

The Commons

A PUBLICATION OF WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
NOVEMBER 2004 VOL. 8 NO. 1

DNV Notes from

President Dennis N. Voskuil

One of the common misconceptions about theological education is that it's all theory and no practice. To be sure, the intellectual demands of courses in Greek, Hebrew, Biblical studies, theology, church history and others are daunting. But formation for ministry is most effective when theory is put into practice—when what is learned in the classroom is experienced in ministry.

Because experience is often the best teacher, students at Western are engaged in the practice of ministry throughout their seminary experience. Within our faith and learning community, they lead worship, gather prayer groups and engage in pastoral care. Outside our community, students are assigned to teaching churches, congregations throughout West Michigan which nurture and mentor students as they experience many forms of pastoral ministry. And during at least one summer of their seminary years, students are engaged in full-time ministry in congregations and chaplaincies across North America.

These summer assignments tend to be invaluable, even life-changing, experiences. This was certainly true of my assignment with the Midland Reformed Church in Midland, Michigan, during the summer of 1969. With a single year of seminary under my belt, I appeared in Midland eager but rough around the edges. Under the gentle tutelage of Pastor Gary Wilterdink, the consistory and members of the congregation, I was encouraged to be a pastoral leader. I preached and prayed in worship, taught Bible school, made pastoral calls, called on non-members and participated in consistory meetings. Betty and I established life-long friendships with many members of the congregation.

It was a wonderful summer experience; it has had a lasting impact upon my life and ministry. I recall one example related to preaching. Following my first sermon, a rather long and winding effort to say everything related to the text, an elderly man greeted me in the narthex with gentle counsel: "Son, you needn't proclaim the whole counsel of God in one sermon."

As students this fall tell the stories of their summer assignments, I am reminded of the people of Midland Reformed Church who graciously contributed to my formation for ministry. I am also reminded that experience is a wonderful teacher.

God be praised!

Dennis

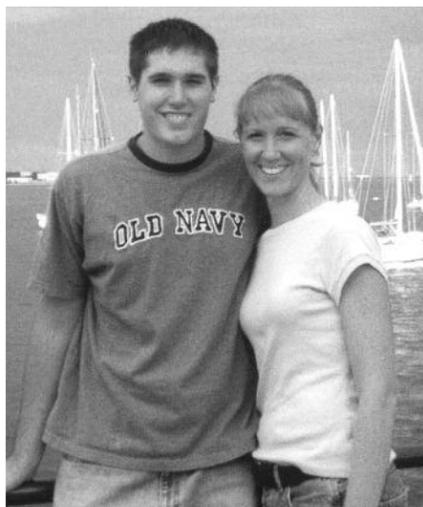
Forming Pastors

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 in national parks and campgrounds, and camp directors. As they preview what full-time ministry is like, these Christian leaders of tomorrow are able to further define God's call on their lives.

Josh & Heather Van Leeuwen Pitcher Hill Community Church, North Syracuse, NY

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses..." were the words that began the scripture passage for my final sermon at Pitcher Hill Community Church. Indeed, Heather and I had been surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses during our 9 1/2 weeks in North Syracuse, New York. Whether it was my mentor—a pastor who takes his call, mentorship, and spiritual life seriously—the many children who filled the hallways of church during Camp Creation (Vacation Bible School), the numerous families who opened their hearts, homes, and lives, or a special young girl and her family who witnessed courage and strength during a battle with cancer, we were continuously surrounded by and reaped the benefits of living amongst so great a cloud of witnesses.

Wanting to be a blessing to the people at Pitcher Hill this summer, I learned quickly that it was I who would be receiving the blessings. For 9 1/2 weeks I stepped into the role of "pastor" and received a taste of what ministry is like in a church setting. The gracious congregation allowed me to experience parish ministry in numerous ways. I was allowed to preach or lead worship every Sunday. Hearts and emotions were laid bare before me during hospital calls and home visits. For one week, Heather and I were sent off to Camp Fowler to

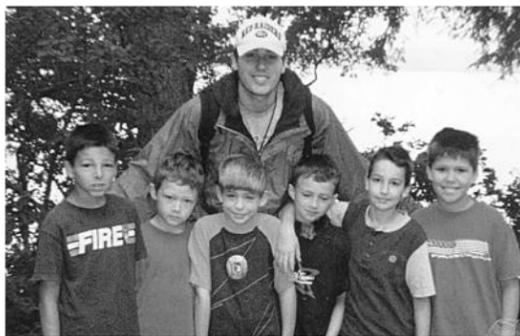


be cabin counselors for 3rd-5th graders—an experience like none other! I was also given the humbling task of organizing and administering Vacation Bible School, a week in which many children, both in and out of the church, experienced the love of God. These experiences and so many more were particularly helpful in gaining experience of what pastoral ministry might look like someday.

However, this summer was so much more than the various tasks that I completed. When I think of my summer at Pitcher Hill, I always go back to the people, the great cloud of witnesses that filled the pews and have filled my heart. Coming off an intense first year at Western, this seminary student was weary and did not know what to expect. According to His perfect plan, God led

Heather and I to Pitcher Hill, and in turn, led us to a congregation who embraced their role as a teaching church, as encouragers, and as cheerleaders with utmost sincerity. We were overwhelmed by the love and support of this congregation and were given renewed strength and passion to follow the call of Christ upon both of our lives. We praise God for this summer of learning,

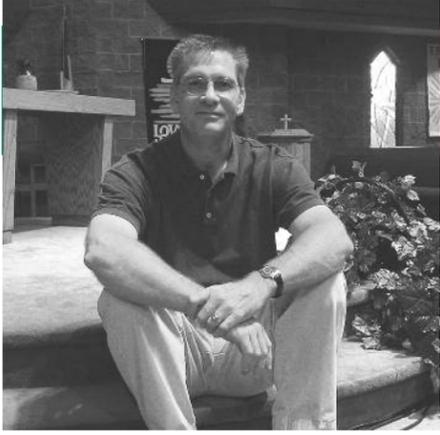
of growth, of new relationships, and for a great cloud of witnesses that have given us encouragement and perseverance to follow the race God has laid out before us.



