

## Paying for Seminary

In recent years, the seminary became aware that our students' debt load was increasing, but we didn't know the scope of the problem nor did we have personnel available to focus on the issue. Through the generosity of Lilly Foundation, Inc., we have been able to direct resources toward delving into the complex issue of student debt, and for that we are grateful.

Western Theological Seminary is one of 67 theological schools in the USA to receive \$250,000 over three years from Lilly to examine and strengthen financial and educational practices with the goal of improving the economic well-being and financial literacy of future ministerial leaders.

Jeff Munroe, V.P. of Operations and Advancement, and Carla Capotosto, who has been responsible for marketing/communications efforts at WTS for the last 15 years, are heading the student debt initiative. The lessons Carla learned while navigating her own life circumstances have

### How I got through seminary without debt:

(feedback from the Classes of 2012-2014)

- I worked all throughout seminary.
- My church funds students in seminary.
- Miraculous provision from a generous and unexpected donor
- Tuition waiver with Northwestern College for children of faculty
- I took 9 years to complete my degree so that I could pay as I went.
- I made a lot of sacrifices and had clear goals regarding my education, lifestyle and finances.
- My spouse worked full time.
- Veterans benefits and special funding for pursuing military chaplaincy
- My generous classis
- People in my congregation helped me.
- Scholarships from Western helped, but we kept expenses low through a simple lifestyle; plus, we both worked.
- I entered into this journey from a place of financial stability.
- I worked 32 hours/wk while in the 5-year distance learning program.
- We had help from our parents.
- Seven years of part-time seminary; long days of work and homework.
- Scholarships, help from classis and church, and I lived very frugally.
- It was a priority not to have any debt.



The junior class had financial literacy training as part of its Christian formation retreat, January 2015.

given her a passion to help students in this area. She and Jeff both want students to experience the freedom that comes with careful fiscal management.

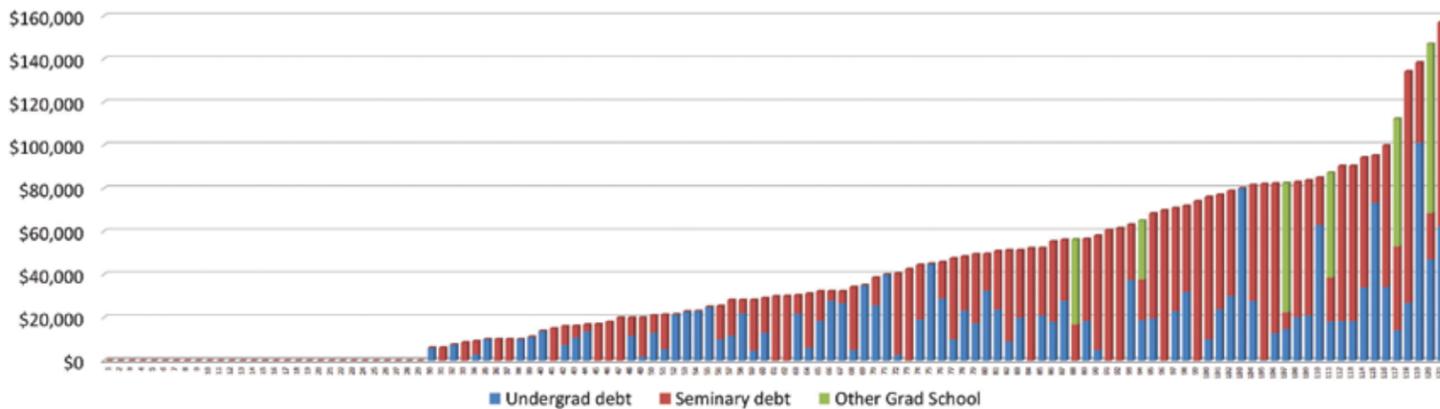
Western is using the funds from Lilly to research the scope and systemic nature of student debt, provide financial counseling and economic education to our students, and explore creative partnerships with undergraduate institutions to lower the cost of a seminary education.

Already a clear picture has emerged by studying the debt loads of our last three graduating classes and our current Master of Divinity and Master of Arts students.

Consistently, one-third of students are either completely debt free or have not taken on seminary debt. This is cause to celebrate! The middle third are carrying debt that will be manageable on their expected salaries (with careful budgeting). The last third are looking like Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* with huge loads on their backs, making every step difficult. We don't know each situation, but from a distance their debt looks unmanageable and certainly like

(cont.)

Educational Debt of 121 Graduates, Classes of 2012 - 2013 - 2014



something that will affect their future home life and their ministries.

So what kind of salary can M.Div. graduates expect as they consider debt load? The starting salary including housing allowance for a first year pastor of an RCA church (with less than 250 people) begins at \$42,291 in one classis and averages around \$53,500 across the country. Ideally, a student without resources for additional household income would keep his or her debt under \$37,000.

The sidebar to the right gives the approximate cost of seminary. It is important to note that without donors contributing to the work of the seminary and defraying the total cost of education, we would need to charge over \$30,000 a year in tuition per student.

Western is also pleased to be able to offer lower tuition rates than our peer seminaries.

