Last year, the Class of 2020 could not have their graduation service in person due to the campus shutdown during the pandemic, so they were invited to join the Class of 2021 at this year’s service on May 10. Many graduates returned to Holland to be able to “walk across the stage” and enjoy the celebration.

That particular stage happened to be at Beechwood Reformed Church in Holland, where Commencement was held due to restricted capacity at the usual venue of Dimnent Chapel at Hope College. It was livestreamed, recorded, and broadcast into an overflow room for friends and family (see westernsem.edu/may-10-2021/).

To the Class of 2021 Western Theological Seminary awarded 23 Master of Divinity degrees, 15 Master of Arts degrees, 12 Doctor of Ministry degrees, four Graduate Certificates in Disability and Ministry, and 18 Graduate Certificates in Pastoral Ministry.

Congratulations, Classes of 2020 and 2021!
Graduates of Western Theological Seminary

Hunter Brumels
M.Div.
Holland, MI

Rawee Bunupuradah
D.Min.
Bangkok, Thailand

Lee Camacho
GCPM
Mesa, AZ

Jacob Chipka
M.Div.
Waterville, OH

Brianne Christiansen
M.Div.
Fayetteville, AR

Savannah Clapper
M.Div., GCDM
Lincoln, NE

Anne Elzinga
M.Div., GCDM
Grandville, MI

Francisco Farrera
GCPM
Austin, TX

Luz Farrera
GCPM
Austin, TX

Donna Field
D.Min.
Levittown, NY

Chris Fitzgerald
M.A.
Atlanta, GA

Kristen Fox
M.A.
Santa Ana, CA

Laura Jonker
M.Div.
Brandon, WI

Brigette Kemink
GCDM
Newnan, GA

Matthew Kooi
M.Div.
Midlothian, IL

Llanet Lara
GCPM
Norwalk, CA

Kristin Lassen
M.A.
Remsen, IA

Rita Loyola
M.Div., GCPM
Holland, MI

Scott Newman
D.Min.
Santa Cruz, CA

Caleb Nykamp
M.Div.
Holland, MI

David Parrish
D.Min.
Papillion, NE

Elisha Penning
M.Div.
Kalamazoo, MI

Dennae Pierre
D.Min.
Phoenix, AZ

Gerardo Pineda
GCPM
Norwalk, CA
CLASS VERSE

“So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.”

Galatians 6:9
In March of 2018 WTS announced significant changes to our Doctor of Ministry degree. The new model is cohort-based, meaning that a faculty member guides participants through learning focused around a particular theme. Prior to 2018, each D.Min. student followed his or her own focus of study with an advisor, which wasn’t necessarily related to what other students were studying.

The “Deepening Soul Care and Spiritual Transformation for Mission” cohort led by Dr. Chuck DeGroat is the first D.Min. class of this kind to graduate, and the new model is showing great promise. Out of 14 initial students, 12 completed their dissertations and earned degrees. This theologically and racially diverse cohort brought together students from all over the country, Canada, and Thailand. Together they explored aspects of spiritual formation for the sake of the mission of God.

“Almost immediately a real sense of cohesion and bonding happened,” says Dr. DeGroat. “The group was there to engage around a similar theme, but each person brought a unique story and longing. We became a close-knit community through the challenges of COVID-19, racial tensions of the summer of 2020, vocational disruption, and personal stories of family illness and death.”

The D.Min. graduates describe their time at WTS as transformational. Some are already presenting their doctoral work to a wider audience, like Rev. Heidi DeJonge, who turned her thesis, “Truthing in Love: Engaging Conflict with the Disarming Love of God,” into a video series for the church she leads.

“To those thinking about taking the plunge into a Doctor of Ministry program, Dr. DeGroat says, “I don’t know of a program where a student would get more personal attention, mentoring, community, freedom to explore, and incredible resourcing from a seminary. We invite students into reflection in ways that challenge them and prompt growth.”

To learn more about open and in-process cohorts, visit westernsem.edu/dmin

“The sense of family and authentic community was an invaluable part of the learning process.”

—Mike Gorr
(thesis: “The Pastoral Experience of Shame: One Church Planter’s Story from Shame to Resilience”)

“I learned so much throughout the three-year program and grew immensely from the environment that allowed me to share deeply in the work of other cohort members.”

—Dennae Pierre
(thesis: “Restorative Leadership: Learning Practices of Reconciliation from the Church on the Margins”)

“In whatever capacity he was needed, Dr. DeGroat was there: the professor with the needed academic challenge, the coach diagraming the way out of a tight spot, the pastor bringing a lantern into a specific darkness, or a trusted friend who’d flat-out earned the right to speak hard and necessary truths to us. …I absolutely cannot imagine how such a cohort could have been more expertly led.”

