that work out?

I graduated with a degree in civil engineering. Then I took another year off to work in college ministries at a Presbyterian church. I went back for a Masters degree in Engineering and worked at a civil engineering firm. I became involved in urban ministries and played with another Christian band at churches and bars in San Francisco. At that point I was going in three directions: music, engineering, and church ministry.

What was going through your mind?

I began to question some of the motives and outcomes of typical development work and wondered if engineering was what I really wanted to do. At the firm we were doing good by making San Francisco safe for earthquakes, and I was gaining valuable skills that I hoped to use overseas, but I thought, "Is this going to be my life's work?" John Perkins had told a group of us in college to figure out how our deepest desires meet the world's greatest needs. Trying to figure out what God was calling me to was difficult, but the result was at the age of 26 I decided to go to seminary.

What did it feel like to quit your job and move across the country?

I thought everyone in my firm would think I was crazy, but interestingly, most of them were almost envious, saying, "Wow, I wish that I had something to be so passionate about." As I approached the move, it was certainly scary, but it was also freeing. I remember later in the bowels of the Duke Library sitting at a steel desk with books in front of me, a shower curtain and concrete blocks beside me, and bad lighting. I recalled my nice oak desk looking out over the financial district of San Francisco, and I realized, "I'd rather be here!"

LifeNotes

b. Harbor City, CA 1964
Education: B.S. Civil Engineering, Stanford University, 1987
 M.S. Construction Engineering Mgmt., Stanford University, 1990
 M.Div. Princeton Theological Seminary, 1995
 Ph.D. Duke University, 2001
 Married to Lynn Richards, 1992 Children: Connor (9), Anna (7)

Musical instruments: piano, acoustic guitar, electric bass, recorder

After nine years of further schooling, you became a seminary professor. Now you're in your fifth year here. Are you different than when you came?

The interesting question for me is: what would I be like if I had taken a position at some other place? The advice I got when looking for jobs was to be careful about my first position, because it forms you in many ways. In the interview process at Western, I found people who had a very similar heart and vision of God's action in the world—but they used a slightly different language. I had come to similar conclusions using quite different dialogue partners. So, it's been a wonderful fit, but it has also enriched me in a whole new discussion. If I had gone to a research university or an undergraduate college—surrounded by different colleagues and driven by different questions—my theological trajectory, my work, and even how I approach teaching would be very different.

Did any teacher ever make a big impact on your life?

Yes! My piano teacher, Alan Boehmer. He taught me piano from elementary



Dr. David Stubbs is Assistant Professor of Ethics and Theology

c. DeVries Photography

school through high school. He was also the accompanist for the Pasadena Boys Choir, which was an important place for me. Alan Boehmer and the boys choir gave me a vision of beauty, excellence and a full human life that I never had before.

As a teacher yourself, how do you hope to influence your students?

Broadly, I want them to see, experience, and love how the mind and the heart can go together and should go together in our relationship to God and our growth as Christians. So often people feel like there is a choice between being more "academic" or being a "heart" person and minister. It is foolish to separate them; I want to help students make connections between them.

More specifically, I'd like to broaden students' understanding of salvation. Often we see it as a very private, inner "spiritual" thing, but God wants to save more than souls. He wants to heal all of Creation, all the relationships between us and God, each other, and the earth. Those relationships have been broken because of sin. Redemption and God's victory over sin is the healing of all those relationships and bringing us into fullness of life. Salvation is much more than merely a personal, individual relationship to God.

How do your students influence you?

They lend me their love of God. They help me to see that what I'm doing matters. Their feedback and lives keep reminding me the larger work of the church is vitally important, and theology and ethics plays an important role in that work. So, they give me heart and purpose, and I hope to give them heart too.

You continue your music by playing in churches and with student groups here. Do you miss engineering?

Music, theology, and engineering can all be ways of entering deeply into the world around us. You can approach each of them in different ways. You can see music as a technique for playing things, or you can listen to the harmonies and dissonances and enter into their beauty and pathos. Theology can be just mimicking pious language, or it can be a way to enter into the world's larger history and the deep patterns of God. As an engineer I had a strong sense of engaging in the larger harmonies of the world, the laws of nature, and the way the world functions, but as I practiced it, I got bored with using the same equations over and over again!

How does your musical background affect your teaching of ethics and theology?