Josh with Deer Cabin and Heather with Hawk Cabin at Camp Fowler



Josh is a middler and Heather is a junior at WTS.



Jeff Allen

Faith Community Church
Littleton, CO

Our summer in Littleton, Colorado, began a year ago in Rome. My wife Elyse and I were blessed to be a part of the "Art and Architecture" tour led by Western's Dr. Don Bruggink. On the first day of the

trip in the Detroit airport we met David and Nancy Van Wyk/Phillips and began a friendship. By the guidance of the Holy Spirit the next spring that relationship led to an invitation for a summer internship by the Rocky Mountain Classis and Faith Community Church.

I arrived in Denver on Monday, June 14. My wife, Elyse, and children, Sandy, James and Kristin, arrived a few weeks later. Words cannot begin to describe our praise and thanksgiving to God for the amazing experiences we shared during our nine weeks at Faith Community Church. The time went by so quickly! From initial introductions at Vacation Bible School... through experiences in a small group... time with folks of the Interfaith Hospitality Network Ministry... mission testimonies from groups who went to Sawmill, NM and Reynosa, Mexico... to times when we gathered together as an entire body of faith in worship of God—we were greatly blessed and shaped by the leading of the Holy Spirit and the people of Faith Church.

Along with our time at Faith Church, we had the opportunity to spend a significant amount of time with David Phillips and others exploring the breadth of worship and ministry within the Rocky Mountain Classis. We gathered with Tim Miller, Ron Gray and Steve Brooks to discuss "church planting". We made ministry visits with Bruce Van Dusseldorp, Greg Brower, Barb Morphew, Rex Schultz, and Karl Neerhof, all of whom are at the front line of



James, Jeff, Sandy, Elyse, and Kristin Allen

revitalizing and defining what it looks like to be a mission outpost in the midst of their communities. To me the Rocky Mountain Classis represents a microcosm of our denomination. Most significantly, I was impressed with the intentionality of this classis as they seek to collegially support one another in the midst of their diversity for the purpose of expanding God's kingdom on earth.

God provided our family with experiences beyond our greatest hopes and prayers. Aside from the truly awesome beauty of Colorado, God showed us the great beauty of hearts enflamed with the passion of the Holy Spirit in ministry and mission.

We cannot praise God enough for the blessings and experiences we received during this time. We thank God for the willingness of Trinity Reformed Church in Holland to give me a summer leave from my duties as pastor of adult ministries and to allow our family this time to explore ministry in a new location. We thank God for the willingness of the Classis to "blaze a new trail" and go where they haven't gone before by extending an invitation to a WTS intern for the summer. And we thank God for the open arms and embrace of Faith Community Church during our brief time of ministry with them. Thank you for sharing with us your passion and love for the gospel of Jesus Christ.



Representatives of the Praise Band: Bruce Dawkins, Barb Wing, Jeff Allen (wearing Denver Broncos hat!), Rob Wing, and Jacqui Wing

Reflections of Ministry

At the 25 Year Mark

by John W. Smith '79

By God's grace, my wife Sue and I navigated the highs and lows of pastoral ministry for 23 years at New Life Community Church. Ministry on Long Island was demanding, challenging and fulfilling. The culture was radically different from our families of origin in southwest Michigan. Yet, by God's grace, we experienced sustained growth for many years in a culture that did not readily embrace the gospel. We cherish many wonderful memories of relationships with people who found new life in Christ, grew in their faith, and experienced joy in serving others.

Through the years, I found pastoral ministry to be more lonely and painful than I anticipated. I learned from personal experience that relationships provide the context for the greatest blessings and the deepest pain in ministry. People who love God can do very hurtful things to others

who also love God and are trying to serve Him.

After twenty years in the same church, my wife Sue and I were deeply wounded by a group of discontented church members. As a result, we took the advice of friends and spent a week at Blessing Ranch in Colorado, a Christian leader resource and renewal center. The intensive counseling with Dr. John Walker saved my ministry. A year later we went back for a second week and came back renewed for two more years of service to the congregation we dearly loved.

In 2002 we took a leap of faith and left New Life Community Church to move back to Michigan, with no position waiting for me. There I went through a seven month period of intense soul-searching, which eventually led me to become a part of Alongside, Inc., a ministry to pastors and missionaries. As I came

alongside wounded pastors, God redeemed every painful experience in my own ministry and used it for His glory and purpose. What a privilege to be part of someone else's healing. What a blessing to use my own wounds to help others.

If you find yourself where I was in my ministry—confused, hurt, missing the joy and purpose you once felt—I urge you to seek assistance. There are confidential resources available that are specifically tailored for Christian leaders and the unique challenges they face. You are not alone.

My position at Alongside is ending at the end of the year, but I believe God has a good plan for the next chapter of my ministry. He continues to form me and shape me, and there is never any wastage. God uses each experience of my life, whether joyful or painful, effective or ineffective, as a building block and as a means of enriching my ministry and impact on all those He will put in my path. I look forward with faith and anticipation to the next 25 years.

Rev. John W. Smith is director of development and pastor care at Alongside, Inc., Richland, MI

Renewal and Restoration Ministries:

Alongside, Inc., Richland, MI 269-671-4809

www.alongsidecares.org

Blessing Ranch, Inc., Livermore, CO 970-495-0920

www.travel.to/blessingranch



A PUBLICATION OF WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



Paul Van Maaren
Church of the Good Shepherd
Lynnwood, WA

I will always remember my experience during the summer of 2004 with the brothers and sisters of the Church of the Good Shepherd (CGS) in Lynnwood, Washington. I was fortunate to share in the ministry of CGS and serve as their pastor for the summer. I am also thankful for the full time ministry experiences those ten weeks offered. Let me share with you two of my highlights.