—Shari DeGraff Stewart
(thesis: “Childhood Denied: A Psychospiritual Reflection on the Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers”)

“I’m graduating from this D.Min. cohort twenty years after earning my M.Div. from Western Theological Seminary. The D.Min. program was just what I needed to reflect on the past twenty years of life and ministry, refocus on my calling, and propel me into the next twenty.”

—David Parrish
(thesis: “Unplugging to Connect: Reimagining Christian Identity Formation in the Digital Age”)
News

On behalf of WTS, Associate Director of Advancement Brenda Dieffenbach presented Bud Van Eck ‘51 and his wife Bea with flowers for reaching the milestone of a 70th WTS reunion. Bud & Bea attended the seminary’s virtual reunion on Zoom on May 10, joining other alumni celebrating their 20th through 60th reunions.

George Boerigter ’66 led the groundbreaking of a new 100,000 sq. ft. office and factory for his company, SoundOffSignal. This facility will enable the company to keep up with its historic pattern of doubling every five years, ultimately housing 250 new employees. The company currently has 175,000 sq. ft. of office/factory space with about 350 employees. The company and George are the major funders of the Boerigter Center for Calling and Career at Hope College and the Boerigter Scholarship at WTS.

Before retiring, Hudson Soo ’71 (MRE) was a secondary school principal for 17 years and the Associate General Secretary of the Church of Christ in China, the Hong Kong Council, for seven years. As the AGS he was in charge of licensing and supervising 25 secondary schools, 25 primary schools, and 5 kindergartens.

Donald Kazen ’74 is semi-retired serving on the staff of the First Presbyterian Church of Ambler, PA as Parish Visitor. He visits people who are in senior living facilities (medical, personal care, independent living), home bound, hospitals, etc. Last summer, after the associate pastor left to accept a call, Don began participating in worship services and preaching regularly to support the senior pastor.

Mark Bruggom ’77 wrote a book in 2010 titled KICD - The First 75 Years. It was an anecdotal history of the radio station where Mark served as the meteorologist for 15 years from 1995-2010. Mark passed away on March 11, 2021 (see On to Glory section).

Bruce Wilterdink ’79 retired from active ministry on August 30, 2020, after serving installed pastorates at RCA churches in Monroe, SD, Chandler, MN, and Tinley Park, IL and 13 specialized interim ministries in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin.

David Landegent ’82 will retire at the end of June from his pastoral work at First Reformed Church in Vola, SD and will move to Salem, OR.

Richard Verkaik ’89 retired from chaplaincy at Beacon Hill at Eastgate in Grand Rapids, MI but still works one day a week. He writes, “Western made my life time dream of being a pastor come to life. I will always be grateful, especially to Professor George Brown.”

Mary Bos ’90 and her husband, Tom Bos ’74, retired to their home in Florida in July 2016. There they are affiliated with Palmetto Presbyterian Church, where they are occasionally invited to preach, perform funeral services and assist with the sacraments.

Cynthia Joy Veldheer DeYoung ’90 has served as a chaplain in healthcare for over 30 years and has been at Spectrum Health Butterworth in Grand Rapids, MI for over 15 years. She works in the intensive care unit, providing spiritual and emotional support to patients and families, many times in end-of-life scenarios. She often serves as a bridge between the hospital and Gift of Life Michigan when

40 year virtual reunion
it’s appropriate to discuss organ donation. Last December, Gift of Life Michigan honored Cindy as the 2020 Hospital Spiritual Care Champion for her efforts to save and heal lives.

Shin Nomura ’91 (Th.M) reports that he and his wife, Makiko, are fine and engaged in their university education and ministry. Shin is the dean of the religion department of Tohoku-gakuin University in Sendai, Japan, and president of the Japanese Calvin Studies Society. Makiko is working with kindergarteners and serving as an elder at their church. They have four children and four grandchildren.

Starting in April, Bethany Popkes ’11 began a new chapter as pastor with the delightful people of First Reformed Church of Wyarnant, NY.

Yi Lo ’19 (ThM) is studying for his doctorate at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary in Springfield, MO. Yi, a Presbyterian minister from the Atayal Tribe in Taiwan, is researching the history of his tribe’s encounter with the Pentecostal movement in 1972 and how members can recapture that experience. As he studies at AGTS, Yi attends the bilingual services of Springfield Chinese Church, where he occasionally preaches and serves on the worship team.