The issues surrounding student debt are complicated, but we are starting with some basics. In addition to helping our students become more aware of the implications of debt, we have added financial literacy training to the curriculum, starting with our junior in-residence class. The

first class was held in January and covered topics such as cash flow, budgeting, insurance, investing, etc.

Other workshops are being created for middlers and seniors that focus on topics such as clergy taxes and church administration. We are also offering financial counseling to students.

The seminary is revisiting our financial aid policies, we are doubling our efforts to solicit private scholarships from donors, and other ideas are in the works.

We welcome your feedback: [carlap@westernsem.edu](mailto:carlap@westernsem.edu)

### How much does it cost to go to seminary?

In-residence MDiv student, 3 year program  
\$14,470 yr - tuition, fees, books

Distance learning MDiv student, 5 year program  
\$9,055 yr – tuition, fees, books

\$1,500 yr – (approx.) travel & lodging for on-campus intensives

Distance learning MDiv student, 4 year program  
\$11,294 yr – tuition, fees, books

\$1,500 yr – (approx.) travel & lodging for on-campus intensives

**Living expenses for 9 months:**  
*(very approximate due to great variety in living situations)*  
\$13,315 single person, 9 months living expenses  
\$21,025 family, 9 months living expenses

**What is available in scholarships and grants?**  
\$7,000 yr max for qualified students (various criteria: need, academic achievement, RCA affiliation)  
\$10,000 yr max for qualified racial-ethnic students (various criteria: need, academic achievement, RCA affiliation)  
Tuition discounts in the M.A. and GCUPM programs

**How much can a student borrow in federal loans each year? (currently at 6.1% interest rate)**  
A maximum of \$20,500, depending on eligibility

### How can I help a seminary student afford school?

1. Give support directly to students you know who are pursuing the ministry.
2. Give to your church's internship fund or seminary student fund.
3. Give to Western Theological Seminary's grant fund. The seminary has sole discretion in directing the fund toward tuition payments, but you may recommend a student.
4. Establish a scholarship to help generations of students (contact the Advancement Office).
5. Locals: Open your home to distance learning students needing housing during their twice a year one-week intensives in Holland (contact Kathy Ehmann at 616.392.8555, x186).

## For the Love of Preaching

When the Rev. Lindsay Small began directing the Bast Preaching Initiatives in the fall of 2013, she was struck by the WTS learning model of continuing education: Learning happens best as people learn together over time, in and out of specific contexts, and share that learning with others. Lindsay wondered, "How could this model be used for preaching?"

With fourteen years of experience as a pastor, Lindsay recognized that good preaching involves dwelling within Scripture, crafting a sermon carefully, and proclaiming the Word boldly.

With these values in mind and alongside a newly formed Bast Advisory Team of WTS personnel, pastors, and college professors, she developed a peer learning model around the concept of "Dwell, Craft, Proclaim."

This model was used to shape three types of groups: Discern Groups for college students, Discover Groups for seminary students, and Dwell Groups for pastors.

Groups employ the three-fold pathway of Dwell, Craft, Proclaim to guide discussion, but use other resources, too. They begin at the Bast Preaching Festival in November and end at the following year's festival.

"Early on I started imagining what it would be like to lead a group myself," recalls Lindsay. "I was growing concerned by the number of female seminarians who dismissed their call to

preach to God's people. It was as if they felt it 'too presumptuous' to think that they could be preachers. I do not believe that every person called to ministry is called to preach, but I want these students to see that God's call is wider than they had possibly imagined."

Lindsay formed the first Discover Group, "The Pulpit," specifically for female seminary students.

The Rev. Lindsay Small  
Associate Director of Journey  
Bast Preaching Initiatives



In the following months, Dwell and Discern groups were established, each with about seven participants and one leader. By November, the groups were eager to begin at the Bast Preaching Festival, featuring Rev. Eugene Peterson.

On November 9, the festival kicked off with Rev. Peterson discussing his book, *Eat this Book*, with students from Central College, Northwestern College, Hope College, and Grand Valley State University. Twenty-six students are in Discern Groups.

"I am hearing our students engage one another about the call to ministry and to preaching," said the Rev. Dan Claus, a chaplain at Hope College. "The diversity of interests in our group helps them gain new insights. The studio art major asks

different questions than the philosophy major, and they are mutually enriched."

WTS faculty and local pastors hosted workshops on preaching throughout the Bast Festival, and overall WTS welcomed 163 participants—a great increase from 55 festival participants the year before.

"So many preaching conferences fixate on techniques, pragmatics, tricks, and gimmicks," said Jared Ayers, pastor of Liberty Church in Philadelphia. "The Bast Conference and these new collegial cohorts are deeply nourishing for Christian leaders living in a moment in which there is a 'famine of hearing the words of the LORD' (Amos 8.11)."

In the five Dwell groups for pastors, there are two local groups in Iowa, one regional group from the East Coast, and two national groups who meet monthly through web chat. That is 38 pastors in all, engaged on the topic of preaching.

The Rev. Small hopes the Bast Preaching Initiatives will continue to grow and bless participants. "I am excited for more and more people—pastors and students alike—to engage peer learning and preaching. We feel like we are just getting started!"

In 2015 a second Discover group for seminarians will be formed.