The first begins in the middle of last May. I sat down with one of my professors at WTS to talk about the summer ahead. I was challenged in that conversation to put to heart and memorize the scripture for each Sunday, which I did. I was, however, unprepared for the reaction of the congregation.

After the first Sunday, one woman said to me, "It sounds like God is speaking right to me." Another said, "It's like Jesus teaching in the temple." I'm not God and I'm not Jesus, but how was it that they heard God speaking? I found an answer to this question while reading my "text-book" for the summer, *Working the Angles* by Eugene Peterson. He writes, "A living God speaks a living word and the Holy Scriptures are the written representation of that word. We read scripture in order to listen again to the word of God spoken, and when we do, we hear him speak. Somehow or other these words live" (Peterson, 113). Scripture internalization or "memory by heart" became essential for me in sermon preparation and indispensable for preaching.

The second experience I want to share began on the second Sunday at CGS. On that morning before worship I met with a young woman who was uncertain about her salvation. She came to my study with her mentor and for the next while we



Paul and Courtney Van Maaren

talked together about what it meant to be saved and to become a follower of Jesus. We prayed through it and she confessed her faith in Christ. But that's not all! Over the course of the summer, this woman and I had multiple conversations. The last of these led up to her profession of faith before the elders.



Paul greets Tanner Weaver, a young member of the congregation.

Finally, on my last Sunday at CGS, this young woman professed her faith publicly and was welcomed into the church family. It was an honor to walk with this woman for eight weeks and to watch her faith grow as I witnessed God's grace in her life. I am filled with gratitude to God for what I saw him do and for an opportunity to be there at that specific time and place.

Going into the summer, I was very selective of the experience I wanted. I knew I wanted to be a solo pastor in a vacant church in some region of the country I had not visited before. Other opportunities came and went, but I continued to hold out for the experience I wanted to shape me, and God was faithful. The lessons I learned from those ten weeks with the brothers and sisters at CGS are indispensable. I will always draw from them in the future ministry where God calls me.

As I reflect on the experience of last summer's assignment in south Minneapolis, I am reminded of a certain Negro Spiritual, which begs:

*Give Me Jesus, Give Me Jesus
You can have this ole world
But Give Me Jesus.*

From the moment I stepped out of my car onto the corner of 4th Avenue and 31st Street where prostitutes strolled and drugs flowed freely, I had but one song to sing—"Give Me Jesus."

I didn't realize, however, that my song joined the chorus of the many others who lived, worked and frequented this very section of town. This truth became crystal clear to me as I assumed my position as interim pastor at Central Church, the formal worship center housed under the organizational structure of Urban Ventures, a not-for-profit organization committed to south Minneapolis.

At first the song was hard to hear amid the needs of the community. It was easier to hear the cry of the teenager who asked for prayer for her friend who was estranged from his family. She had consulted witch doctors and sorcerers and thought it wouldn't hurt to consult the God of Central Church as well. I could even hear her mother who cried out for guidance in how to appropriately parent this child whom she had adopted as an infant but as a teenager had slipped out of her grasp. With their lips they cried out, "Help me!" but with their hearts they begged, "Give me Jesus."

It was no different Sunday after Sunday as people young and old, black and white, poor and rich, made their way to this small worship center to hear the Word of the Lord. They gazed blankly at the theology but echoed "amen" to the application. One young man sat at the back of the church throughout



Denise (far right) with her daughter Gezelle and the Harris family of Central Church

Denise Grier
Central Church,
Urban Ventures
Minneapolis, MN

the entire healing service. As the invitation was made for those seeking healing to approach the altar, I watched him leave the young lady by his side and make his way to the front of the church. "This is my first day clean, I haven't had a drink all day," he boasted. "I want to be free from this addiction." Several weeks later, he and I sat at a table near my office and I inquired about the young lady who accompanied him in church at that healing service. He confessed he didn't know who she was; he had awakened from a night of drinking to find her in his bed, but since that Sunday he had not had any contact with her or the drink which had welcomed her. At that moment it became clear to me that at the altar that Sunday my brother was saying more than "I want to be free..." He was repeating that old Negro Spiritual, *You can have this ole world, but give me Jesus.*

Jesus was in south Minneapolis when I arrived, and though I brought him with me, I have to admit, I also found him there.

Answered Prayer

Denise Grier and her husband C.J have labored fruitfully at Maple Avenue Ministries in Holland during her tenure at Western. Because of Denise's call to urban, multi-cultural ministry, we sought a summer internship opportunity that would allow her to participate in another faithful urban model for ministry.

The right partner was identified as Central Church/Urban Ventures in Minneapolis. However, there were housing and financial roadblocks, which we took to God in prayer.

Rev. Art Erickson, president of Urban Ventures, called with exciting news. A woman who had benefited from the ministry had sent

a check for \$1000 — exactly the amount yet needed to fund Denise's internship. On top of that, someone gave a house that would become the site of their new leadership center. It could be used for Denise's summer assignment and removed later to make way for the new center.

Art clearly understood this as God's amazing provision for what proved to be an equally amazing summer of service by Denise.

— Dr. Matthew Floding, WTS

www.urbanventures.org

with Robert Van Voorst

When you were growing up, did any particular person influence you into ministry?

My 5th and 6th grade teacher, Ivan Compagner, and my pastor, Paul Colenbrander, at Maplewood Reformed in Holland, MI. My parents also encouraged it. They practiced the faith in a situation of chronic sickness, and this had a tremendous impact on me.

What appeals to you about the academic world?

To study a field, know it, and contribute to it. I like teaching the New Testament to students—not everybody gets to talk about Jesus and Paul all the time! I also like the tasks of research and writing.

When I was a parish pastor, twelve years in one church allowed me to develop long-term relationships with people of different ages and circumstances. Here at seminary we see people for three years, and then they're gone. It's a short time to do our work. It's intense, but very appealing.

Are there lessons learned as a pastor that help you to be a better teacher to future pastors?