Music sensitizes people to certain ways of engaging scripture. Ethics becomes a way of learning how to make our lives a pleasing musical composition rather than following simple, mechanical rules. Similarly, theology becomes the arena where we listen for the grand melody of God and attune our hearts, minds, and lives to it.



David plays the recorder with students Nate Huisman, Philip Rose, and Rylan Kahly.

Richard Mersman

New Faculty Share First Impressions

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God (II Cor. 1:3-4).



Theresa Latini
Assistant Professor
of Pastoral and
Congregational
Care

Western Theological Seminary was on my personal "Top Ten List" from the time I began my Ph.D. program. I was drawn by its reputation for commitment to the Reformed tradition and its commitment to the flourishing of the church. It seemed to me that WTS was a seminary that kept its feet in both of the often severed worlds of academy and church. Given my own call to be a pastor-theologian and my passion for "the church to be the church," WTS seemed like one of those rare places where I could truly integrate my previous experiences as a chaplain and an associate pastor into my teaching and scholarship.

Since my arrival at WTS, I have happily discovered space to help students hone their pastoral skills of listening to and interpreting the human predicament from the lenses of Reformed theology, psychology, and social theory. I also have discovered space to help students listen to God and themselves as they care for others, and in this way, I hope to equip future ministers to care for themselves as an act of stewarding the gifts God has given them. Finally, as I teach pastoral and congregational care, my focus will be on equipping students to foster the development of listening and healing communities, gatherings of people who live *koinonia* by humbly bearing one another's burdens in Christ.

"Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart." (Psalm 37:4)



J. Todd Billings
Assistant Professor of
Reformed Theology

When I heard about the position in Reformed Theology at Western, I immediately saw it not only as a "good fit" but an exciting opportunity to use my loves and gifts for ministry. Western's commitment to the Reformed tradition and missional church emphasis corresponded to the way God had been shaping my desires and gifts for many years. Although I had not known it beforehand, God had been shaping my heart to love the ministry at Western.

Since coming to Western, I have been impressed with the commitment of the faculty and staff to training and equipping ministers for Christ's kingdom. The vision of Western is not only to serve the academy, but the church. Yet, Western also realizes the importance of learning to think theologically in a changing world—learning the mechanics of ministry is empty if it is divorced from faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In light of this, I appreciate that Western is grounded, yet open—in other words, "Evangelical, Ecumenical, and Reformed."

As a faculty member in this dynamic environment, my main task will be to teach systematic and historical theology. Drawing upon a wide variety of experiences—including writing about Calvin in the eclectic environment of Harvard Divinity School and teaching theology in the largely Eastern Orthodox country of Ethiopia—I hope to teach a distinctively Reformed theology while engaging a broad range of ecumenical voices. Today's congregations are seeking alternatives to "Enlightenment" versions of Christianity. In my view, this opens the door to a renewed exploration of the richness and contemporary applicability of pre-modern Reformed and catholic theological traditions. I want to remind students that we are never reading Scripture alone, but rather with the community of saints, as part of the ministry of the Word and Sacraments.

Faculty News

J. Todd Billings, Assistant Professor of Reformed Theology, successfully defended his Harvard dissertation on September 16 in Cambridge, MA. The Thesis title is, "Calvin, Participation and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ." This signals the completion of the Th.D. degree for Professor Billings.

Todd Billings' article, "United to God Through Christ: Assessing Calvin on the Question of Deification," appeared in the *Harvard Theological Review* 98:3 (2005).

Steven Chase, Associate Professor of Christian Spirituality, has written a new book, *The Tree of Life: Models of Christian Prayer*. On Wednesday, November 16, Dr. Chase led a discussion about his book at a "Brown Bags n' Books" gathering sponsored by The Sacred Page bookstore.

In addition, Dr. Chase has written dictionary articles on Intercession, Mystery, Praise, Recollection, Thanksgiving, and Victorine Spirituality for *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*. (Westminster John Knox Press, 2005)

Jaco Hamman, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling, has published his first book, *When Steeples Cry: Leading Congregations through Loss and Change*.

During the month of October, Dr. Hamman led an adult education class, "On Becoming a Person" at The Community Church of Douglas, MI. Also in October, he spoke at First Reformed Church in Holland as they blessed their Pastoral Care Elders.