The 2015 Bast Preaching Festival will feature keynote speaker Anna Carter Florence. There, the Discern and Dwell groups will wrap up their year of learning, and new peer groups will begin.



Dwell Groups for pastors kicked off at the Bast Preaching Festival in November.

Interested in joining a Discern, Discover, or Dwell Group?  
Contact Lindsay at [lindsay@westernsem.edu](mailto:lindsay@westernsem.edu), 616.392.8555, x178

# Treading the Homeland of Jesus

Intercultural Immersion trip, January 7-18, 2015. Hosted by RCA missionaries Marlin '82 and Sally Vis

I have dreamed of going to Israel since I was 15 years old. Thanks to the Intercultural Immersion program of WTS, that dream came true in January. Led by our guides, RCA missionaries Marlin and Sally Vis, our group of jet-lagged—but excited—seminarians left the plane in Tel Aviv, donned warmer clothes, and hit the ground running. For the next several days, we trekked to and through as many sites as the weather and practical logistics would

and the gospel must carry in it a deep understanding of Jesus' humanity and the culture in which he lived.

I cannot adequately explain the different feel of the land. There is a continuity we touched momentarily through the stones and ruins that inform millennia of culture and conflict. We felt it when we climbed to the caves in Mt. Arbel and heard the story of the slaughter there. We saw it in B'et She'an, with its Greek-influenced layout and immensity, a foreign template for power demanding recognition. We saw it at Herodium, the five-story palace fortress looming from its perch just outside Bethlehem. We saw it in the wall and checkpoints and red tile roofs of Jewish settlements sprawling down the mountains in the West Bank. We heard it in the voices of the people we met and grew to love.

Our first night in Jerusalem marked a shift of focus from the past to the present and future. In those next few days, we traveled to the West Bank to Hebron, guided by a hospitable, gentle Muslim woman, experiencing more freedom in our movement than she was allowed. We toured Yad Veshem (the Holocaust memorial) while winding through Israeli military training groups. We listened to

the heart-wrenching stories of Muslim and Jewish daughters killed by the enemy, saw firsthand the non-violent resistance of Palestinian Christians at the Tent of Nations farm, visited a settlement, meeting with two Jewish settlers, attended a lecture by Dr. Salim Munayer at Bethlehem Bible College, and were welcomed into the homes of Palestinian Christian families, who shared their stories of life in this land of occupation. Western media falls short in giving us the whole picture. Consistently, we heard this plea: "Tell our story. Come back. Bring people with you."

The politics are harsh. The fear is palpable. It is easy to claim sole ownership of a connection to the land, to assign blame, to take sides. While governments stake out political positions, individual Americans are free—free to seek peace, not merely cease-fire, to join hands with any and all who seek justice. We cannot fix the problems or force solutions, but can walk alongside, lift up, and do the work of Jesus in his homeland.

I hope to return someday and bring friends along to meet the people and learn their stories. Meanwhile, I will keep listening to the stories, the living history of the land. Regardless of whether I am able to return, the cycle of power and oppression, wealth and poverty played out over thousands of years in Israel/Palestine serves as a clarion call to address injustice wherever it is met, whether that is in the Middle East or the American Midwest. We are called to do the work of Jesus in our own homeland as well.

by Diane Shircliff

Fourth year  
Distance Learning  
M.Div. student



allow, both in the Galilee region and in and around Jerusalem. Eagerly and intentionally absorbing the view from the hill, the unevenness of the ground, the cold of the stone, the beauty of the architecture, the undeniability of the ancient Roman power, we were consistently challenged to think what that culture brings to biblical teaching, to remember that knowledge of Jesus



The group poses just below the southwest side of the Temple Mount.



Climbing to Mt. Arbel on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee



A Jewish rabbi at the Western Wall



A military post in the disputed land of Hebron



Faces of the land of Israel

Thanks to Mindy Thompson, Travis West, and Sally Vis for photos.

## Rejoicing in Lament

Gordon H. Girod Research Professor of Reformed Theology J. Todd Billings has had a dramatic two and a half years. From being diagnosed with incurable cancer to undergoing a near-lethal dose of chemotherapy followed by a stem cell transplant, to enduring a two-month quarantine and a long, painful recovery, he has surely walked through “the valley of the shadow of death.” Through it all, he has remained an inspiration to many and has now published a book about the intersection of his faith and cancer.

Since his hospitalization in March 2013, Todd Billings has been on the slow road to what he calls the “new normal.” His cancer is in a strong partial remission, and he has returned to his roles as father, husband, professor, and active church member. However, this season of his health is not without its challenges.

“With the deep joys of interaction, work, and family come downswings in energy that involve physical pain, heavy fatigue, and emotional lows. The three can almost seem inseparable,” he writes.

As he remains under “maintenance chemotherapy” to keep his cancer in check, Todd continues to find solace in the Psalms.

“As I noticed in reading Psalm 77 recently, there is little or no ‘mind over matter’ optimism here,” he shares, “but there is trust in the strong love of the God of deliverance.”