It's important that parish pastors have a firm grasp on the essentials of the Gospel—what the Gospel is, what it isn't, and then minister out of that. This is tested in the crucible of pastoral experience, and if one doesn't articulate it in the mind and believe it strongly in the heart, it can soon shake apart.

I try to talk realistically to my students about pastoral work. It's often difficult. Much of what you learn here in seminary will work in the "real church," but some will not. You have to be cooperative, patient, and forgiving, even when—especially when!—you don't want to.

Are you a tough teacher?

Yes. I keep traditional standards for student performance, and try to enable them to reach these standards. It's a part of loving God with all our minds.

Do you keep those high academic standards in the textbooks you write?

That's getting more difficult lately. Educational abilities of many college students are declining so much that many textbooks must be "dumbed down."

My *Anthology of World Scriptures* went through four editions over twelve years—same style, content, and organization. Its new fifth edition is not as demanding intellectually. Paragraphs, sentences, and words are shorter. It has friendlier eye appeal, like bulleted lists and boxes.

What other changes have you seen in publishing?

Commercialization is getting stronger. Pub-

lishing houses, even university presses, will not accept any book unless it will make a significant profit. Just because a book isn't profitable doesn't mean it isn't valuable.

Another change is in the electronic aspect. Forward-looking textbook publishers are insisting that all textbooks have electronic supplements, usually on their websites. My *Reading the New Testament Today* has interactive quizzing, chapter summaries, helps & instructions

for professors, PowerPoint® slides, and extra essays on various topics. It's almost like writing another book, but it's valuable for students and professors.

How do your students benefit from your work as a writer?

Western students can feel confident, because my "stuff" is constantly peer-reviewed, and used nationally. Not only do I teach 100 students at Western every year, I teach about 10,000 other students indirectly through my books. Writing keeps me current and contributing, and my students benefit

Lifenotes

b. Holland, MI, 1952
A.B. Hope College, '74; M.Div. Western Theological Seminary, '77; STM, Union Theological Seminary, '79; Ph.D. Union Theological Seminary, '88.
Married to Mary Bos in Lucas, MI, 1974
Children: Richard (22), graduate student at U of S Florida studying Jazz and Nicholas (16), junior at West Ottawa High School (1977-89) Pastor, Rochester Reformed Church, Accord, NY (1989-99) Professor of Religion, Lycoming College, Williamsport, PA (1999-) Professor of New Testament, Western Theological Seminary

Book Publications:
The Ascents of James: History and Theology of a Jewish-Christian Community • *Building Your New Testament Greek Vocabulary* (3 editions)
• *Anthology of World Scriptures* (5 editions) • *Readings in Christianity* (2 editions) • *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* (co-authored) • *Anthology of Asian Scriptures* • *Jesus Outside the New Testament* • *Reading the New Testament Today*

Favorite author/book: N. T. Wright's three volumes on Jesus

from this.

My textbooks are field tested in classes with my students. A couple of my students, Jonathan Brown and Andrea Philipps Poppleton, helped me with the interactive quizzing in my New Testament book.

Do you like writing more than teaching?

Teaching has an immediate personal interaction with individuals and the group. It's gratifying to walk out of class and think, "That really clicked!" Of course, other times we're thinking, "Oh boy, I really blew that one."

Writing is much lonelier. It takes a lot more work than teaching, and a supportive spouse helps! You write by yourself. You send an article or book off for peer review, all anonymous. You revise and publish it if it's accepted (most



Dr. Robert Van Voorst
Professor of New Testament



Studying at home, 1960

manuscripts aren't), and only a few of its readers will communicate with you about it.

Writing is still fun to do. It's interesting to grapple with the challenge. For example, there are already dozens of New Testament textbooks. I have to think very carefully, not just about the con-

tent, but about the prevalent pedagogies—what can I do that's not just different in terms of a marketing niche, but is academically and educationally valid?

You teach a lot of adult education classes in churches. What topic benefits church members the most?

It's most beneficial for them to know the Bible, how to read it, and how to apply it to their contemporary lives. Biblical literacy, even in the RCA, is way down, and the present generation knows less about the Bible and their

Reformed heritage than previous generations did. We've got to start recapturing our tradition. We can do this, but it's difficult.

What would be a practical solution for a church to follow?

I have no easy solutions. People must read the Bible, think about it, and live it. In our denomination it's crucial to read Scripture from a Reformed perspective.

We as a Reformed church are becoming more and more Americanized—Arminianized!—and less and less Reformed. Denominations have to be what they are, and find their place in the mix of Christianity by holding to their own foundations, living and relating on the basis of those foundations with other churches.

Besides writing and teaching, what are other passions in your life?

I enjoy golf, yard work, and cooking. When I invite students and their families to my house and cook meals with my family's assistance, sometimes they're astounded: "YOU cooked this?" Having students over helps them to understand me more as a person in my home and family context, and it models pastoral hospitality.

When you were 22, is this where you thought you'd be 30 years later?

Well, it wasn't what I thought—it was what I hoped. This, in essence, is my dream job, and I consider myself blessed.

I do miss the parish life, though. I loved being a pastor, doing all sorts of pastoral work. I content myself with the realization that now I minister indirectly, through the students here that become pastors.



The Van Voorst family, 2004

© De Vries Photography 2004



Bob greets Florence Countryman and Norma Martin at a historical service of Rochester Reformed Church, 1988

Surprise!

As you could tell, I was totally surprised and a bit overwhelmed by your expressions of appreciation and love, but I will hold the occasion in my heart forever. I am blessed to have wonderful faculty and staff colleagues and to share my life with remarkable students.

*With appreciation and affection,
Dennis Voskuil*



Dennis Voskuil's 10 years at WTS

Community Celebration October 26, 2004

Dennis invites us into the home of his heart. He loves us and we know it. He knows each of us by name; he knows where we went to college, what sports we played, our hometowns, and who our families are.



Dr. Tom Boogaart speaks on behalf of the faculty.



