My experience as president has been deeply satisfying and fulfilling. I have been blessed by gifted and dedicated faculty who have been willing to embrace new approaches in preparing the next generation of leaders for the church of Jesus Christ; by wonderful staff deeply invested in our ministry; by an administrative team faithfully devoted to our mission; by a remarkably adept Board of Trustees who affirmed and cared for my wife Betty and me; and by hundreds of students who brought joy, energy and purpose to every day of our life together.

I have been thinking of you because you have made our ministry possible through your prayers and gifts. With the apostle Paul I thank God every time I remember you because you have shared in our ministry from the very first day until now.

You need to know that while I plan to leave the presidency in the summer of 2008, I will not be leaving the seminary community which I love so intensely. I am privileged to hold the Marvin and Jerene DeWitt Chair of Church History, and I will continue as a teaching member of our fine faculty. I also know that you will continue to support our ministry with your prayers and gifts.

My friends, thank you for “sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.”

Distinguished Alumni of 2007

Delbert Vander Haar ’47
by Marlin Vander Wilt

Delbert J. Vander Haar trusted in God to lead him through life as a son, student, husband, father, and grandfather. He faithfully pursued God’s call through 59 years of ministry within the Reformed Church in America.

I first met Del in his role as the pastoral advisor to the regional board members of the Iowa State Christian Endeavor board. His quiet suggestions, attentive study of our decision making, and deep spiritual direction impressed me as he helped us to be faithful leaders.

In 1960, Delbert was called to develop and co-direct a new RCA National Youth Fellowship. He and Harold De Roo developed a national structure and programming for high school youth fellowships across the country. They also directed the Caravan Program, Volunteer Summer Program for college students, national and regional youth conferences, and work camps.

Once again I had an opportunity to

(continued on page 2)

Paul Hostetter ’54
by I. John Hesselink ’53

Like many earlier RCA missionaries Paul Hostetter was born in a farm home, not in Michigan or Iowa, but in the Swiss-German “Pennsylvania Dutch” community of Lancaster, PA. He gives great credit to his godly parents, members of the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination, who modeled faith and work for him. How Paul ended up in the Reformed Church and at Western Seminary is due to the providence of God for which we are thankful.

At the age of 16 a special touch of the Holy Spirit called Paul to the ministry. He had no idea this call would take him to serve in Sudan, Pakistan, the RCA’s Board of World Mission, two Michigan churches, Chiapas, Mexico, the Crystal Cathedral, Reformed Bible College, and Words of Hope International Radio/Print Ministry. Few Western Seminary graduates can match such diversity in serving Jesus Christ!

Paul’s academic career is equally diverse with studies at Lancaster Bible College, Wheaton College and Graduate School, Western and Fuller Seminaries, Michigan State University, and linguistics at the University of North Dakota. He completed phonemic analysis of the Murle (Sudan) language at the Kennedy School of Mission, later used in the translation of the Murle Bible. His evangelical zeal was enhanced by numerous academic skills.

(continued on page 3)
The Vander Haar family, 1989

Distinguished Alum Delbert Vander Haar ’47

Work with Del when I directed the 1968 National Youth Assembly in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. There I met Del’s wife, Trudy, and his children: Tim, David, Philip, and Jane. It was good to see him modeling the “family man” to me and about 1000 high school youth.

The next year Del moved his family from New Jersey to California to become Secretary for Regional Services in the West and to create a new ministry for Family Life. Using his master’s degree in counseling, he and Trudy led Family Life Seminars across the country. In 1972 at the first National Family Festival in Estes Park, Colorado, 3000 adults, youth, and children connected through intergenerational Bible studies, celebration worship, and speakers. My entire family attended, reaping the blessings of Del’s planning and leadership.