On November 6, Dr. Hamman led a workshop at Grace Episcopal Church in Grand Rapids, "Creating Space: Persons with Disabilities and the Families Who Love Them." On December 3 he will speak at Christ Memorial Church in Holland at a conference on care to persons with disabilities.

On October 11-12, **George Hunsberger**, Dean of Journey, presented "Conversation on Theology in Congregational Life" at the Hartford Institute for Religion Research at Hartford Seminary. On October 25-27, Dr. Hunsberger co-led a conference on "Changing the Lens, Exploring Missional Education" for the MidSouth Association of Resource Centers and Presbyterian Educators. As the Coordinator of the Gospel and Our Culture Network, Dr. Hunsberger led the annual conference in October at Luther Seminary, where 250 people gathered to hear the results of a Lilly research project on Missional Systems. The study involved judicatories and churches from four denominations.

Cynthia Holder Rich, Associate Professor of Continuing Education, presented "Spirits and the Spirit: The Shepherd Movement of Madagascar" at the Theological Society of South Africa, June 22-24, 2005, which met at Stellenbosch University.

She will participate in "Daughters of Thunder Speak Out" week of women's preaching, co-sponsored by Journey and Preach Sista, March 20-24, 2006.

On October 13, **Christopher Kaiser**, Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology, lectured on "Beliefs in Natural Science, Then and Now" at the Meeter Center for Calvin Studies, Calvin College. Some of the beliefs of early modern scientists have persisted in surprisingly consistent forms. These beliefs are so basic to scientific endeavor that it could not be sustained without them. Modern science actually turns out to be a faith-based enterprise.

David Stubbs, Assistant Professor of Ethics and Theology, co-wrote a report on sacramental theology called, "Invitation to Christ," for the PC(USA) Office of Theology and Worship. He also wrote "Karl Barth and the *Pistis Christou* Debate" as part of a Wabash Summer Research Fellowship.

Dr. Stubbs taught a mini-series, "Ethics in Science and Engineering," to Summer Research students at Hope College. He will teach a 3-week series at First Reformed Church of Grandville, MI on "John Calvin and His Theology" (Jan. 29, Feb. 5, Feb. 12, 2006 at 11am). He will teach "Ethics and the Sacraments" Feb. 19 at Trinity Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. All are welcome to these classes.

Leanne Van Dyk, Academic Dean and Professor of Reformed Theology, was the keynote speaker at the Welch Lectures in Reformed Theology at the University of Tulsa on November 4-6. In addition, on September 10 she spoke at the Santa Barbara Presbytery Leadership Training event on "Reformed Theology for the Church Today."

Dr. Van Dyk wrote a chapter entitled, "A Conversation with the Ecumenical Creeds" in *Conversations with the Confessions* (edited by Joseph Small, published by Geneva Press).

Robert Van Voorst, Professor of New Testament, led worship for three Sundays at First Reformed Church of Grand Haven, MI and taught adult education for three weeks at the Community Church of Ferrysburg (CRC). He also led three workshops on women and church office for the consistory and congregation of South Blendon Reformed Church. His new textbook, *Reading the New Testament Today*, is being used by the "Living Stones" lay education course in the Albany Synod.

Journey
Learning Together on the Way

A center for the continuing education of the church, located in the Garden Level of Western Theological Seminary

Events and Seminars

Jan. 16 - Martin Luther King, Jr. Service and Celebration 11am, Mulder Chapel
Preaching by The Rev. Dr. Michelle Loyd-Paige, professor at Calvin College and pastor of Faith and Hope International Church, Muskegon, MI. Service followed by a community lunch in Semelink Hall. Public invited.

Feb. 18 - "Intelligent Design: Is it Science?" one day seminar
Keynote speaker: Dr. Howard Van Til, Professor Emeritus of Science, Calvin College
Response: Dr. Caroline Simon, Professor of Philosophy, Hope College, and public school educators

Mar. 20-24 - "Daughters of Thunder Speaking Out" a week of women's preaching
co-sponsored by Journey and Preach Sista

March 21-22 - Osterhaven Lectures with Dr. Nicholas Wolterstorff

Journey Academy Winter & Spring Courses

- Specifically designed for laypeople and taught by seminary professors
- \$80 course fee, \$40 for accompanying spouse, \$30 for age 65+

Feb. 21 - Mar. 28, Tuesday mornings, 10am-12noon "Christian Responses to Terrorism: Searching the Scriptures" with Dr. Mark Rich