John Busman ’57
b. 9/13/1931 Coopersville, MI
d. 3/11/2021 Grand Haven, MI
Hope ’54; WTS ’57
RCA Churches served:
(1957-62) Greenwood, Kalamazoo, MI
(1962-69) Longview, Phoenix, AZ
(1969-81) Calvary, Ripon, CA
(1981-95) Our Saviour’s, Lakewood, CO
(1995-97) interim pastor, Denver, CO

Donald DeBraal ’59
b. 8/24/1932 Rochester, NY
d. 10/9/2020 Ashland, OR
Hope ’56; WTS ’59
(1959-61) Interlaken Reformed, NY
(1961-63) Trinity Reformed, El Monte, CA
English teacher, Arroya High School, El Monte, CA

Ronald B. Mayers ’73
b. 7/26/1940 Herminie, PA
d. 12/27/2020 Grand Rapids, MI
Baptist Bible Coll; SUNY Binghamton (BA); WTS ’73 (ThM), Syracuse U (PhD)
Pastor, Upper Lisle Baptist Church, Whitney Point, NY
Professor of Philosophy and Religion, Cornerstone University, Grand Rapids, MI

Mark Bruggom ’77
b. 4/5/1952 Sheldon, IA
d. 3/11/2021 Spencer, IA
NWColl ’74; WTS ’77 (MRE)
3 years as assoc. editor for the Church Herald, Grand Rapids, MI
5 years as an R.N. in South Dakota
15 years in broadcasting & meteorology at KICD, Spencer, IA

Gale Hagen ’83
b. 1/21/1958 Illinois
d. 12/27/2017 Seattle, WA
Central Coll ’80; WTS ’83 (MRE)
Several years as Director of Religious Ed., Wedgwood Presbyterian Church (Seattle), and then a career at Icogenex Bi incubator

Virginia Titus ’97
b. Pittsburgh, PA
d. 3/24/2021 Alpena, MI
Service to the following:
First Congregational Church, Douglas, MI
Christ Community Church
South Congregational Church
Park Church
Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota
(2008-2018) Atlanta Congregational UCC, Atlanta, MI

Julian Ebenezer Sampath ’16
b. 8/5/76 India
d. 4/18/2021 Bangalore, India
WTS ’16 (ThM)
Served a Church of South India congregation of the Karnataka Central Diocese, Bangalore, India
This year’s Distinguished Alumnus Timothy Brown ’76 first served as the pastor of Fellowship Reformed Church in Hudsonville, MI, then First Reformed of South Holland, IL, and also Christ Memorial Church in Holland, MI, before becoming the Henry Bast Professor of Preaching at Western Theological Seminary and retiring as president of that same institution. He served on many boards, including the boards of Hope College and Words of Hope. But only to list the jobs he had or the roles he played would diminish his influence on so many of our lives.

I think these words from 1 Corinthians 13 might be a window into something that is more true of my dad: “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”

Faith. He grew up in the shadows of Roman Catholic churches in Battle Creek, MI, but faith was not a present reality in his home. His mom had been excommunicated from a conservative Reformed church, and so his dad wanted nothing to do with church. But Russ DeVette gave my dad a shot to play basketball at Hope College. He quickly joined the Frater fraternity intending to enjoy college life. He traveled down to Daytona Beach, FL for spring break, expecting to do whatever freshmen in college do on spring break but instead was met by the living Christ on the beach. He heard the words from a Campus Crusade for Christ ministry team, “Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation, the old is gone, behold the new has come.” He was converted and will tell you he was called to ministry at the same time. (And all of God’s people said, “Amen.”). Though he would spend a lifetime pastoring and and leading faculty and staff, he loved training pastors most of all. Deep in his bones is a simple gospel that he wants everyone to hear and know and believe: “anyone who is in Christ is a new creation, the old is gone, behold the new has come.”

Hope. If there is a word that epitomizes my dad more than any other, it is hope. He thinks Michigan will win the national championship in football and basketball every year. He still thinks each of his three children are the best at whatever they’re doing. It’s not only a family thing, though, he actually thinks everyone he encounters is fascinating, brilliant, hard-working,
and kind. Many of you witnessed his loquacious praise and thought maybe he was exaggerating, but he said the same thing to us about you. “She’s a phenomenal preacher,” he would say. “He is so smart,” he would mention. “They are so generous,” he would add at a dinner table conversation. He actually saw in each of us what the living God meant when it was declared, “Let us make humankind in our own image, according to our likeness.” He saw that in all of us, and told us what he saw, always hoping we’d live into it.

