When Chris Kaiser arrived in Holland, Michigan as a sabbatical replacement for Dr. Eugene Osterhaven in 1976, it was a long way from his roots on the East Coast and his initial training as a physicist.

The change of career really stemmed from the influence of one man. When Chris was a college student at Harvard, he took a summer job working for an eccentric Dutch immigrant named Henry. Chris simply wanted to make some money and get on with his life, but Henry had other ideas. He would sit Chris down and question him about his goals and political views, and usually the conversation would turn to Jesus Christ. Did Chris realize he was sinful and in need of forgiveness?

"Frankly, I was shocked," says Chris. "Nothing in my church background as a nominal Episcopalian had prepared me for that."

Henry took Chris to Park Street Church in Boston, where he was amazed to find intelligent young students from Harvard and MIT who believed the same things. At the time Chris could not believe what they believed, but he was impressed by their sense of purpose, their strong Christian fellowship, and their interest in intellectual and social issues.

Five years later in Colorado, Chris found himself wondering whether he wasn’t missing something. He began to read Proverbs and soon realized he had acquired a lot of knowledge but was lacking in wisdom. He found an evangelical church where basic Christian faith and practice were explained and was amazed that the Scriptures could make sense. He came to believe the gospel and confessed that Jesus was Lord.

His colleagues, professors, and parents protested his decision to turn from astrophysics and go to seminary, but “I was young!” Chris laughs, “no fear…”

Dr. Kaiser has never regretted that decision, and his teaching vocation has...
always worked to build bridges between his two disciplines, theology and science. He has been a resident member of the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, NJ where he researched the interaction of science and theology during the Renaissance and the eighteenth century.

For many years Dr. Kaiser has taught a class called, "Ministering to Science-Minded People." Students have appreciated learning how they can discuss their faith while encouraging people to question and think things through.

"I call that the growing edge," Chris explains. "It's the point where a person is trying to think and discover new ideas, and it's where the Holy Spirit can work. You're better off trying to minister to them in their own quest than trying to drag them over to what you think they should be doing or thinking."

As Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology, Dr. Kaiser teaches students about the doctrines of Creation, the Trinity, of Christ, and also about humanity. "I cover the basic Christian faith that is common to all branches of the church and the way it encounters the challenges of the world of modern science."

Taylor Holbrook '86, pastor of Hopewell Reformed Church in Hopewell Junction, NY, considers Dr. Kaiser one of his favorite professors and recalls how practical he was, too. "In some ways he seemed like the type of guy who would write a PhD thesis called, 'The Thermal Emission of Interplanetary Dust Cloud Models,' but his love of study also made him very interested in people. For his class, 'Christianity in a Technological Society,' he sent us out to study people in their workplace and reflect theologically on their situations. He taught us to look for wisdom, not just knowledge."

As Chris Kaiser looks back on nearly four decades of service, his fondest memories are of seminars in which students and he read early Christian texts and discussed them together. "I learned from the students as much as they did from me," he says.

Chris also enjoys meeting students and Hope College colleagues informally for refreshment and conversation.

After 36 years of teaching, Dr. Chris Kaiser is retiring in June. In his retirement he will continue to teach occasional classes as an adjunct professor, but he hopes he and his wife, Martha, will have more opportunities for exploring other cultures both in the USA and abroad.

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**Additions to Faculty**

Western Theological Seminary is pleased to announce the addition of two fine young scholars to our faculty:

**Dr. Kyle J.A. Small**, co-pastor of an Evangelical Covenant Church in Harbert, MI, has accepted the position of Assistant Professor of Christian Leadership. Dr. Small has served as a consultant to the Cooper Leadership Team at Western and recently taught the senior leadership course. He earned his Ph.D. degree from Luther Seminary and has gifts and interests in areas such as institutional research, leadership, educational technology, and academic administration. He will begin this position in the Fall and continue part-time as co-pastor of his congregation with his wife, Lindsay, an ordained minister.

**Rev. Brian Madison**, Assistant Professor of Religion at Calvin College, will become Assistant Professor of Theology at WTS in the Fall. Rev. Madison is an ordained minister in the PC(USA) and serves Eastminster Presbyterian Church in Grand Rapids as a scholar in residence helping with weekly worship and adult education. Rev. Madison enjoys the dialogue between Christian theology and the natural sciences. He will teach courses in systematic theology, ethics, and historical theology, as well as various electives. He is soon to complete his Ph.D. at Duke University.
When something good is in plain view and all around us, we may be grateful but sometimes we may take it for granted. Not so with racial and ethnic diversity at Western Theological Seminary: the evidence is definitely on the rise, and we do not take it for granted. Current experiences of racial and ethnic diversity at WTS give witness to a fuller reality toward which we are moving, something long anticipated for this traditionally white and ethnically Dutch institution. When Rev. Denise Kingdom-Grier, our Diversity Team facilitator, was a student here several years ago, she was the only African American student on campus. Those days have passed, and I’m grateful that our witness is getting stronger and clearer. Here are a few hopeful signs...