Feb. 21 - Mar. 28, Tuesday evenings, 7-9pm "Revelation for Today" with Dr. George Hunsberger and "Christianity and Science" with Dr. Christopher Kaiser

Mar. 1 - Apr. 5, Tuesday mornings, 10am-12noon "Christianity and Literature" with Dr. Jim Cook

Registration information: www.westernsem.edu **Questions?** Call Judy Bos at (616) 392-8555, x128

Introducing The Friendship House

I have heard in the tone of parents' voices and seen in their hopeful eyes the yearning that Friendship House might provide a safe and secure place for their son or daughter, who rightfully wishes to live independently as a young adult. This makes it very exciting to think of an additional goal of the steering committee: that Friendship House be replicated in many communities by a variety of institutions, especially seminaries and colleges.

— Matt Floding, Dean of Students

During the last ten years, Western Theological Seminary's student enrollment has tripled, but student housing has fallen behind the need. At the same time, another need has developed in the Holland community. The number of persons living with cognitive disabilities has increased, and their families have been unable to find appropriate housing for them.

The Friendship House concept resulted from "out of the box" thinking. How could we address both of those needs at the same time? The innovative solution is a housing structure on the campus of Western Seminary that will house 18 Western students, six people with cognitive impairments, and a resident director. Each special-needs adult will share an apartment with three seminary students, interacting and engaging in friendships, yet functioning independently.

In the process of conceiving the Friendship House, the steering committee met with many families of special needs children. The most difficult stories to hear were of pastors unable to relate to these children and their families. The Church became a very awkward place for them.

One primary goal, in addition to addressing the real need for housing, is to have every graduate of Western equipped to minister to persons with disabilities and to their families.



Architect: VerBurg & Associates, Holland, MI

This will include:

- The ability to lead a Bible study developmentally suited to persons with cognitive impairments
- Communication skills that engage persons with disabilities in appropriate ways
- Basic counseling competencies to support families of persons with disabilities
- The conviction that church campuses should be accessible to those with a variety of physical challenges.

By virtue of living in community with people who have cognitive impairments, Western students will become more aware of the challenges faced by persons with a variety of disabilities. As we celebrate Communion together each Friday in our chapel, we will witness a poignant reminder that our Lord's love and compassion is toward all regardless of able-mindedness or able-bodiedness.

Imagine the ripple effects of those who live in Friendship House taking their experience into the church— every minister that graduates from WTS will influence congregations and ministry with the care and sensitivity persons with special needs deserve.

This project is in the fundraising stage. For information on how you may become involved, please contact Ken Neevel at 616-392-8555.

Calls to the Class of 2005

Master of Divinity graduates

Jeffrey Allen, B.A., M.Div. of Holland, MI — Pastor, Faith Community Church, Littleton, CO

Mark Andersen, B.A., M.Div. of Orange City, IA — Pastor, Herkimer Reformed Church, Herkimer, NY

Amy Avery, B.A., M.Div. of Holland, MI — Master of Social Work program, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI

Joshua Baron, B.A., M.Div. of Allendale, MI — Pastoral Resident, Church of the Servant, Grand Rapids, MI

Wayne Barrett, B.A., M.Div. of Poland, OH — Pastor, Range Line Community Presbyterian Church, Hebron, IN

Kathy Bartels, B.S., M.Div. of Spring Lake, MI — Associate Pastor, First Reformed Church, Grand Haven, MI

Joshua Bode, B.A., M.Div. of Hudsonville, MI — Clinical Pastoral Education, Albany Medical Center, Albany, NY

Lindsay Bona, B.A., M.Div. of Williamson, NY — Clinical Pastoral Education, one year residency, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN

Barbara Boss, B.A., M.Div. of Newaygo, MI — Associate Pastor, Newago United Church of Christ, Newago, MI

Mitchell Brink, B.S., M.Div. of Hamilton, MI — Pastor, Reformed Dutch Church of Claverack, Claverack, NY

Kelly Brouwer, B.A., M.Div. of Edgerton, MN — Clinical Pastoral Education, Loyola University Medical Center, Chicago, IL

Chad DeGraff, B.S., M.Div. of South Holland, IL — Pastor, Riverside Reformed Church, Bloomington, MN

Michael Drew, A.B., M.Div. of Hudsonville, MI — Pastor, First Reformed Church, Portage, MI