Del and Trudy faithfully followed changes in denominational structure. In 1973 they moved to Orange City as their children began to leave the nest, find lifemates, and raise families of their own. By 1989 it was time to retire but not to quit working. Del and Trudy accepted an invitation to serve the Yokohama Union Church in Yokohama, Japan—Del as minister and Trudy as Christian Education director. Once again our paths crossed. Del came to study my pastoral library at the American Reformed Church in Orange City as he developed a traveling library for pastoral ministry and preaching. This man was constantly learning and never assumed that he “knew it all.”

In Japan Del discovered he still loved to preach and that his 29 years of administrative experience helped him deal with the government’s red tape and reluctance to recognize the church as a non-profit organization. This was accomplished just before they left Japan. Delbert’s concluding ministry was at Hope Church, Holland. The Parkinson’s disease (diagnosed before Japan) was progressing, but this faithful “wounded healer” served as a pastoral caregiver to many and a model to those who suffered through debilitating illnesses.

In God’s providence, I was once again privileged to relate to Del, this time as a visiting pastor to retired ministers and their spouses for the Board of Benefit Services. Although his last years were difficult, Del continued to reflect on Psalm 16:11, “The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage.” In his final days when audible speech had all but left him, he could still repeat the words of the 23rd Psalm, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.”

God called his servant Delbert home on November 15, 2006, after a life of abiding faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and of faithful service within the Reformed Church in America, from coast to coast and across the Pacific Ocean on a pilgrimage of ministry. With deep gratitude to almighty God, it has been my privilege to know and celebrate that ministry.

Del and Trudy lead a marriage workshop, c. 1972

Reflections of Ministry

The Years Speed By…

by John J. Arnold ’52

As fast as the weaver’s shuttle, our life is rushing by. Nothing makes us more aware of life’s brevity than the celebration of an anniversary, when we call to remembrance things past. In the mind’s eye, events of long ago become as current as news in the morning paper. Anniversaries are also an opportunity to thank and praise God for His lifelong, providential care.

Last year my wife and I had the privilege of returning to a church we had pastored half a century ago in Rhinebeck, NY, to participate in their 275th anniversary. While serving there, we had celebrated with them 225 years of Christian witness. To place this all in its context, the church at that time received a congratulatory telegram from then sitting President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

The memories of those days form part of the tapestry of our lives. Here God gave us opportunity to proclaim His Word and provide spiritual leadership within the Christian community. We also expended a great deal of effort preserving and maintaining the beautiful historic building with its colonial graveyard, the resting place of Revolutionary War soldiers. What we did was not unique, but was and is the task of any serious pastor. Yet, some memories stand out, distinctive to us and our ministry. These special memories generally revolve around people and the impact made on their lives. For property, no matter how old or beautiful, finally passes away, but the human soul is forever. The supreme experience of the Christian pastor is to be instrumental in leading a person into a closer walk with God.

One episode illustrates the type of memory that brings joy to a pastor’s heart. While at this old church, God blessed a young
that three million people have since learned to read through the primer New Day and Nirta Kitchens—Unique Books.

Winifred was ill in Pakistan. Complications developed during furlough in 1966, and she died in 1967. During her illness and afterward Paul served as a field secretary for World Mission and as international pastor at University Reformed Church at Michigan State University, where he pursued graduate studies in communication. There he met Dorothy Clark, skilled in biblical instruction and completing her Ph.D. They married in 1969, and Dorothy became a wonderful mother to the three girls born to Paul and Winifred. In 1973 Paul and Dorothy accepted an invitation to teach in the Bible school of the Chol people in Chiapas, Mexico. Together with Henry Stiegenga and Chol colleagues they initiated Theological Education by Extension, which expanded into seven centers with 250 students attending. Paul wrote a four-volume course on doctrine, as well as workbooks on worship, preaching, and roles of elders and deacons. Dorothy wrote and taught numerous book studies in Old and New Testament.