The Board of Trustees members played a numbers game to illustrate changes in the last ten years. (Kay De Cook pictured)



Granddaughter Nola joins Dennis and Betty Lou Voskuil in the celebration.



Student Jamie Schmeling leads the community in a blessing over Dennis.

Dennis knows each of our voices. I don't necessarily mean he recognizes us by our voices in the hall (which he does). Rather, I mean the voices we carry with us, the things about which we are passionate, the words we proclaim here and will go on to proclaim outside the seminary.

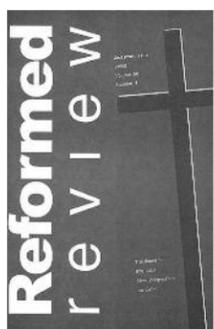
Not only does Dennis know each of these unique voices, but he appreciates, respects, and nurtures them. Dennis encourages us to be not who he wants us to be, but who God has called and created us to be. He sees us with a vision that is of God and encourages us to grow into men and women uniquely formed by God. For this vision and support we are profoundly grateful.

Thank you, Dennis, for your love, vision, and commitment. May God continue to bless you and to bless others through you.

—Susan Kingma, speaking on behalf of the students

The **Reformed Review** is published online now. You will be able to find issues at www.westernsem.edu/publications.html

The Autumn 2004 issue of



Reformed Review (volume 58, number 1) is "RCA Mission in Chiapas: History and Prospect" and includes papers from Roger De Young, J. Samuel Hofman, Vernon J. Sterk and Charles Van Engen.

Subscriptions for a photocopy of the online version of *Reformed Review* are \$15/year. (call 616-392-8555, attn: Rayetta Perez)

Change is Good!

Fall is a beautiful time of year. As I write this, the colors are vibrant and the air has a certain crispness to it, as do my newly discovered favorite Honeycrisp apples. The leaves are changing and so is Western Seminary.

At the fall Board of Trustees meeting, we celebrated ten years of leadership by Dennis Voskuil. While celebrating his leadership, the board shared some telling numbers. The campus has grown from 60,000 square feet of space to over 86,000 in the last 10 years. The faculty size has increased from 14 to 18 in that same time. The endowment has grown from \$9.5 million to \$32 million. And the reason for all of this, the number of students has risen from 139 to 216! Wonderful changes have taken place at Western Theological Seminary.

Of course not all change is good. In the last 10 years, student tuition has doubled, and financial support from churches has dropped to its lowest level of just 11% of our operating cost. Sometimes change is difficult.

The beautiful leaves are changing color, but soon the branches will be empty of these leaves. The pastors who serve our churches today will someday retire, leaving our pulpits empty. Springtime brings new life to the branches of the trees and growth takes place out of the changing of the seasons. Western is preparing the new life of leadership for the Church of Jesus Christ and your support helps sustain the growth.

The seeds of change have been planted and the branches are bearing fruit. Please give as you are able so that all who are called may respond. Change is good. God is Good!

—Ken Neevel, Director of Advancement & Communications

Faculty News

On October 25, the WTS community hosted a banquet to honor **James V. Brownson** for his exemplary eight years of service as academic dean.

The seminary has flourished under Dean Brownson's academic leadership. He gave shape to a new mission-based M.Div. curriculum and helped guide the revitalization of the Th.M. and D.Min. programs. He played a major role in developing a strategic plan for the school's future, resulting in the construction of additional facilities and the implementation of a distance learning M.Div. program and a center for the continuing education of the church. Recently he headed the seminary's team for the 10-year review process of the Association of Theological Schools.

Dr. Brownson decided to step down from the half-time position in order to devote more time to teaching and to scholarship for the sake of the Church. As the seminary has become larger and more complex, he has concluded that the deanship needs full-time attention.

Leanne Van Dyk will succeed Dr. James Brownson as academic dean beginning January 1, 2005. The board of trustees approved her full-time administrative appointment for a three-year term.



she has agreed to take on this new responsibility. The position of dean of the faculty will remain unfilled.



On November 10, **Steven Chase**, Associate Professor of Christian Spirituality, served as a panelist at "Jewish and Christian Mysticism: Convergences and Divergences." The event featured Dr. Arthur Green and Dr. Bernard McGinn and took place at Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI.

Dr. Chase was ordained as Minister of Word and Sacrament by the Presbyterian Church (USA) on October 31.

Matthew Floding, Director of Formation for Ministry, taught at the Pastors and Christian Workers Leadership Conference at the Khartoum Evangelical (Presbyterian) Church in Khartoum, The Sudan, the first week of November. His wife Marcia, director of Children's Ministry at Third Reformed Church, Holland, traveled with him and addressed the opportunity of children's ministry in the church.

As part of a National Science Foundation grant, **David Stubbs**, Assistant Professor of Ethics and Theology, led a mini-series on "Ethics in Science and Engineering" for summer research students in science and engineering this last July.

Recently Dr. Stubbs presented biblical arguments concerning open table practice to a Presbyterian task force charged with examining proposed changes to the PC(USA) Book of Order concerning the practice of the Lord's Supper.

Through Journey (Western's center for continuing education), Dr. Stubbs led a Brown Bags and Books discussion of Robert Webber's book, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* on October 21.

Professor of New Testament **Robert Van Voorst's** book, *Reading the New Testament Today*, was published in August. Designed as a textbook for college and seminary courses, it employs five of the major interpretive methods used in New Testament study today: historical, narrative, social-scientific, feminist, and cross-cultural. More information and an interactive website for this book is at www.wadsworth.com/religion.

Who Will They Be?

Have you thought about what the next generation of pastors will look like? Will it be the mischievous little boy that lives down your block? The one who plays basketball in the driveway with his friends? The little girl with pigtails who just lost her front teeth? Who will minister to your grandchildren and great-grandchildren? Will they themselves be called?

Leadership for the church of the future is of critical importance. The growing number of pastors reaching retirement age coupled with the number of new churches that are beginning present us with a challenge.