Brian Engel, B.A., M.A., M.Div. of Chatham, NY — Pastor, Mohawk Reformed Church, Mohawk, NY

William Freeman, B.A., M.Div. of Grand Rapids, MI — Pastor, First Congregational United Church of Christ, Belding, MI

Denise Kingdom Grier, B.A., M.Div. of Holland, MI — in candidating process

Kyle Haack, B.A., M.Div. of Hospers, IA — church plant with CRC, Rochester, MN

Wendy Haack, B.A., M.Div. of Zeeland, MI — church plant with CRC, Rochester, MN

Pamela Henshell, B.A., M.Div. of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada — in candidating process

Richard Husselman, B.A., M.Div. of Salina, KS — Associate Pastor, First Reformed Church, Byron Center, MI

Susan Kingma, B.A., M.Div. of Grand Rapids, MI — graduate studies, Drew University, Madison, NJ

Darrell Koopmans, B.A., M.Div. of Holland, MI — Calling Pastor, First Reformed Church, Holland, MI

Mara Cooper Norden, B.A., M.Div. of Zeeland, MI — Pastoral Resident, Church of the Servant, Grand Rapids, MI

Andrea Poppleton, B.A., M.Div. of Kentwood, MI — Co-pastor, First Reformed Church, Lafayette, IN

Drew Poppleton, B.S., M.Div. of Pittsburgh, PA — Co-pastor, First Reformed Church, Lafayette, IN

Adam Potgiesser, M.Div. of Lawton, MI — church plant in Lawton, MI through Third Reformed Church, Kalamazoo, MI

Dennis Scheibmeir, B.B.A., B.S., B.S., M.Div. of Wichita, KS — Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Larned, KS

James Schepers, B.S., M.Div. of South Haven, MI — in candidating process

Jamie Schmeling, B.A., M.S., M.Div. of Miles City, MT — Iona Community, Scotland

Aaron Schulte, B.A., M.Div. of Orange City, IA — in candidating process

Scott Stephan, B.S., M.Div. of Elk Rapids, MI — Pastor, Second Reformed Church, Fulton, IL

Shane Sterk, B.A., M.Div. of Chiapas, Mexico — Associate Pastor, Faith Community Church, West Chicago, IL

Katrina Te Winkle, B.A., M.Div. of Sheboygan, WI — Chaplain, Gerber Memorial Hospital, Fremont, MI

Arika Theule-Van Dam, B.A., M.Div. of Allendale, MI — Acquisitions Assistant, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI

William Vander Werp, M.Div. of Zeeland, MI — Pastor, Casnovia Reformed Church, Casnovia, MI

David Van Huisen, B.S., M.Div. of Hudsonville, MI — church plant

Paul Van Maaren, B.S.E., M.Div. of Kellogg, IA — Pastor, Faith Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

Kamren Zorgdrager, B.S., M.Div. of Holland, MI — Intern, Beechwood Reformed Church, Holland, MI

Master of Theology graduates

Ferenc Baumann, B.A., M.Div., Th.M. of Erdély, Romania — Pastor, Hungarian Reformed Church, Kalamazoo, MI

György Kustár, M.Div., Th.M. — Pastor, Debrecen, Hungary

Mun-Gye Lee, B.A., M.Div., Th.M. of Seoul, South Korea — Ph.D. studies, Detroit, MI

Grace Hui Liang, B.A., M.A., Ph.D., Th.M. — Professor, Hangzhou University, Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, China

Lalrosiem Songate, B.A., B.D., M.A., Th.M. — General Secretary, Council of Churches, India

David Sal Thang Vunga, B.A., M.Div., D.Min., Th.M. — Ecumenical Relations, RCA, Myanmar

Jong Pil Yoo, B.A., M.Div., Th.M. of Seoul, South Korea — Ph.D. studies, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN

Samuel Wasswa, B.A., Th.M., returned to Kampala, Uganda

Alumline

News

Jonathan Meester '03 accepted the call to become the pastor of Hope Community Reformed Church in West Bend, WI. He was ordained in August in Albany, NY and moved to Wisconsin to start his new ministry in September.

Earl A. Laman '57 recently published a first novel, *A House Beyond Expectations*, flowing out of his lifelong involvement with people and set in a fictional lake town in West Michigan.