In 1980 Paul accepted a call to the Crystal Cathedral as Minister of Mission and Evangelism, where Paul and Dorothy made a lasting contribution teaching the large Becomers Sunday school class. The next surprising venture was to become professor of mission and cross-cultural studies in 1985 at the Reformed Bible College (now Kuyper College) in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Paul is spending his “retirement years” at Words of Hope, writing, editing, and supplying cross-cultural notes for messages of radio minister David East.

Paul has made countless contributions to the cause of Christ through the RCA, ranging from congregational and regional synod offices to mentoring a Sudanese “Lost Boy” who will be ordained in Grand Rapids as a pastor in 2007. He has lived out a lengthy, productive missionary career. Thousands of people around the globe have been touched by his life and witness. In Paul’s own words, “What a life for a farm kid! I praise God for the joy, labor and privilege of sharing God’s Good News with the world, backed by fantastic support and crucial training through the RCA.”

Reflections of Ministry, cont.
Alumni/ae Day

1957 50 years

Front: Dick Evers, John Busman, Jack Boerigter, Norman Menning, Levi Akker
Back: Earl Laman, Wes Kiel, Ken Vermeer, Thurm Rynbbrandt, Nevin Webster, Robert Dykstra, Eugene DeHoogh, Donald Jansma


1967 40 years

Front: Wendell Karsen (Th.M.), Don Jansen, Ralph Houston
Back: David Bach, Paul Swets, Ralph Robrahn, Calvin Tyson


1982 25 years

F. Peter Ford, Jr., Paul Hansen, Paul *Bud* Pratt, John Nylitray, Kent Fry


* deceased

AlumLine

Kenneth A. Dykstra ’46 served five churches over 41 years, retiring in 1987 and returning to Pella. His wife died unexpectedly later that year. In 1988 he joined the staffs of the First RCA in Pella and the First CRC in Oskaloosa, and he is still on the Oskaloosa staff. After 60 years of preaching, he finally gave that up, but he still teaches a class at the Pella church on Wednesday nights. He married again in 1990, and he and his wife are pleased to share the bounty of their garden that runs along the length of their duplex. “We could pick tomatoes out of our bedroom window!”

Harold Englund ’50 is keeping well in retirement, preaching and teaching where and when needed. His wife, Enid, is also well and active. They are living at “The Samaritans”, a retirement community related to the Evangelical Covenant Church in Santa Barbara, CA.

Peter Breen ’52 and his wife have a goal of walking 100 miles each month, which they usually meet. He writes how much he enjoys hearing reports of the ministry of their two sons, as well as that of his grandson Timothy as he began his ministry this past year.

J. John Hesselink ’53 continues to advise Western’s Master of Theology students and teaches a course occasionally at the seminary. He gave the plenary lecture at the international Calvin Congress in Emden, Germany last August and lectured and preached in Seoul, Korea in November. Latest publication: Introductory essay for Calvin on Prayer.

On September 17, 2007, Ann and Don Nicholls ’54 celebrated their 59th wedding anniversary, the same day their first great-grandchild, Isaiah Daniel Hurt, was born.

Just a few days after Christmas 2006, William Hoffman ’56 encountered “an unusual bend in the road of my life’s journey” with the results of a radiology report. Since then he has had two surgeries and some complications, but he is progressing very well, “ahead of patients my age.” He praises God for the support of family and friends.

Gerrit Booger ’57 was a pastor of Reformed churches in North Dakota, Kentucky, and Iowa for 13 years before resigning in 1970 to take up a career teaching in the public school system in Little Rock, Iowa (he had started teaching in the fall of ’68).

2007 marks 50 years of ministry as Eugene R. DeHoogh ’57 continues to serve as an ecumenical chaplain at the Dow Rummel Village in Sioux Falls, SD, sponsored by the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ. He began there in the fall of 1990 and continued as a part-time chaplain after retiring from the Faith Presbyterian Church in 1998.