Love. Mostly he loves Jesus, the Word made flesh who comes to us still in the Word written, the Bible. So he spent countless hours interiorizing Scripture. Some say, “he must have a photographic memory.” I can assure you that is not the case; he just loves Jesus so much that he immersed himself in Scripture to come to know Him more deeply. And he really wanted others to know the same Christ by internalizing the same Word. His love for Christ may be no more evident than now. In his retirement he spends his days as a substitute teacher in Holland’s Public Schools. I regularly ask him, “Hey man, shouldn’t you take it easy? Why don’t you relax a little?” He regularly responds with the call of missionary Lesslie Newbigin: “to enter every sector of public life to claim it for Christ.”

“Now faith, hope and love abide, these three.” And none of those three without my mom. They believed God together when life in ministry was hard or when life with family was tough. They hoped in something more together when pressures were high and challenges were real. They loved each other through it all; they love each other still. And together they love so many so well. I’m probably biased—but that doesn’t make me wrong—“love” might be the defining word for how others experience them. The young woman wondering if she can preach, they loved into preaching. The tired pastor wondering if he could keep going, they loved into continuing. The three kids who wondered if they would ever measure up, they loved so much that measuring was not ever a part of the conversation.

So my father, Tim Brown, has received the 2021 distinguished alumnus award from Western Theological Seminary, but mostly that’s a way of saying, “We love you too.” Now faith, hope and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love.

—Rev. Dr. Jon Brown
Lead Pastor, Pillar Church, Holland, MI
Two years ago, Hope College and Western Theological Seminary (WTS) began a pilot program to offer a Christian liberal arts education to long-term incarcerated men at Muskegon Correctional Facility in Muskegon, MI. We are pleased to announce that the initial success of The Hope-Western Prison Education Program (HWPEP) has led the college to pursue taking steps to accreditation. Essentially, the prison will become an extension campus of the college, and men housed there will be able to earn a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Faith, Leadership, and Service with standards as rigorous as those expected of Holland-based Hope College students.

Following the model established by the pilot program, the classes will be taught by professors from Hope College and Western Theological Seminary, and Hope and Western students will have the opportunity to be teaching assistants. Since its start in 2019, seven professors from Hope and Western have taught a total of six classes to 20 incarcerated students who have enrolled in the program. Ten seminary and college students have served as assistants.

A cohort of 20 students will be added each year until the program is fully operational at four cohorts (80 students). The students will be recruited from among the 31,000 male prisoners in the 26-prison system operated by the Michigan Department of Corrections. Prospective students will need letters of recommendation from their warden, chaplain, or prison school principal. They will apply to the college, write an essay, and possibly be interviewed by video. If accepted, they will be moved to the Muskegon Correctional Facility. For a lot of these men, this will be the first real community they have had since being incarcerated.

The seeds for HWPEP were sown by a student in Calvin University’s Calvin Prison Initiative (CPI) at Handlon Correctional Facility in Ionia, MI. He was a pen pal with Dr. Jared Ortiz, a professor at Hope College, and came up with the rather unusual idea that he and his fellow students at Handlon should host a conference on restorative justice at Hope College. That conference, “Hope for Restoration: Radical Hospitality and Prison Reform,” took place on March 4, 2017, and the CPI students participated virtually from Handlon.

Inspired by the conference, about 20 Hope and Western professors got together to discuss whether something like the CPI program could serve as a model for Hope and Western. WTS Professor of Ethics and Theology David Stubbs was particularly struck by the idea, and after several talks with the people at Calvin and visits to the Handlon prison, he became convinced he should devote himself to this important project. Soon Professor of Kinesiology Richard Ray of Hope College was on board, too, and the CPI leadership graciously took them under their wings. They visited Angola Prison in Louisiana, where they learned that prior to its B.A. program, there were 4000 violent incidents a year. That fell to 400. Even more striking, after Calvin University instituted its program at Handlon Correctional Facility, over 1000 annual violent incidents decreased to eight. Calvin student cohorts changed the culture. This ignited the imaginations of professors Stubbs and Ray.

“We saw the unbelievable things happening to the men at Handlon, many of whom had spent decades behind bars,” Ray shares. “They were clearly not the people they used to be. The work Calvin folks were doing with these men was really changing them.”

“Many of them did something bad when they were 17 years old, but now they’re 40, 50 years old,” explains Stubbs. “Having a vocation, something they can give back to their families and communities, is incredibly humanizing.”
The two professors and a steering committee spent 18 months preparing for the pilot program launch, earning the support of the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC), the warden at Muskegon Correctional Facility, and the support of then presidents Timothy Brown (WTS) and Dennis Voskuil (Hope).