God's Spirit is moving. A record number of men and women have come to Western Theological Seminary in preparation for ministry. Henry Blackaby writes in *Experiencing God*, "Watch to see where God is working and join Him." God is working at Western Seminary—will you help?

The Zwemer Society is a growing group of individuals who are building a financial foundation to insure that trustworthy, quality, theological education remains available for coming generations. If you have made an estate or planned gift arrangement that includes Western Theological Seminary, we welcome your membership! If you have been considering your legacy, would you consider joining?

For more information on the Zwemer Society or to discuss your gift arrangements, please call the Advancement Staff at 1-800-392-8554.

Laura De Vries
Associate Director of Advancement



Calls to the Class of 2004

Master of Divinity graduates

- Eddy Aleman**, B.A., M.Div., of Toronto, Ontario, Canada — Church Planter, Classis of California, Fresno, CA
Bryan Boersma, B.A., M.Div., of Holland, MI — Minister of Outreach and Youth, First Reformed Church, Oak Harbor, WA
Ardean Brock, B.S., M.Div., of Caledonia, MI — Chaplain, Luther Village, Grand Rapids, MI
Michael Christmas, B.B.A., M.Div., of Portage, MI — In the candidating process
Miguel Cruz III, B.A., M.Div., of Holland, MI — Pastor, Reformed Church of Palmyra, Palmyra, NY
Richard Davis, B.A., M.Div., of Winthrop Harbor, IL — Pastor, Martin Reformed Church, Martin, MI
Wayne DeVrou, B.R.E., M.Div., of Holland, MI — Pastor, First Reformed Church, Oostburg, WI
Elizabeth Brown Hardeman, B.A., M.Div., of Des Moines, IA — Co-Pastor, Alton Reformed Church, Alton, IA
Julie Hoving, B.S.W., M.Div., of Holland, MI — In the candidating process
John Jason Hubbard, B.A., M.Div., of Grand Rapids, MI — Interim Education Minister, Fountain Street Church, Grand Rapids, MI
Mark Kleinheksel, B.A., M.Div., of Holland, MI — Pastor, South Blendon Reformed Church, Hudsonville, MI
Aaron Kuecker, B.A., M.Div., of Holland, MI — Associate Pastor, Community Reformed Church, Zeeland, MI
Daniel Wels Lannin, B.A., M.Div., of Elgin, IL — Associate Pastor, Oaks Community Church, Chino, CA
Angie Mabry-Nauta, B.S., M.A., M.Div., of San Antonio, TX — Pastor, Downers Grove Community Church, Downers Grove, IL
James Nathanael Meldrim, B.A., M.Div., of Glen Ellyn, IL — Pastor, Kinderhook Reformed Church, Kinderhook, NY
Michele Monroe-Clark, B.A., MSW, MATS, M.Div., of Park Forest, IL — Clinical Pastoral Education, Howard Community Hospital, Kokomo, IN
Gary Mulder, M.Div., of Rock Rapids, IA — Pastor, Chandler Reformed Church, Chandler, MN
Jonathan Myers, B.A., M.Div., of Valparaiso, IN — In the candidating process
Jon Nienhuis, B.A., M.Div., of Holland, MI — Pastor, Ebenezer Reformed Church, Morrison, IL
Reggie Padin, B.S., M.Div., of Holland, MI — Pastor, Fourth Reformed Church, Holland, MI
Elizabeth Potter, B.A., M.Div., of Flint, MI — In the candidating process
Carolyn Raar, B.A., M.Div., of Los Gatos, CA — Associate Pastor, Beechwood Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan
Terry Scholten, B.A., M.C.E., M.Div., of Hudsonville, MI — Minister of Small Groups, Fairhaven Ministries, Jenison, MI
Jessica Shults, B.A., M.Div., of Grand Rapids, MI — Pastor of Discipleship Ministries, Standale Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI
David Smallegan, B.A., M.Div., of DeMotte, IN — Pastor, Fairview Reformed Church, Fairview, IL
Daniel Teerman, B.S., M.Div., of Holland, MI — Bible Teacher and Chaplain, Bradenton Christian School, Bradenton, FL
Jason VanAnkum, B.C.S., M.Div., of Drayton, Ontario, Canada — Pastor, Powell River Reformed Church, Powell River, British Columbia
Randall VanderWeit, B.S., M.Div., of Warrensville Heights, OH — Christian Reformed Church World Relief Council in Tanzania, Africa
Randal VanDoornik, B.A., M.Div., of Detroit, MI — Pastor, Second Reformed Church, Wyckoff, NY
Aaron Vis, B.A., M.Div., of Urbandale, IA — Pastor, Covenant Community Church, Hudsonville, MI
Dale Vos, B.A., M.Div., of Pella, IA — Pastor, Oaks Community Church, Chino, CA
Aaron Vriesman, B.A., M.Div., of Hart, MI — Studying at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI
Patricia Bos Weatherwax, B.S., M.Div., of Kalamazoo, MI — Clinical Pastoral Education, Bronson Hospital, Kalamazoo, MI

Master of Religious Education graduate

Pablo de Tarso Canche Tun, B.Th., B.R.E., M.R.E., of Holland, MI — Pastor, Iglesia de Roosevelt Park, Grand Rapids, MI

Master of Theology graduates

- Barna Kali**, Th.M., returned to Cluf-Napoca, Romania
Reynoldson Kharnaioir, B.Th., B.D., Th.M., returned to Meghalaya State, India
Aluu Nnali, B.D., M.A., Th.M., of Afikpo, Imo, Nigeria, pursuing his Ph.D. at Concordia Seminary, Ft. Wayne, IN
Enio Pinto, M.A., Th.M., M.L., Th.M., returned to Parana, Brazil
Rowland VanEs, Jr., B.A., M.A., M.Div., Th.M., of Holland, MI — teaching at St. Paul's United Theological College, Zimuru, Kenya, Africa
Andrew Wafula, B.D., Th.M., returned to Kitale, Kenya
Samuel Wasswa, B.A., Th.M., returned to Kampala, Uganda

Alum Profile

Phil Assink is Sr. Pastor of Faith Community Church in Edmonds, Washington.