*I cry aloud to God,  
aloud to God, that he may hear me.  
In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord;  
in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;  
my soul refuses to be comforted...  
I will meditate on all your work,  
and muse on your mighty deeds.  
Your way, O God, is holy.  
What god is so great as our God?*

In his new book, *Rejoicing in Lament: Wrestling with Incurable Cancer and Life in Christ* (Brazos Press), Dr. Billings is honest and vulnerable about his cancer story, all the while pointing to the larger story of Christ’s redemption. He tells of bringing his pain, anger, and even blame before God, while at the same time always basing these questions in trust that God can handle our laments.



Todd and Rachel Billings with children, Neti and Nathaniel. (2012)

“*Rejoicing in Lament* is both a comfort and a guide for all who labor along the same path as Billings does. It also provides insight to family members and friends of those suffering from cancer or other serious illnesses,” writes John Koessler in his five-star review for *Christianity Today*.

Rev. April Fiet (WTS ‘07) has found the book particularly helpful in her work as a pastor. It is a “beautiful, raw, and rich work that is hands-down the most important book I’ve read about pastoral care—even though the book is not explicitly written as a pastoral care guide.”

On March 31, Western Theological Seminary will host a conversation between Dr. Billings and esteemed American poet and editor Christian Wiman, who also suffers from incurable cancer.

Wiman’s collection of reflections, entitled *My Bright Abyss*, chronicles his rediscovery and exploration of faith in the wake of his own diagnosis.

Please join us on March 31 at 7 pm for an evening of rich discussion on life’s deep struggles. No RSVP needed.



The James I. Cook Endowment in Christianity & Literature and the Osterhaven Lecture Series

### A Poet and A Theologian Talk about Incurable Cancer a conversation with Christian Wiman and J. Todd Billings

**March 31, 2015**  
Tuesday, 7:00 pm

The Commons at WTS  
All are welcome!

Christian Wiman is an American poet and former editor of *Poetry* magazine. When Wiman was 39, he was diagnosed with an incurable form of cancer, sparking his return to a faith he had abandoned. He has since undergone a bone marrow transplant and published *My Bright Abyss*, a collection of meditations on faith through his experience.



## WTS Professor Engages Students and Pastors in China

According to an article in the *Financial Times*, “The Rise of Christianity in China,” membership in the church there is now greater than membership in the Communist Party. By 2030, China likely will have more practicing Christians than the U.S.A.

Professor of New Testament Robert Van Voorst and his wife, Mary, immersed themselves in this surprising new environment for two weeks last November. Dr. Van Voorst was invited to be a “Distinguished Overseas Visiting Scholar” at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, where the government sponsors a doctoral program in Christianity Studies. The Chinese government paid for the entire trip.

Former WTS student Grace Hui-Liang (Th.M. 2005) coordinated the visit. She is a professor at Zhejiang University and author of three books on the history of Bible interpretation in China.

Bob taught 12 students from Zhejiang’s Ph.D. program in Christianity. Many of these young scholars will get six months of paid study in the West as they write their dissertations. When they finish, they will be placed as Christian religious studies scholars in various Chinese universities.

Dr. Van Voorst discussed cross-cultural Bible study methods and shared knowledge of the historical Jesus. His final lecture covered the present state of religious studies in higher education in the West.

The days fell into a regular rhythm: lectures and advising students in the mornings and then sightseeing in the afternoon. The students showed their American professor and his wife the sights of Hangzhou—the university, temples, and the beautiful West Lake. The students were very respectful, calling Mary by her first name at her request, but never dreaming of calling their professor “Bob.”

Bob and Mary visited a local house church and soon found out that “house church” simply means it is not one of the government’s recognized churches.



Dr. Robert Van Voorst  
Professor of New Testament

Mostly university students attended the church, participating by devoutly praying, singing from Chinese hymn-books, and taking notes.

“At times you could hear the whole room full of whispered prayers,” Bob reflects. “It was quite beautiful.”

The men sat on one side and the women on the other—but a woman preached the sermon.

Following the service, the pastors took Bob and Mary out for lunch, asking difficult questions about the religious futures of the U.S. and China, the rise of secularism in the U.S., and whether there would be any hope for the world if the U.S. gives up its role of promoting freedom.

Asked for his thoughts on avoiding persecution but still spreading the gospel, Bob reached into the New Testament. “If you suffer for being a Christian, God will bless you,” he told them. “But if you suffer because you break God’s law, then you should accept your punishment as just.”

The house churches are spreading very rapidly as more people come to faith.

“Frankly, the church in China is doing very well now,” Bob says, “but Western Christians don’t realize that the Chinese government is both encouraging and suppressive.”

The Chinese government sponsors the largest Bible printing operation in the world. It has printed 125 million copies of the Bible, given to churches for use and distribution—even house churches. The government would rather have a mainstream form of Christianity influenced by the Bible than to have Christian cults.

However, the government remains wary of any movement becoming too large, and as Christianity grows among intellectuals and business leaders, the government tries to control that growth.

“As Tertullian said around A.D. 200, ‘The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,’ Bob remarks. “The more you try to suppress faith, the more the faith grows.”

Professor Van Voorst hopes to participate again at Zhejiang University. He believes both the academy and the church are going to be important for Christianity in China.

“It’s simply amazing that a political system pledged to atheism would sponsor the high-level study and teaching of Christianity,” he says. “We may wonder why, but we thank God that such research and teaching are being done.”