LeRoy Koopman '60 is the author of *Taking the Jesus Road: The Ministry of the Reformed Church in America Among Native Americans*, the fiftieth volume of the RCA's Historical Series edited by Donald Bruggink '54. This is Koopman's fifteenth book.

Mark Nieuwsma '76 is now the Pastoral Care coordinator for South Grand Rapids Classis and Interim Minister at Wallin Congregational Church, Grand Rapids, MI.

Roger Punt '76 and his wife Judy are completing their 12th year of ministry at First Reformed Church, Sully, IA. They recently welcomed their second granddaughter, Mya Jean Punt, who joins her older sister and parents near Fargo, ND.

Al Pruis '80 celebrated his 25th anniversary of ordination at the morning services on June 26 at Peace Reformed Church in Eagan, MN. He has served four churches, including North Holland in Holland, MI, First Reformed in Edgerton, MN, Bethany Reformed in Sheboygan, WI, and Peace Reformed since 2001.

Daniel Carlson '97 has been received by the Classis of Schenectady and installed as Associate Minister of First Reformed Church of Schenectady.

Dan Egerly '97 and his wife Heather announce the birth of Malachi Jacob on June 14, 2005. Dan is the Associate Pastor at Bay Presbyterian Church, Bay Village, OH, under the Formula of Agreement with the PCUSA (meaning he retains his RCA credentials).

on to Glory...

Richard W. Shockey, '86 (M.R.E.)
b. Fort Riley, KS 9/6/48
d. Carmel, IN 6/07/05
Warner Pacific College, OR ; WTS '86
Anderson School of Theology (M.Div.)
Trinity Int'l University (Ph.D.)
Service to the Church:
(1988-2005) Associate Secretary
and Executive Secretary of Indiana
Ministries, Church of God

Necrologist: Glen Bruggers '51

Special Gifts made to Western Theological Seminary

Gifts made between
May 19 - October 14, 2005

In Honor of Emily Mouw
Mary Mouw

In Memory of Fred Blackmore, Sr
Dorothy M. Blackmore

In Memory of Marian Buckhout
Donald & Erma Bruggink

In Memory of Beverly J. Jessen
Carl Jessen

In Memory of Antonio Moncada
Jeannette Moncada

In Memory of Henry Mouw
Mary Mouw

In Memory of Carl Reimink
June Reimink

In Memory of Harriet Shaver
Marvin & Joanne Hoff



Bill Van Auken carefully positions framed class photos in Western's new permanent alumni/ae gallery in the east hallway.

Welcome!

Glenn Swier came to Western in June after working at Heartside Ministry in Grand Rapids for 12 years as their program coordinator. Glenn has a Masters degree in Social Work, and he is deeply interested in urban ministry and cross-cultural learning.



Glenn Swier
Associate Director of Formation for Ministry

As Associate Director of Formation for Ministry, Glenn gives direction and oversight to the Teaching Church program for in residence and distance learning students. So far his favorite part is developing new placements where students can explore their gifts for ministry.

Christine Battjes arrived at Western in May. She is a 1995 M.Div. graduate of WTS and served as co-pastor of Herkimer Reformed Church in New York for nine years with her husband, Don.



Christine Battjes
Circulation Supervisor, Beardslee Library

As the interim Circulation Supervisor in the library, Christine checks out materials and "gently encourages" patrons to check them back in on time. She is also covering Professor Paul Smith's reference desk hours during his sabbatical leave.

Jan Poppen is a graduate of Western Seminary with a Master of Religious Education degree. She is excited

to be back at WTS and involved in the new

Master of Divinity distance learning program. With a background in elementary education, experience as an executive assistant at Hydro Automotive Structures in Holland, and her religious education training at Western, she brings a unique perspective and combination of skills to her job as Administrative Assistant to Distance Learning.



Jan Poppen
Administrative Assistant, Distance Learning Program

Kyle Nevenzel graduated from Hope College in 2005 with a teaching degree in Physical Education and History. He works second-shift at the seminary as the Maintenance and Grounds Assistant, which gives him the opportunity to coach soccer at a local middle school and to serve as a part time youth director at Central Park Reformed Church in Holland.



Kyle Nevenzel
Maintenance & Grounds Assistant

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Editorial Council: Dr. Dennis Voskuil, Dr. George Brown, Dr. Robert Van Voorst, Dr. Matt Floding, Ken Neevel

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