JUNE 2007 A PUBLICATION OF WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Earl A. Laman ’57 has published a stand-alone sequel to his first novel, A House Beyond Expectations. The new story, Those Acts of Enlightenment, encourages the reader to trace the discoveries of an unrecognized kind of prodigal son. See www.authorhouse.com

Even after undergoing surgeries and suffering a stroke in 1995, Nevin B. Webster ’57 has biked over 30,000 miles in the last 15 years. Right now he and his wife Dot are on an evangelism trip to spread the good news of Jesus Christ through 38 states and 10 provinces of Canada. The trip will take about 20 months, with Dot driving their motorhome and Nevin biking another 28,000 miles!

Robert Zap ’57 retired from being a full time pastor in 1994 but continues to serve as a part-time pastor at Andrews First Christian Church in Andrews, TX. Robert was elected mayor of Andrews in 1995 and still holds the position. He and his wife, Joyce, have been married 56 years with 7 children and 3 wonderful grandchildren.

Glenny Schouten-Thies, widow of Norman Schouten ’59 has published two books written by Norm: If Sandals Get Wet and A Thousand Splinters of Grace.

Ronald Geschwendi ’62 is serving part time as Coordinator for Commissioned Pastors, Synod of the Great Lakes.

Renske and Wendell Karsen ’63 will be leading a travel seminar to Hong Kong, China, and Tibet June 6-23. The group will ride “the highest train in the world to the roof of the world.” The purpose of the seminar is to study the culture, church, and contemporary scene in the places visited.

Gerald E. Bates ’64 (Th.M.) has been appointed interim president of Spring Arbor University, Spring Arbor, MI for the academic year 2007-08.
On May 1, the Western Seminary community was saddened by the death of Dr. James Ivan Cook, professor of New Testament from 1963-1995. His humility, vulnerability and life of grace touched the hearts, minds and souls of students, friends, congregations and colleagues, inspiring all to be genuine, kind and true in relationships.

"Over the weeks of his illness, Jan received hundreds of cards, emails, and other expressions of love," said President Dennis Voskuil. "I have never known anyone so loved and revered by such a wide variety of people. It is surely evidence of a life well lived.

Vicky Memming, a friend, colleague, and former student of Jim Cook, said in a 2004 WTS Distinguished Alum tribute that a gentle and gracious spirit emanated from Jim Cook's core. "In whatever role he fulfilled—proud grandparent, loving husband and father, loyal friend, fierce table tennis player, adept churchman, engaging teacher, lover of literature, music and drama, or compassionate pastor—he made life richer and brought God's grace closer to all who had the privilege of knowing him."

James Ivan Cook was born in 1925 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the fourth of five sons. He graduated from South High School and received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Hope College in 1948 after two and a half years in the army during World War II. He earned a Masters in English literature from Michigan State University in 1949, a Bachelor of Divinity from Western Theological Seminary in 1952, and a Doctor of Theology from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1964. While attending Princeton, he, with his wife Jean, served the Blawenburg Reformed Church, Blawenburg, New Jersey as pastor from 1953-1963.

Dr. Cook taught generations of students as the Anton Biemolt Professor of New Testament at Western Seminary from 1963-1995 and continued to teach courses as needed until his last class in the Fall of 2004, "Christianity in Literature."

In the early 1980s, Dr. Cook served the Reformed Church in America as the vice president and president of General Synod. He chaired the Commission on Theology and edited two volumes of its papers (1959-84 and 1984-2000), published as part of the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America. He also edited essays in honor of Lester J. Koop (Grace Upon Grace) and essays in honor of Richard C. Oudershuyse (Saved by Hope)—two colleagues and theologians he greatly admired. Perhaps his most beloved piece of writing is a little booklet called, Shared Pain and Sorrow: Reflections of a Secondary Sufferer, published in 1991. Many have received comfort and understanding for their own pain by reading Jim and Jean Cook's experience of the suffering and death of their son Paul, taken by cancer as a young man.