Bob and Mary Van Voorst enjoy a meal with Chinese Ph.D. students in Hangzhou, China. Dr. Grace Hui-Liang is seated second from left.

## Ridder Church Renewal

*The Rev. Chris DeVos joined WTS on January 19 as the new Associate Director of Journey for Ridder Church Renewal.*

Chris grew up in Grand Rapids, MI, where his family was deeply involved in both an RCA and a CRC church. While attending Calvin Theological Seminary,

**The Rev. Chris DeVos**  
Assoc. Director of Journey  
Ridder Church Renewal



he sensed a call to pastoral ministry with the need to bring renewal to the church. He spent six years in campus ministry at the University of Colorado before answering a call to a CRC church in Dunwoody, GA. There he spent seven rich years learning what it meant to be a pastor before sensing another call to Kingston, Ontario. Finally, in 2003, Chris moved to Holland to lead Pillar Church, where he participated in Ridder Church Renewal. Chris brings the unique perspective of working in both CRC and RCA churches in the US and Canada, as well as being a pastor who has gone through the Ridder process.

### What is Ridder Church Renewal?

Ridder Church Renewal is really more of a movement than a program. It is a process of transformation for pastors and churches, geared toward those who want a more vibrant mission and life as a congregation. We work primarily with pastors and leadership teams of six people. We teach pastors and leaders to take responsibility for their own growth.

It's as if you hadn't been eating a great diet for a while, and you begin to ask, "Why do I eat as I do? What do I mean by health and how do I reach it?"

We start out with Faithwalking, digging deep into the hidden assumptions within the personal lives of the pastor and church leaders. Out of personal

transformation comes corporate renewal. The entire process is spread out over five years with training and teaching.

### What interested you in leading this?

Ridder has made such a big impact on my life and in the life of Pillar Church. To be a part of that with other churches excited me. Even the congregation, although they didn't want me to go, could see that this was really a good fit for my gifts, passions and experiences.

### What impact has Ridder made on you?

The situation of the church right now in North America means that churches have to wrestle with change. Pastors need to learn to be a less-anxious presence in the midst of hard conversations about change and mission. The Ridder process has developed me to be much more capable in that way and much more honest. I've had people say to me at Pillar, "You're a different person than you were when you came here."

### Have you witnessed other renewal?

Every one of the churches involved with Ridder is gaining clarity on what it means to be in mission for God with integrity, authenticity, love, and courage. In the first two and a half years we see a lot of transformation in the lives of pastors. As the process continues, churches help their members see how God is calling them to their own ministries in their community.



Communities of grace and truth offer opportunities to share with authenticity.

### Why is Ridder is catching on so fast?

It is the testimony of churches and pastors saying that it has made a deeper difference than just a program. It's not a quick fix. Ridder focuses on being more genuine and faithful to the gospel.

### How many churches are involved?

There are 56 RCA and CRC churches. A year from now there will probably be 120. The churches are located across the U.S. and Canada. They belong to several RCA synods—Great Lakes, Wisconsin, Albany, Mid-America and New York. A number of CRC classes are also represented. We hope to expand into a Pacific NW region and to Iowa, the Dakotas, and Minnesota.

### What are your dreams for Ridder?

My dreams all center on what would help pastors and churches grow in their capacity to be in God's mission in the world. The more we can facilitate that, the better. My main work is to steward this movement as it grows.

We're exploring ways to craft an even deeper collaboration between Ridder and the academic life of the seminary. I'd love to see more involvement with our faculty, as well as a Doctor of Ministry track for pastors engaged in Ridder.

As our work expands, I want to see more and more pastors and leaders take up the challenge to learn, live, and act in ways that are required of us to be more faithful and fruitful in mission today. I'm committed to doing that in my own life.

## Torres Times Three!

*A family delves into seminary.*

What do you get when you take a Hispanic family from a Pentecostal background and put them in a Reformed theological seminary?

You get a seminary that is more culturally aware, and a family that learns to think outside the box.

Luis Torres had enrolled in the WTS Graduate Certificate in Urban Pastoral Ministry (GCUPM) program in 2011.

"In my heart was always a desire to study, but because of my financial situation it was hard to go to school," he says. His friend and mentor, C.J. Kingdom-Grier, who works in Western's Admissions Department, encouraged him to pursue his dream.

Luis works as the Connections Coordinator at Engedi Church in Holland and feels his studies at WTS have helped him navigate cultural differences within his own church body.

"Western has been a tool in my life helping to connect me with people from outside my normal social circles and outside my own traditions."

After much encouraging, Luis's parents, Gretchen and Javier Torres, also enrolled in the GCUPM program this year.

Their experience with Hispanic ministries in Holland, the Chicago area, and Puerto Rico provide invaluable insight into the fastest growing population in the country.

Javier is the pastor of Pentecostal Church of God, and Gretchen ministers alongside him. Gretchen is also the administrator of the Instituto Bíblico Ebenezer (IBE), a Hispanic theological training institute headquartered in Chicago.

"We want to make a difference in the Hispanic community, and that's why we're here," Javier says. "We have to first reach the community and then learn other cultures too.

We learn a lot at Western and to know the Bible through every point of view is really important."