Every M.Div. student participates in a 10-day trip that crosses boundaries of many kinds to experience the “other.” Usually these trips cross national boundaries to experience a different Gospel and culture mix than the familiar one. This year students had a new option that crossed racial/ethnic boundaries within the USA on a Sankofa bus trip to civil rights sites in Alabama and Georgia and a few days in Chicago neighborhoods. (Sankofa is a West African word meaning “looking backward to move forward.”) Each student was paired with a partner of a different race or ethnicity. Listen to these words of witness:

I helped my partner see things differently and she helped me. We now know that it is up to us to be the change we hope to see in this world. —Alice Taylor

Sankofa gave me deeper insight into how racism has affected my white brothers and sisters. If we are to stop Sunday from being the most segregated day of the week, it will only happen by developing cross-cultural relationships where honest communication happens. —Wayne Coleman

Faculty Fellow Chris Dorsey taught a multicultural ministry course last semester with possibly the most diverse student roster in the history of WTS: Latino, African American and white students from the Graduate Certificate in Urban Pastoral Ministry program, international Master of Theology students from Zambia, India, and Ethiopia, and several M.Div. students.

Early in the class a particular reading spurred a spirited debate. The term “color blind” that made so much sense to some was offensive to others. Bravely, each side presented their viewpoint, and in the struggle we began to know each other. Each consecutive week as we melded scripture with experience, the relationships in the class became easier and deeper. —Vicki Ackerman

Dr. Frank Yamada, president of McCormick Theological Seminary, gave the Stoutemire Lecture in Multicultural Ministry in February. The Diversity Team initiated this series two years ago to commemorate Rev. Leonard Stoutemire, pioneer African American clergyman and church planter in Holland, MI in the 1940s.

As we read the Bible, let us keep in mind that culture shapes our faith and how we read. Since meaning is bound to context, there is no single general understanding of the Bible that will be valid for everyone; understanding is always particularized, modified by our context... Devaluing or seeking to destroy cultural diversity hinders and limits our understanding of the world and of the Word. —Dr. Frank Yamada

Living into an emerging multiracial/ethnic reality at WTS is not a simple, predictable process, but it is filled with hope and longing for dignity, respect, and understanding. It is heavily dependent on humility, courage and grace. May the Spirit continue to build and empower our witness.
Daily chapel services provide space and time for us to worship, pray, and discern the presence of Christ in our midst. Through the preaching of the Word, the joyful sounds of music, and the sharing of Sacraments, we remember who we are and whom we serve.

For 60 years these services have taken place in the John R. Mulder Memorial Chapel, a colonial style structure with a raised chancel, center pulpit, and long rows of wooden pews—a design that reflected what most Reformed churches looked like in the mid-20th century.

In recent years the chapel had begun to show significant wear, and students and faculty became reluctant to use the facility because it was physically uncomfortable, poorly insulated, inflexible in its design, and was not equipped with appropriate technology. Furthermore, changing worship styles brought into focus elements of the chapel design that served to emphasize, rather than bridge, gaps of separation between God and the people, between clergy and congregation, and worshippers from one another.

At their February 2010 meeting, the seminary’s Board of Trustees instructed President Brown to raise necessary resources and employ professionals to renovate the chapel into a flexible, energy-efficient, beautiful, and theologically sound worship center.

Architect Jim VanderMolen of Elevate Studios designed the renovation, Stan Hamstra of SDH Construction was the General Contractor, and Acoustics by Design oversaw the chapel’s acoustics and technology needs.

Jim VanderMolen
Architect

To creative types—artists, writers, composers, architects—a blank sheet of paper can be intimidating, even frightening. What to make? Out of all possible ideas, what? Creativity comes most freely when there is something inspiring to respond to, something that stimulates the designer’s imagination.

Fortunately, in the design of Mulder Chapel, we were not faced with a blank piece of paper. Not only did the existing chapel have “good bones”—solid infrastructure, historic design elements, and a magnificent organ—but the committee had prepared thoroughly researched and eloquently expressed reflections on the theological importance of spaces for worship. The committee had a vision for transforming the chapel that integrated the practical, the pedagogical, and the transcendent.

Upon seeing the space, reading the reflections, and listening to the aspirations of the committee, we were
struck by the image of the ceiling opening up to create a luminous vertical axis and the walls of the chapel inflecting toward the light in a spatial embrace.