Faith Link, a 1995 WTS graduate and pastor of Stanton Reformed Church in Stanton, NJ remembers how nervous she was the first day of Dr. Cook's Greek class. Someone had told her he was a "legend." "Over the years Dr. Cook proved to be just what that person whispered—a legend—but now fear doesn't seize me when I hear or say it. Rather, my heart fills with joy," she says with a smile. "It didn't take long to learn that Dr. James I. Cook, the legend, wasn't a legend because he could parse Greek words, preach on the Pauline Epistles or debate theologically. He was a legend because he embodied Christ's Gospel, lived out his sermons, and knew in dealing with people that the correct word (in Greek or English) is always this: GRACE."
On May 14, 2007 Western Theological Seminary granted degrees to 46 graduates at our 131st commencement service, held in the Dimnent Memorial Chapel on the campus of Hope College. The seminary awarded 32 Master of Divinity (M.Div.), one Master of Religious Education (M.R.E.), eight Master of Theology (Th.M.), and five Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) degrees.

Dr. Marianne Meye Thompson addressed the graduates on the subject, “At Four to One Odds, Why Take up Sowing?” based on the scripture, Mark 4:1-9. Dr. Meye Thompson is Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA.

Jeffrey Fiet, a master of divinity graduate from Wheaton, Illinois, addressed the audience on behalf of the master of theology graduates. The Rev. Robert Yoder, campus minister at Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana, spoke to the audience regarding the experience of pursuing a doctor of ministry degree, which he received that night.

The liturgy for the event was written by graduates Jeffrey Fiet, Abraham Nkhata, Rebecca Town, and Krista Veenstra.

President Dennis Voskuil congratulates Kurt Henry, who has been at the seminary almost as long as Dennis! Kurt began taking classes in 1995 and earned his M.Div. degree this year.

A Season of Celebration and Change

A lot has changed at Western Seminary since Dennis Voskuil became president in 1994. The developments in the academic program, staffing, and facilities are remarkable. Over the course of the next year you will hear more about those changes as we celebrate the final year of Dennis’s presidency.

Meanwhile, I want to share one significant way we will honor Dennis and his leadership. At its May meeting, Western’s Board of Trustees authorized a campaign to establish the “Dennis and Betty Voskuil Fund for Seminary Support.” The money raised will strengthen and uphold existing programs rather than new initiatives, assuring the financial stability of Western as Dennis steps down.

I will share more details of the campaign in the fall, but in the meantime, please pray for Dennis and Betty as they look forward to the next phase of their life. And keep Western Seminary in your thoughts and prayers as together we prepare for the next phase of transition and change in our ministry.

—Ken Neevel
Vice President of Advancement and Communications

Find Classmates

The new Alumni/ae database is now available. To locate a Western Seminary alum, take the following steps:

1) Go to Western’s website at www.westernsem.edu
2) Click “Alumni” in the upper right corner
3) Click “Alumni/ae Directory and Transcript Form”
4) Click “Go to the Alumni/ae Directory”
5) Enter the last name, state abbreviation, or graduation year of the person you are seeking
6) Click the search button

Questions or comments? advancement@westernsem.edu
“What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Micah 6:8
Faculty News

Leonard and Marjorie Maas are charter members of Olivet Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan and lifelong members of the Reformed Church. They raised their family and built their lives upon the principles in Scripture and among the fellowship of believers, and God has blessed them spiritually, emotionally and financially. Their desire has been to pass God’s blessing on in ways reflecting their values. Having been blessed with an ability to spot a great investment, they chose to invest in Western’s future through a Charitable Remainder Trust. The Maas Charitable Remainder Trust will help Western Seminary meet future challenges while providing an income stream for Len and Marge today. Western Seminary and the church are grateful for the Maas’ generosity and will be blessed for years to come.