Dr. Stubbs taught the first class, “What are People For?” to a cohort of 20 students in the Spring of 2019. This was followed by “Differing Meanings of Freedom” by Dr. Jim Allis (Hope), “Communicating with Courage and Compassion” by Dr. Pam Bush (WTS), “What is the Good Life?” by Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger (Hope), and “Friendship and Community” by Drs. Dennis Feaster and Curtis Gruenler (Hope).

The men in the program were thrilled to be gaining an education and very quickly began teaching bunkmates and family members what they were learning. Not only were HWPEP students becoming transformed, they began stopping fights in the yard using non-violent communication techniques they learned in class.

As one student aptly put it, “Most of my life has been a journey in trying to find something greater than myself. Getting a college education would give me the tools necessary to complete my journey—to be a better man, to be a bigger person than I once was, to contribute to the world around me in a positive way, and to be what God intended me to be—his true and faithful servant.”

Recent WTS graduate Gene Ryan ’21 served as a teaching assistant, reading through students’ weekly papers and offering feedback. “I remain blessed by the connections made with the students, having seen the work they put into their writing and heard their wisdom weekly in the classroom,” he says. “Walls and bars cannot contain the work of the mind. These students showed me that, and it is a lesson I will not soon forget”.

In 2020, coronavirus lockdowns temporarily halted HWPEP as visitors were not allowed into the prison facilities. Sadly, the Muskegon Correctional Facility suffered an illness rate of over 80%, and nine inmates lost their lives to the virus. Eventually, “Friendship and Community” was able to be completed as a correspondence course, and another course entitled “Exploring Faith, Leadership, and Service” was offered and also was completed by correspondence.

Moving forward with HWPEP will involve many critical steps, including Higher Learning Commission approval of MCF as a satellite campus of Hope College, the recruitment of faculty, and the recruitment of a robust pool of generous donors who recognize the redemptive potential of education to transform those locked away from society.

“Why a prison education program? It is part of the Christian mission of our schools,” says co-director David Stubbs. “At the heart of a liberal arts education is equipping people with a vision of what human life is all about, who they are, and who they can be. These men are changed by that vision as well. Please pray for us. HWPEP a wonderful thing to be a part of and a privilege as well.”

“A chance to be a college student is a reminder that God is not finished with me.”

**Vision**

To provide a Christian liberal arts education to incarcerated men with the goal of renewing minds, forming persons, and helping transform the prison, the college, the seminary, and the larger community into places where “justice and peace embrace” (Psalm 85:10).

**Mission**

The Hope-Western Prison Education Program provides a Christian liberal arts education to incarcerated men with long-term sentences at Muskegon Correctional Facility. As a covenant partnership between Hope College and Western Theological Seminary, the program strives to form thoughtful and wise citizens dedicated to improving their communities—whether inside or outside of prison.

A generous donor has committed to match gifts to WTS in support of the HWPEP program up to $100,000 each year for four years. This gift holds the promise of serving as a transformational catalyst and is the most significant in HWPEP’s history. To donate to the program, visit westernsem.edu/hope-western-prison-education-give
The life of missionary nurse Cornelia Dalenberg spanned the last century (1893-1988) and was spent bringing the Gospel to the Arab world. She took her nursing training to the Arabian Ministries for the Reformed Church in America, serving the RCA and representing her home congregation of the First Reformed Church of South Holland faithfully and famously for many years.

Leaving her home in South Holland, IL, Cornelia went to the Arabian field by slow boat and returned twice after retirement by jumbo jet. Her life was rich with adventure. She arrived in Bahrain before there was a port at which to dock. She played tennis with the Englishman who discovered the oil that so dramatically changed the face of the Arabian Peninsula. Her obedience to the call of missions took her into the awesome marshlands near Basra, Iraq. During a wartime furlough, she crossed the Atlantic in a convoy that lost two ships.

The women, children, and others she served in Iraq, Bahrain and Oman gave her high praise, calling her Sharifa, meaning “the noble one” in Arabic. Her many adventures are captured in a book by that same name, Sharifa, (published in Cornelia’s 90th year) as part of the Historical Series of the RCA.

Even Cornelia’s long retirement was filled with purpose. Her life of service continued as long as she had strength, even being carried into church meetings on a chair when she could no longer climb the stairs. Choir, Bible courses, public speaking on missions, active membership in the South Holland Historical Society, and tremendous hospitality were just some of the ways she occupied her time. She had a young spirit and was always ready to make new friends.