For Gretchen, the Lord has opened doors she never expected.

WTS was exploring ways to be involved in theological education for Latino pastors when President Tim Brown and Academic Dean Leanne Van Dyk found out that she was the administrator of IBE.

After Gretchen explained IBE's curriculum and vision to develop leaders and pastors in the Hispanic community, WTS invited her to host the institute within the seminary.

Since October 27, more than 30 Latino pastors have been on the seminary campus each Monday night for classes taught by IBE instructors. Gretchen says the students are happier and more comfortable in their new learning environment.

Recently Gretchen organized "Tabernacle Night," where first year IBE



students presented models they made of the Tabernacle as well as priestly garments. Dr. Tom Boogaart spoke on the meaning of the Tabernacle, and the event was translated in English and Spanish. Over 150 people attended.

"I believe God wants unity in his church," Gretchen says. "Coming from one church sometimes we think 'we are the one,' but that's wrong."

Javier adds, "We're still very conservative in our church, but we have an open mind. I'm still Pentecostal, but this experience with Western and the Reformed church is really, really good for us."

Last semester, all three Torreses were in Dr. Bechtel's Old Testament Foundations class.

"Never in a million years did I think I'd have my parents as classmates," Luis remarks. "They taught me how to walk, and now we're being taught together the Word of God—so God is teaching all three of us how to walk."

"To be honest, the language is a big, big challenge for us...it's a barrier," says Javier. "But we know we can do it, so why not give it a try? That's why we're here. It's fun to see my son in the corner and my wife by my side."

"We have to prepare in ministry in order to reach others—in our case, the Hispanic community," Gretchen says. "I believe this program is going to help me to grow, and I'm going to help others to grow too."

WTS continues to pursue relationships with the Hispanic community. Distinguished theologian Rev. Dr. Justo L. González will be the 2015 WTS commencement speaker and will offer himself as a resource to Latino/a leaders in the greater Holland area when he is here in May.

In addition, Rev. Dr. Daisy L. Machado, Professor of Church History and Director of the Hispanic Summer Program at Union Theological Seminary, will be the 2015 Leonard F. Stoutemire Lecturer in Multicultural Ministry.



**Rob Housman** began work as associate director of development on March 5. A native son of First Reformed Church in South Holland, IL, Rob spent much of his career in director-level roles for Young Life in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan (Holland), and Wyoming. Rob is also a student in our distance learning M.Div. degree program.

Along with an eager pursuit of theological study, he brings 20 years of Christian ministry experience, all of which include fundraising, to the Development Department. He most recently served as community pastor of Cheyenne Hills Church in Cheyenne, WY. Rob, his wife, Shanna, and three daughters moved to Holland in February.



Congratulations to **Suzanne McDonald**, associate professor of historical and systematic theology, who became an American citizen on February 25, 2015. Suzanne is originally from Australia and took part in a ceremony with 78 people from 37 different countries in the Gerald Ford Museum auditorium in Grand Rapids, MI.

Dr. McDonald taught two adult education sessions at La Grava Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids on "Dealing Faithfully With Dementia" on February 1 and 8.



Professor of Old Testament **Carol Bechtel** is teaching a 5-week series on the book of Esther at Faith Reformed Church in Zeeland, MI, during March.

Together with RCA Chaplain David Blauw, Dr. Bechtel is directing the HarpCare initiative—a cooperative effort between Western Theological Seminary and Holland Hospital aimed at training students to use harp in pastoral care. Three students are in the program, progressing well. Watch the online video to learn more: [www.vimeo.com/106960200](http://www.vimeo.com/106960200)



The Episcopal Diocese of California invited **Scot Sherman**, director of the Newbigin House of Studies and WTS Newbigin faculty member, to consult on "Church in the 21st Century" at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco on February 4. He networked with local leaders and shared best practices for church planting and revitalization.



On Feb. 19-20, **Theresa Latini**, professor of practical theology and pastoral care, presented a lecture and workshop on cultivating communities of care at Yale Divinity School with Deborah Hunsinger of Princeton Seminary. It was based on their co-authored book, *Transforming Church Conflict: Compassionate Leadership in Action* (Westminster John Knox).

On Feb. 28 Dr. Latini offered a workshop at First Reformed Church, Holland, MI, titled "Communicating with Care, Deepening Relationships." Dr. Latini taught two day-long workshops on transforming congregational conflict in Evansville, IN, and Jeffersonville, IN, on March 10 and 12.



**Robert Van Voorst**, professor of New Testament, is serving as an adjunct professor of Greek at Hope College for the spring semester.

In the January-February 2015 issue of *Biblical Archeology Review* in the article, "Did Jesus Exist? Searching for Evidence Beyond the Bible," Lawrence Mykytiuk extensively quotes Dr. Van Voorst's book, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*.



The Board of Trustees has approved the appointment of **Han-luen Kantzer Komline** to the position of assistant professor of church history and theology, effective July 1, 2015. Professor Kantzer Komline is currently the 2014-15 faculty fellow.

On March 3 Professor Kantzer Komline presented a chapter of her dissertation on Augustine and the will at the Hope-WTS Theology Seminar, a monthly gathering of scholars from Hope College and Western Theological Seminary who present a paper and engage in robust Christian theological discussion.