What is unique about ministering in the Pacific Northwest?

Nearly everything happens here by choice. The church has to “compete” for people’s allegiance. For some, this is very frustrating. Others see it creating a more genuine community of people who are intentionally following Jesus.

This also means guilt doesn’t work. Those who try it invite a mass exodus. It’s a challenge to convince people that admitting you are sinful is good news! How do I deal with sin redemptively? I can’t ignore the brokenness, but I still proclaim the transformational power of the gospel.

Less is assumed about church here. People don’t automatically respect me because I’m a pastor. At times it feels like my diploma is on par with a Starbucks placemat! Ministry depends on building trust and credibility.

The natural beauty of the Northwest seems to encourage a

“nature cult.” Everyone wants to worship God alone in nature. Immersed in the majesty of creation, it is hard to argue, but the biblical emphasis on community has to be laid alongside this sentiment.

People seem to be extremely “spiritual” here. The culture holds that whatever you believe is fine as long as it works for you. A conversation about spiritual things is easy, but the uniqueness of Christ is looked at with serious reservation.

What similarities have you found between your congregations in California and in Washington?

Affluence has been an issue everywhere I have gone. It’s an issue for me personally—I certainly have everything I need and most of what I want. Affluence can so easily distract us from our dependence on Christ. It permeates our entire society, not just the west coast. This is one reason why stewardship is a critical component of any church’s message.

Do RCA members in the Northwest feel disconnected from the rest of the RCA?

Technology and transportation minimize the distance, but regular face to face contact just isn’t realistic. We just have to adjust our expectations.

Many members do not have any RCA background. The title “Reformed” is a virtual mystery. The pastoral challenge is to communicate what it means to be a part of the RCA family.

As a Classis we want to raise the visibility of ministry opportunities here. Our goal is to communicate to seminary students that this is a place where serving will not only impact spiritual growth significantly, but where ministry can lead to spiritual birth. We are hoping more students can spend a summer



Phil & Melissa Assink

What was it like mentoring one of our students, Paul Van Maaren, this summer?

I appreciated the opportunity to connect with my old roots and celebrate the great things happening at Western. Paul and I were able to cover valuable ground, and I hope sharing my experiences gave him some framework for his theological learning.

How long have you been a chaplain for the police department?

Seven years. The most obvious opportunities are the crisis responses. Less well known are the contacts with officers in the department.

I volunteer in this capacity because it is one of the ways our church serves the community, and it’s a natural extension of my style of ministry.

What fires you up?

My passion is primarily geographic. I grew up in Washington State, so my roots are an important part of connecting here. Whether a concern for the environment or a respect for Mount Rainier, I feel a deep sense of belonging.

I get fired up communicating Christ to a secular culture. The community I serve is part of the greater Seattle area, but it has a distinct, smaller town feel. I enjoy meeting people and building a bridge from where they are to where Christ can connect with them.

I feel strongly about long term ministry. Much of what I am doing after ten years in the same community didn’t start happening until I had been here 5-6 years. I want to continue to work with unchurched folks I have met and pray for the opportunity to be a partner in leading them closer to Christ.

What are you still learning about ministry?

Back in seminary, my first prayer of confession in chapel lasted only 13 seconds—maybe that’s why it has taken 25 years to discover the value of a day set

apart! Long term ministry takes intentional cultivation. I left seminary ready to “do ministry”. Now I am discovering the value of time away to think and reflect. I am currently developing plans for an extended renewal period in ’06. I have observed that about 5-7 years into a ministry, the urge to change can emerge. A sabbatical allows space to discern if you need to change who you are where you are currently serving or to change locations. I think the average movement of pastors about every seven years in the

RCA has created a culture of unintentional sabbaticals by relocation. Good ministries can be interrupted for the wrong reasons.

The Rev. Philip Assink, WTS M.Div. '81

here and get excited about returning to the mission front we call Classis Cascades.

Any advice for seminary students?

Take a technology course before you leave. At the very least learn how to run a sound system and work with a secretary. That does not fall under biblical studies, theology, or pastoral care — it is in the essential category!



Phil with confirmation class led by Associate Pastor Rebecca Stegeman-Riekse '00 (at left).

What did you learn at seminary that has consistently helped you over the years?

I learned how to think. Seminary can give you tools to help you think and act appropriately, but it is impossible to cover every nuance of ministry that will arise. If you learn how to learn, you can last for a lifetime. If you try to learn what a pastor does, you will be outdated before you land your first assignment.



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

“Brown Bags and Books”

- Buy the book, (all texts available at the Sacred Page Bookstore), read it, and come with your lunch to discuss the book with seminary professors. Beverages provided.

Time: 11:30 am to 1:00 pm

Where: Garden Level at Western Theological Seminary

December 16 - The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity by Philip Jenkins. Discussion led by Dr. George Hunsberger

January 20 - The Five People You Meet in Heaven by Mitch Albom. Discussion led by Dr. Tim Brown

February 17 - Life after Grace: Daily Reflections on the Bible by Carol Bechtel. Discussion led by Dr. Carol Bechtel

March 17 - Contemplation and Compassion by Steven Chase. Discussion led by Dr. Steven Chase

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+

Jan. 11 – Feb. 15, Tuesday mornings, 10am-12noon
“Living, Dying and Rising: The Rhythm of the Christian Life” with Dr. Cynthia Holder Rich

Jan. 11 – Feb. 22, Tuesday evenings, 7-8:30pm
“Christian Approaches to Other Faiths” with Dr. Robert Van Voorst
“John’s Unfolding of the Ageless Good News” with Dr. George Hunsberger

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

Registration information is available at:

www.westernsem.edu/journey

Questions? Call Judy Bos at (616) 392-8555, ext. 128



Children watch as Pastor Phil baptizes a baby.