In the early 1980s, First Reformed Church felt called to honor Cornelia’s work and life by establishing a scholarship with Western Theological Seminary for international students pursuing a degree in ministry in the United States.

For nearly four decades, First Reformed Church of South Holland has fostered its relationship with the seminary by sending a church representative each year to meet the Dalenberg scholarship recipient and tell the story of Cornelia’s life of service.

By doing so, the student learns that there are real people and stories behind the money they receive to offset their tuition bills. Over the years, students from Brazil, Taiwan, Thailand, and many other countries have been helped by this one church’s commitment.

In two years, First Reformed Church of South Holland will celebrate their 175th anniversary. Their legacy extends beyond Illinois and into the world as they impact international students with the same adventuresome spirit as Cornelia Dalenberg.

Dear Friends,

On this page you will read about an amazing person, Cornelia Dalenberg, medical missionary to the Arab world. She grew up in South Holland, IL, and over one hundred years ago she left that familiar place because she felt called to use her nursing training overseas for the sake of the Gospel.

I love that a church would seek to honor one of its own by establishing a permanent scholarship at Western Theological Seminary. This is one of the most longstanding scholarships at the seminary, and it has impacted dozens of students over the decades.

Would your congregation like to honor a pastor or some other person who has had an impact on your community? A student scholarship can be started with $10,000 and is fully funded (meaning it starts generating scholarships) at $25,000. Please contact me if you are interested.

I am so grateful for the many churches who support our students annually and through scholarships like these.

Yours in Christ,

Andy Bast
Director of Development

WTS Connection Week 2021
September 19-26
connecting WTS and the local church

How can the Western community pray for your church? Please let us know needs you are facing this year. Email us, including your church name and location, at: advancement@westernsem.edu

A True Legacy
Helping others by honoring one life

First Reformed Church of South Holland, IL pictured at top.
 Churches in Mission  
Seeing neighborhoods with new eyes

In 2020, Lilly Endowment Inc. awarded the seminary a one million dollar grant to fund Churches in Mission, a five-year project that aims to learn with and from congregations as they discern God’s movement in their neighborhoods. In April, Churches in Mission kicked off a 15-month journey with a virtual training event. From a variety of contexts, traditions, and neighborhoods, seven congregations invited five team members to engage the process and attend the event. Their work begins with an ethnography-inspired listening and discovery process in their neighborhoods. Their goal is to more deeply hear, love, and care for their neighbors. They may also discover new local partnerships and ministry opportunities along the way.

At the April event, teams identified the boundaries of their neighborhoods; they received areas of exploration including transportation, school access, and local business; they practiced listening skills and conducted interviews. Each congregational team beautifully began the work of slowing down and seeing their neighborhood with new eyes.

The congregations participating in the Churches in Mission cohort are fostering curiosity around what it means to understand and appreciate the land from which they benefit. One congregation is seeing their neighborhood shift with the construction of 10,000 new apartments on their street. Another congregation recognizes that their neighborhood is becoming less accessible to lower income families. One church is curious about missed relational opportunities as their building houses two distinct worshipping communities comprised of members from different economic groups.

Faithfully engaging local mission will unfold uniquely in each of these contexts. These teams are on a journey to listen deeply, be abundantly grateful, and joyfully minister in the unique neighborhoods in which they dwell.

If you would like to hear more about the Churches in Mission project or access resources, please reach out to Shari Oosting (shari.oosting@westernsem.edu) or Hannah Stevens (hannah.stevens@westernsem.edu).
New Chair at WTS

We are pleased to announce the G.W. and Edna Haworth Chair for Educational Ministry and Leadership. The chair was previously occupied by Dr. George Brown, who served as the G.W. and Edna Haworth Professor of Christian Education from 1999 until 2012. With the involvement of the Haworth family, this chair has been newly designated. It will now support the academic dean position at Western Theological Seminary and will be occupied by Dr. Kristen Johnson, Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs and Professor of Theology and Christian Formation.

A graduate of St. Andrews University, Dr. Johnson is a well-respected scholar and sought-after teacher who focuses in the area of theology, discipleship, formation, culture, and political theory. In 2018, she was named by Christianity Today as one of 10 New or Lesser Known Female Theologians Worth Knowing. Dean Johnson is an outstanding leader who has provided visionary, excellent, and faithful leadership to the academic affairs of the seminary. We are exceedingly grateful to the Haworth family for their continuing support of WTS and our mission. An installation service will be held in Fall 2021.