Couple Meets Future Needs of the Seminary

Leonard and Marjorie Maas are charter members of Olivet Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan and lifelong members of the Reformed Church. They raised their family and built their lives upon the principles in Scripture and among the fellowship of believers, and God has blessed them spiritually, emotionally and financially. Their desire has been to pass God’s blessing on in ways reflecting their values. Having been blessed with an ability to spot a great investment, they chose to invest in Western’s future through a Charitable Remainder Trust.

Throughout years of unprecedented change and growth Len and Marge have watched as the seminary, with courage and conviction, has implemented new programs and strategies to effectively train missionaries and pastors for the church.

“We have had the opportunity through our scholarship at Western to meet many of the students. We believe the future of the church rests upon the character and quality of her leaders. To us, investing in Western Seminary is investing in the future.”

Len Maas

The Maas Charitable Remainder Trust will help Western Seminary meet future challenges while providing an income stream for Len and Marge today. Western Seminary and the church are grateful for the Maas’ generosity and will be blessed for years to come.

Let classmates and colleagues know about the milestones in your life. Send your news items to “Alumline”, Western Theological Seminary, 101 E. 13th St., Holland, MI 49423; fax 616-392-7717; carlaw@westernsem.edu.

June 2007, Vol. 10, No. 3
Editor: Carla Plumert Weese
Art Direction: RCA Production Services
Editorial Council: Dr. Dennis Voskuil, Dr. George Brown, Dr. Robert Van Voorst, Dr. Matthew Floding, Ken Neeve
The Commons is published three times a year for alumni/ae and friends of Western Theological Seminary by the Office of Advancement and Communications, Kenneth Neeve, vice president, 101 E. 13th Street, Holland, Michigan 49423. 1-800-392-8554 or 616-392-8555. Reproduction in whole or in part by permission only.

A Lilly Foundation Theological Scholars Grant has been awarded to J. Todd Billings, assistant professor of Reformed Theology, for a project entitled “Participating in Christ: The Eucharistic Doorway to a Catholic-Reformed Vision of Salvation.” The grant provides funds for research, travel, and course reduction for the 2007-2008 school year. Dr. Billings also received a grant to participate in a “Teaching and Learning Workshop” for seminary professors at the Wabash Center during 2007-2008.

Christian Education professor George Brown taught an adult Sunday school class on the Belhar Confession at Central Reformed Church in Grand Rapids during March (the RCA is studying this confession of faith from South Africa). The RCA Commission on History has appointed Dr. Brown as associate editor of the RCA’s Historical Series.

Jaco Hamman, associate professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling, is pleased to announce the publication of his book, Becoming a Pastor: Forming Self and Soul for Ministry. On May 4 Dr. Hamman lectured on forgiveness and reconciliation at Calvin College for the CRC Abuse Prevention Ministry. June 7-8 he returned to Calvin to be the keynote speaker at the CRC Chaplaincy Conference presenting, “Chaplaincy between Love and Hate” and “Chaplaincy as Play.” On June 15 he travels to Puerto Rico as a respondent “Doing Pastoral Theology in the Post-Colonial Context” for the Society for Pastoral Theology.

Historical and Systematic Theology professor Christopher Kaiser taught a 4-week series on “Living the Christian Faith in a Tech-Wired World” at First Reformed Church in Holland during April-May. He traveled to the Czech Republic in early April to speak to the Silesian Evangelical (Lutheran) Pastors in Karvina and to lecture at the University of Ostrava, Dept. of Christian Education.

Reformed Theology professor Leanne Van Dyk was a keynote speaker March 16-18 at Neshaminy-Warwick Presbyterian Church near Philadelphia. The conference highlighted a Geneva Press series called, “The Foundations of the Christian Faith.” Dr. Van Dyk wrote one of the books in this series, Believing in Jesus Christ.

New Testament professor Robert Van Woest completed several articles for the New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible. Recently he preached or taught mini-courses at North Holland Reformed Church, at Freedom Village retirement community in Holland, and at Eglesia Emanuel Reformed Church in Chowchilla, CA.