News

On June 22, **George D. Boerigter '66** was the honored guest and featured speaker at the ceremonial ground breaking of a new 150,000 sq ft factory in PuDong, Shanghai, China. The factory is a joint venture with Sound Off, Inc. and will make the newest technology LED lamps for school buses and commercial vehicles in the US and Europe. George is President/CEO of Sound Off, Inc. in Hudsonville, MI.

Steven Vander Molen '77 completed two terms on Western Seminary's Board of Trustees in June 2004, the last two years as moderator of the Board. He was elected President of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in June as Synod met on the campus of Wheaton College in Chicago, Illinois. Steve continues to serve as the senior pastor of the First Reformed Church in Orange City, IA.

In July **Philip A. Rauwerdink '88** began his fourth term as a Specialized Interim Minister. He is serving the Hope Community Reformed Church, West Bend, WI following the retirement of their pastor, **Rev. Vernon Smith '76**.

Dean Van Farowe '00 and his wife Christine are proud parents of twin boys, Zachariah and Elijah, born July 21, 2004. Dean is pastor of Calvary Reformed in Cleveland, OH.

Doug '00 and **Kristi '01 Kiel** welcomed daughter Sophie Margaret into the world on October 30, 2004. She weighed 2 lbs and was 13.5" long.

In August, **Eddy Aleman '04** started a Spanish weekly radio broadcast called "Cambiando Vidas" ("Changing Lives"), aired on KIRV 1510AM Saturdays from 1:30 - 3:00 pm in Fresno, CA. Eddy is the Hispanic Church Multiplication Leader of the Classis of Central California.

on to Glory...

Martin Hoekman '38
b. Monroe, SD 1/11/13
d. Cresco, IA 6/14/04
Hope College '35; WTS '38
Reformed Churches served:
First, Monarch, Alberta, CAN (1938-45)
First, Archer, IA (1945-48)
Hope, George, IA (1948-53)
First, Inwood, IA (1953-59)
Bethel, Passaic, NJ (1959-62)
First, Maurice, IA (1962-69)
Knapp St., Grand Rapids, MI (1969-74)
Also served at: Hope Haven School, Rock Valley, IA (1974-75)

George Chermak, '44
b. Whiting, IN 11/25/15
d. Mt. Morris, IL 9/17/04
Central College '41; WTS '44
Reformed Churches served:
Conklin, Conklin, MI (1944-46)
Martin, Martin, MI (1946-55)
Hope, Detroit, MI (1955-59)
Ebenezer, Oregon, IL (1959-66)
Emmanuel, Waupun, WI (1966-80)

John Herman Ettema, '46
b. Choteau, MT 9/18/21
d. Holland, MI 7/26/04
Hope College '43; WTS '46
Reformed Churches served:
First, Monroe, SD (1946-51)
Hope, Lincoln, NE (1951-59)
Chandler, MN (1959-69)
Grace, Allen Park, MI (1969-87)

Otto Grundler, '50
b. Burbach, Germany 4/3/28
d. Kalamazoo, MI 9/12/04
University of Gottingen; WTS '50
Professor, Western Michigan University (1960-95)

Joseph Carleton Holbrook, Jr., '52
b. Indianapolis, IN 10/17/26
d. Bridgewater, NJ 6/4/04
Columbia University '48; WTS '52
Reformed Churches served:
Berdan Heights, Fairlawn, NJ (1952-57)
Westside, Cicero, IL (1957-64)
Grace, Brooklyn, NY (1964-69)
Mountain View Community, Denver, CO (1970-77)
Westwood, Westwood, NJ (1980-89)
Also served as: Executive Director, Evangelical Concern, Denver, CO (1977-80)

Lambert John Ponstein, '52
b. Elburg, the Netherlands 3/2/12
d. Holland, MI 10/21/04
Hope College '48; WTS '52
Professor, Hope College (1952-77)

Necrologist: Glen Bruggers '51

Special Gifts made to Western Theological Seminary

In Memory of Antonio Moncada

Jeannette Moncada

In Memory of Elizabeth TenClay

Jay & Jerrie Bosch
Engel & Annetta Corstange
Leon & Ruth Dykstra
Dorothy Goldschmeding
Duane & Robin Haack
Carl & Christine Hakewessell
I. John & Etta Hesselink
Jake & Mary Khatchikian
Lois Kronemeyer
Ruth Kronemeyer
Arleen Lapekas
Burrell & Norine Pennings
Reformed Christian Fellowship,
Grand Rapids, MI
Ruth Rewerts

Willard & Laura Rooks
Royal Park Condominium
Association, Zeeland, MI
Paul D. & Evie Schmidt
John M. and Marian Smith
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Lester & Coral Swieringa
Harris Walters

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Larry Bakker
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Bob Gardner
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Cynthia Holder Rich & Mark Rich

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Eugene & Lois Kitchen
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Mark & Susan LaFontaine
Sharon Meeuwsen
George & June Prins
Randall & Jacalyn Soper
Jean Vandenberg
David & Garnet Vanderleek
Mark Vanderleek
Kelly & Kim VanderZwaag
James & LuAnne VanSlooten
Dennis & Betty Lou Voskuil
C. Bruce & Mary Ann Wierks
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Lorraine Busman
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Henry J. VanDerSchaaf
Evelyn VanEngen
Bob & Peggy Webster
Jason & Marian Wyngarden
Ted & June Zandstra
George & Joan Zuidema

In Honor of Dr. Dennis Voskuil

Arland & Eunice Benson

Welcome!

During the past year, the seminary has grown in terms of the number of students, the amount of programs offered, and sheer physical space. We welcome four new employees, two of whom are filling brand new positions created to meet Western's growing needs.



Brian Plumhoff
Maintenance
Assistant



Regan Postma
Acquisitions and
Serials Technician,
Beardslee Library



Carol Ann Bailey
Administrative
Assistant for
Journey



Kerry Weavers
Receptionist,
Accounts
Payable &
Special Projects

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