On March 25 Professor Kantzer Komline will teach the Wednesday night Bible study for Hope College students at Pillar Church in Holland.



On February 7, Associate Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling **Chuck DeGroat** was the keynote speaker at Dordt College's "Day of Encouragement," a day meant to inspire, encourage, and equip God's people for ministry. Dr. DeGroat spoke on showing hospitality to the toughest

people to love, weariness, and the antidote to exhaustion. Chuck is a graduate of Dordt. That weekend he also preached at First Reformed Church in Sioux Center, IA, and spoke at Northwestern College's chapel service on Monday, February 9.

Dr. DeGroat's book, *Toughest People to Love: How to Understand, Lead, and Love the Difficult People in your Life—Including Yourself* (Eerdmans) was chosen by the editors of *Leadership Journal* as a best leadership book of 2014.



**J. Todd Billings**, the Gordon H. Girod research professor of Reformed theology, announces the publication of *Rejoicing in Lament: Wrestling with Incurable Cancer and Life in Christ* (Brazos Press). The editorial office of *First Things* is sponsoring a book launch on April 7 at 7pm, 35 East 21st St. (6th floor) New York, NY. Call to RSVP: (212) 627-1985.



On February 25, Friendship House Director Melissa Conner and the residents of Friendship House hosted a group of Calvin Theological Seminary administrators and students who are interested in the possibility of starting a Friendship House at their seminary. Dan DeVries, the FH resident advisor, gave tours with the friends, and many good conversations took place between the visitors from Calvin and FH friends, parents, and WTS staff. Calvin Theological Seminary will continue to explore what shape such an interface might take there.

## On to glory...

**Floyd Gouloze '50**  
b. Prairie City, IA 1/1/1929  
d. Scottsdale, AZ 6/5/2014  
Hope '50; WTS '53;  
CA Grad School of Theology '75 (Ph.D.)  
*Reformed churches served:*  
(1953-56) Bethel, Kalamazoo, MI  
(1956-63) Mayfair, Lakewood, CA  
(1963-98) Glass & Garden Com, Scottsdale, AZ

**Donald Lam '52**  
b. Holland, MI 3/18/1920  
d. Kalamazoo, MI 1/1/2015  
Hope '49; WTS '52  
*Reformed churches served:*  
(1952-58) Montclair, Denver, CO  
(1958-63) St. Thomas, Virgin Islands  
(1963-77) Calvary, Kalamazoo, MI  
(1977-85) Raritan, IL  
(1994-97) Calling pastor, Bethany, Kalamazoo, MI

**Edwin Martin '57**  
b. Patterson, NJ 5/4/1931  
d. Vicksburg, MI 1/28/2015  
Hope '54; WTS '57 & '72 (MCE)  
*Reformed churches served:*  
(1957-59) Ontario, NY  
(1959-63) Bethany, Flint, MI  
(1963-69) Dunningville, Allegan, MI  
(1969-72) Southridge, Kalamazoo, MI  
(1972-97) Special Min, Youth Worker, Kalamazoo, MI  
(2001-11) Pas for Srs, First, Portage, MI  
25 yrs as Classis Clerk

**Donald J. Vuurens '66**  
b. Holland, MI 11/1/1932  
d. Muskegon, MI 1/10/2015  
Davenport '55; Hope '63, WTS '66  
*Reformed churches served:*  
(1966-70) Baileyville, IL  
(1970-74) Forest Home, Muskegon, MI  
(1974-76) Special Min, World Vision  
1976 - Dismissed to the Methodist church, where he served 40 yrs as a United Methodist minister.

**Marvin Buekelman '61**  
b. Monee, IL 9/8/1935  
d. Holland, MI 1/2/2015  
Western WA State U '57; WTS '61  
*Reformed churches served:*  
(1961-66) First, Melvin, IA  
(1966-70) Westwood Hgts, Omaha, NE  
(1970-81) Roseland, Blomkest, MN  
(1981-90) Otley, IA  
(1990-95) Sixth, Holland, MI  
(1995-99) assoc, Calvary, Holland, MI  
(2000-11) congr care, Beechwood, Holland, MI

**Richard Stadt '63**  
b. Grand Rapids, MI 11/3/1937  
d. Gary, IN 8/6/2014  
Hope '59; WTS '63  
*Reformed churches served:*  
(1963-69) American, Worthington, MN  
(1969-77) Tinley Park, IL  
(1977-79) Ross, Gary, IN

**Charlotte Heinen '65**  
b. Lima, IA 3/29/1937  
d. Juneau, WI 2/8/2015  
Central Coll '58; WTS '65 (MCE);  
Jesuit Sch of Theol '84 (PhD)  
*Reformed churches served:*  
(1969-72) Minister of Children Min, Crystal Cathedral, CA  
Also directed Christian education and children's ministries at churches in Michigan, Iowa, California and Florida.