As an adjunct professor at Western for several years, David Escobar Arcay is the only person who has taught in both our Spanish and English programs, consistently receiving excellent course evaluations. Dr. Arcay has accepted the offer to join WTS full-time as Associate Professor of Theology and to direct our Hispanic Ministries Program. Dr. Escobar Arcay has considerable experience in a range of educational settings as a schoolteacher, principal, and most recently as a professor at Nova Southeastern University for the last decade. His first Ph.D. is in educational leadership and his second Ph.D. focuses on trinitarian theology. We look forward to welcoming him to campus for the fall semester.

The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America presents The Tongue of a Teacher: Essays in Honor of Dr. Timothy Brown. The festschrift was edited by Trygve Johnson ’99 and will be available at General Synod this fall (as well as on Amazon).

After 22 years meeting the communications needs of the seminary (including 66 issues of The Commons!), Carla Capotosto will be winding down her position this summer to devote more time to her aging parents. When Carla began at WTS in 1999, the website consisted of four pages and was run by the library director. The seminary’s photographer developed b&w film in his own darkroom. “I have seen so much change in communications over my career,” she says. “The internet, email, desktop publishing, digital photography, smart phones, social media—none of that existed when I graduated from college in the 80s. Much of the change has taken place in the last 20 years.” She has enjoyed putting her design and writing abilities to use for the seminary and was pleased to develop her strong interest in personal finance for six years as associate director of the Lilly Grant for Economic Challenges Facing Future Pastors. “If any of the classes, programs, or resources we put in place helped students understand finances and generosity better, I’m content,” she says.

Alli VandenBosch began working in the newly created position of Financial Aid and Student Billing Coordinator in June. In this part-time role, she assists the Academic and Student Life Office. She comes to us from Kuyper College in Grand Rapids, MI, where she spent the last five years working in the academic office. She is the mother of two small boys and enjoys “rediscovering the wonder of the world and our Creator through my children’s eyes.” She is very familiar with the rigors of seminary, as her husband, Collin, just completed his education and works in ministry at a church in Byron Center, MI.

Meet WTS Faculty and Staff:

preaching dates

Felix Theonugraha:
- July 4 – Central Park Chapel, Holland, MI
- Aug 29 – The Foundry, Zeeland, MI

Winn Collier:
- June 6 – Pillar Church, Holland, MI
- July 18 – Faith Reformed Church, Traverse City, MI
- August 22 – Central Reformed Church (adult ed.), Grand Rapids, MI
- September 26 – Rose Park Reformed Church, Holland, MI

Suzanne McDonald:
- June 6 – Camp Geneva, Holland, MI

Chuck DeGroat:
- June 20 – First Church, Jupiter, FL
- August 22 – City Church, San Francisco, CA

Keith Reynolds:
- June 27 – Beechwood Reformed Church, Holland, MI
- August 28 – leading workshop, Calvary Christian Reformed Church, Holland, MI
- August 29 – Calvary CRC, Holland, MI

On April 20 WTS celebrated the book written by Tom Boogaart, professor emeritus of Old Testament, and Jeff Barker, visiting scholar. Performing the Plays of the Bible is the result of nearly 20 years of their work together. The book focuses on seven ancient dramas of the Old Testament—from “Eve’s Two Sons” to “The Sword of Goliath.”

Tom and Jeff’s presentation and conversation is available on video at vimeo.com/541711522
New Scholarships Awarded

Last Fall we announced the addition of three new premier scholarships that will provide full-tuition scholarships. We are now pleased to introduce you to the worthy recipients of those awards, in addition to the newest Girod Fellow.

Boerigter Grant—covers both tuition and living expenses for one year for an in-residence M.Div. student. The recipient must feel called to be a pastor in the Reformed tradition.

Benjamin DeBoer
Ben recently graduated from Northwestern College in Orange City, IA, where he majored in Biblical/Theological Studies and minored in English Literature. Throughout college, Ben worked in campus ministry and residence life and was involved in athletics and theatre (where he met his fiancée, Nicole). Ben and Nicole will be moving to Holland after they get married this summer.

“I always knew that I wanted to go to seminary and get my M.Div. but didn’t know if I would have the opportunity (or means) to do so directly after my undergraduate degree. As I began the application process at Western, the admissions staff went above and beyond to help me in my decision-making process—they encouraged me, prayed for my fiancée and me, and periodically checked in over email and Zoom to see how I was doing. I was floored by their level of support and honesty, and when I received word about the scholarship I received, I was speechless. Despite not knowing me in person, the people at Western cared for me so well and affirmed so many ministerial gifts in me that I couldn’t help but say yes to attending Western. My fiancée and I have truly felt blessed by the seminary already and are so excited for what God will do in the next three years.”