**John Peter Ekema '66**  
b. 12/20/1926 Kalamazoo, MI  
d. 2/11/2015 Hartselle, AL  
Hope '64; WTS '66  
*Reformed churches served:*  
(1966-82) Free Grace, Middleburg, IA  
(1982-87) Matlock, IA  
(1987-90) Eden, Herman, MN  
(1990-95) Faith Comm, Eddyville, IA  
(1995-97) Newton-Zion, Erie, IL  
(1998-99) int, First, Knoxville, IA

## News

At its October 2014 classis meeting, the Muskegon Classis bestowed upon **John DeKam '86** the title of Minister Emeritus of Muskegon Classis for his faithful service and honored him for his ministry as a Specialized Interim Minister.

**Matthew Floding '96 (DMin)** received a grant from the Tom Russell Charitable Foundation to create a national board for Friendship House Partners and to foster the formation of Friendship Houses at seminaries across the country. Former WTS faculty member Dr. Jaco Hamman and current member **Dr. Benjamin Conner** serve on the board. Matt was involved in the creation of Friendship House at Western and at Duke Divinity School. Five additional seminaries and divinity schools are considering Friendship Houses in their communities.

**Bill Freeman '05** began serving as the senior pastor at the United Church of Christ in Menifee, CA, on September 1, 2014.

**Darrell Delaney '12** earned a Th.M. in Pastoral Care from Calvin Theological Seminary in May 2014. On Sept 28, 2014, he was ordained in the Christian Reformed Church and installed as campus pastor of Madison Square Church in Grand Rapids, MI.

On December 28, 2014, **Dan De Graff '14** was installed as pastor of Corsica Christian Reformed and Grace Reformed Church in Corsica, SD.

**Kevin Slusher '14** was ordained on Sunday, January 11 at Third Reformed Church in Holland. He is now pastor at the Reformed Church of Port Ewen, NY.

**Stacey Sterkenburg '14** was ordained on February 1 and installed into specialized ministry as a family therapist with Bethany Christian Services in Grand Rapids, MI. The service was held at Hope Reformed Church in South Haven, MI.

On March 1 at Trinity Reformed Church in Holland, **Kayla Fik '14** was ordained and installed as a specialized minister, commissioned as the Ministry Coordinator for Zeeland Classis RCA, providing leadership, coordination, and pastoral care.

## Alumni/ae Day: May 11, 2015

Contact **LuAnne VanSlooten** at 616-392-8555, x109 or [luanne@westernsem.edu](mailto:luanne@westernsem.edu)

- 12:00 Luncheons for 40th, 50th, & 60th reunions (Classes of '55, '65, '75) Luncheons are \$10/person. An invitation packet will arrive in April.
- 2:00 Presentation by Commencement Speaker Rev. Dr. Justo L. González, a leading voice in Hispanic theology. Location: Mulder Chapel, *public invited*.
- 5:00 Alumni/ae Banquet in the Western Theological Seminary Commons honoring Distinguished Alum Dennis Voskuil. *Dinner is \$20/person*.
- 7:30 Class of 2015 Commencement held in Dimnent Chapel, Hope College. *No tickets are needed to attend; doors open at 6:45pm*.

## We need a little help...

This issue of *The Commons* contains news of the passing of Charlotte Heinen (MCE, 1965), a pioneering woman student at Western. I'm writing to our alumni to ask for help understanding her story and our history.

**Jeff Munroe**  
Vice President of Operations and Advancement



Was Charlotte the first person to receive the MCE degree here? What led her to Western?

The first woman to graduate from WTS was Elsie Wen-Hua Shih Law,

who received a Bachelor of Divinity alongside her husband Jeremy Chong-Hian Law in 1963. They are both deceased—my guess is they fled Communist China (which is especially interesting in light

of the articles in this issue about Bob Van Voorst and Han-luen Kantzer Komline). But Elsie wasn't our first woman student.

Our records indicate several women took classes at WTS in the late 1930s, all spouses of male students. Was enrollment so low in the heart of the Great Depression that we invited spouses to study? Does anyone know the full story?

There are other pioneers I want to know more about. Who can tell me about Duke Richardson, who graduated with Sam Williams as our first African-American students in 1951? The class of '51 was remarkably diverse—Antonio Moncado and Chun Young Chang were also in that class. Those names don't sound Dutch to me! Who were they? I am anxious to hear from you and to know more.

Write or call: [jeff@westernsem.edu](mailto:jeff@westernsem.edu) or 616.392.8555, x111

# A Note from

PRESIDENT TIMOTHY BROWN



Friends, I am so pleased to tell you that Faculty Fellow Han-luen Kantzer Komline will be joining the faculty full time this fall as our assistant professor of church history and theology.

Some of you will recall that eight years ago the seminary began the Faculty Fellow program,

designed to take positive steps toward racial-ethnic diversity in the faculty. We invite doctoral students to teach part-time at Western while completing their Ph.D. studies in a seminary related field. A unique feature

of the program is that faculty fellows may be considered for regular faculty appointments. So far we have had two other fellows—the second was Chris Dorsey, who also joined the faculty.

Our students love Han-luen. She is articulate, energetic and committed. She also speaks four languages, including Mandarin Chinese, and can read Latin, Koine Greek and biblical Hebrew. That's impressive!

She is a Ph.D. candidate in theology at the University of Notre Dame. Her dissertation is on Augustine's conception of will. She is passionate about church history.

I bless the Lord for this wonderful addition to the Western community!