The Elsie Wen-Hua Shih Law Award for Excellence in Female Leadership—full-tuition scholarship for a full-time female student in the in-residence M.Div. program. The student must be dedicated to advancing the leadership of women in all areas of church and ministry and be committed to ministry.

Emily Hanrahan
Emily is from Birmingham, AL and recently graduated from Samford University with a Bachelor of Music. Emily has been leading worship for the past four years at the Cathedral Church of the Advent in downtown Birmingham and has also served as the Mission & Outreach intern there for three years. She sang in the Samford A Cappella Choir for four years and traveled to Budapest with them in 2018, where they won an international choral music competition. Emily’s music degree is in voice, but she also plays piano and little bit of guitar.

“I chose Western because of the worship culture present in the Holland and Grand Rapids area. I knew Western was right for me due to the hospitality and the familial energy present through-out every step of the application process,” she says. “I am so excited to learn more about theology and ministry practice in a place where I know I will feel comfortable being myself.”

The Samuel Williams Scholarship for Scholars of Color—full tuition to a full-time M.Div. student of color who is committed to ministry and advancing justice and reconciliation.

Christy Escobar
Christy hails from Lake in the Hills, IL, coming from a family of “six crazy kids” and “two of the coolest parents around.” They spend most of their time reading, creating, cooking and then eating. Christy feels blessed by who they have made her.

“I am excited to call Western my home for the next three years by both serving the community and learning from them. I am already so grateful for what they have gifted me and thank God for this opportunity,” Christy says. “Western stood out to me in its authentic desire to be involved: involved in cultivating justice, involved in one another’s lives, and involved in the community. My prayer is that this experience will fully encompass a gift—to be both from and for our Father.”

Girod Fellowship—full-tuition scholarship for students with outstanding research and writing skills who display eagerness for deep theological learning and have a heart for the church’s ministry. Girod Fellows also serve as research assistants to the Gordon H. Girod Research Chair of Reformed Theology Dr. J. Todd Billings.

Emili Shepperson
Emili grew up in Slovakia before moving to the U.S. for undergraduate studies. As a 21 Wheaton College graduate with a B.A. in Biblical and Theological Studies, her interests revolve around discipleship, early Christianity, and the urban context. She is also drawn to the intersection of faith and medicine. This past spring, she interned at Lawndale Christian Health Center, an inner-city primary care clinic located in west Chicago. She currently works as a research assistant to Dr. Gregory Lee in the theology department at Wheaton College researching gender and church unity.

“I first learned about Western Theological Seminary from professors at Wheaton, and I was drawn to Western’s unique commitment to fostering pastor theologians. It combines both my deep love of discipleship with my academic interests,” Emili says. “I’m excited to begin the M.Div. program in the fall, and I’m especially honored to study with Dr. J. Todd Billings.”
A Note from

PRESIDENT FELIX THEONUGRAHA

I love WTS Commencement. For our graduates, this annual event marks the end of their seminary journey. They have accomplished what they came to Western Theological Seminary to do. This year, we celebrated the graduation of 68 students across all of our degree programs. It was also an historic Commencement, as we cheered on the first graduating students from our Hispanic Ministry Program.

Two of those students are Francisco and Luz. Francisco was a gynecologist and Luz was a physician’s assistant in their home country. One day, the gang that controlled their neighborhood threatened to take their lives unless they paid a ransom in exchange for their safety. Francisco and Luz fled the country overnight to join their daughter-in-law in the United States.

After arriving in the U.S., Francisco and Luz sensed that God was calling them to plant a church. They needed training, so they enrolled in our Hispanic Ministry Program. Yet, because they are not certified and licensed as medical professionals in the United States, they are employed as custodians working night shifts. Every couple of weeks they would send $50 or $75 to the seminary in order to pay their tuition bills.

This May, I had the privilege of meeting them after Commencement. They said, “Thank you for the Hispanic program. It’s a great blessing. God bless you and all your faculty and staff.”

Friends, what an incredible privilege for Western Theological Seminary to be a part of Francisco and Luz’s ministry preparation. By God’s grace, we are privileged to be forming women and men for faithful Christian ministry and participation in the Triune God’s ongoing redemptive work in the world. Please continue to pray for us and support us as we seek to accomplish this mission.

Dr. Felix
Theonugraha
President

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