We also understood early on that the power of the design would reside in a strong relationship between what had been (the original chapel) and what would become (the renovation). To completely obscure the original details would be to disrupt the continuum of memory and meaning elicited by the chapel space. So we determined to make of our design a sort of ongoing dialogue between the old and the new in which both had something beautiful to say. It is that sense of transformation as redemption rather than replacement that drove the design process and which we hope lingers in the hearts of the chapel’s users.

Sarah Hall, a world-renowned Canadian stained glass artist, designed pieces of art glass which will be installed over each window in April. She has created nearly a thousand windows for churches, synagogues, mosques, schools and public spaces and was very pleased to be part of our chapel renovation project. (More about the windows will appear in the Fall issue of The Commons)

Assistant Professor of Preaching and Worship Arts Ron Rienstra loves seeing the students experiment with the flexible set-up. “The space itself demands that we make the central things of worship central,” he says. “As the students connect praise, proclamation and prayer to the symbolic elements of the faith which point to Jesus—the font, the table, and the pulpit—the students and congregation are reminded why we gather in the first place.”

We invite you to see the renovation yourself at one of these events:

Monday-Friday Chapel services, 9:40-10am
April 17 (7:00) Lecture by Dr. Christopher Kaiser
April 19 President’s Club dinner (for members)
May 7 (2:00) Alumni/ae Day presentation by J.K. Smith, commencement speaker

James E. VanderMolen, AIA LEED AP
Principal Architect, Elevate Studio
www.elevatestudio.net
The third book of Associate Professor of Reformed Theology J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church,* is making a splash. The book’s release has led to Dr. Billings giving many radio, podcast, and blog interviews about being united to the living Christ and how this can change the way believers approach worship, justice, mission, and the Christian life. He recently learned that Christian Literature Crusade will be translating *Union with Christ* into a Korean-language edition within the next two years.

Out of 390 titles submitted by 52 publishers, *Christianity Today* chose *Union with Christ* for an Award of Merit in Theology and Ethics in their 2012 Book Awards. *Christianity Today* has also commissioned Dr. Billings to adapt *Union with Christ* for an article on Incarnational Ministry that will appear in the magazine this summer.

The book is dedicated “to my students at Western Theological Seminary, who helped show me the life-changing nature of union with Christ.” Reflecting on this dedication, Dr. Billings says, “Students have often been my teachers—showing me how this biblical teaching is transformative for their own lives. As graduates told me of the vital role union with Christ played in their various ministry contexts, I became convinced that I needed to go beyond teaching this in the classroom and bring it to a larger audience. After all, union with Christ is a summation of the gospel itself.”

On February 3, the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators (APCE) honored Professor of Christian Education George Brown, Jr. as the 2012 Educator of the Year in recognition of his outstanding advocacy for teaching and education. Dr. Brown has been affiliated with APCE since 1982, writing articles for the *APCE Advocate* as well as leading workshops at annual events, including a workshop and forum at the 2012 APCE annual event in Grand Rapids, MI.

The seminary is pleased to announce that Chris Dorsey, 2011-12 Faculty Fellow, will be remaining with us as Visiting Assistant Professor of Theology for the 2012-2013 academic year. Prof. Dorsey has been well-received as a Faculty Fellow, teaching in the areas of multicultural ministry and the theology of social movements.

Director of Formation for Ministry Matthew Floding has learned that the Association for Theological Field Education has selected his article, “Fostering a Mentoring Community” as their “best practices” contribution to be published in the 2012 issue of *Reflective Practice Journal.*

Professor of Missiology George Hunsberger is presenting three plenary lectures on “The Missional Church and D.Min. Education” at this year’s meeting of the Association for Doctor of Ministry Education, which will be held on Western’s campus March 22-24.

The Rev. Chip Sauer is pastor of Community Reformed Church in Charlevoix, Mich. As the Bast Resident Preacher for 2012, Chip travels to the seminary each Thursday this semester to interact with the WTS community in several ways, including two preaching courses, a special Community Conversation, a Journey-sponsored learning event for pastors, and building student relationships. Chip spends his travel time listening to great preachers and is focusing some of his time at the seminary on an in-depth study of 1 Corinthians. “I am being deeply blessed and renewed by participating in this wonderful program,” Chip says.

Look for articles in the March issue of *Perspectives: A Journal of Reformed Thought* called “The Fellowship of Presbyterians” and “The ECO: Interpreting a Historic Moment in the PC(USA)” by David Stubbs, Professor of Ethics and Theology.

Robert Van Voorst, Professor of New Testament, recently preached in churches in Fremont and Saugatuck, MI and taught a series on Philippians at First Reformed Church of Holland. His book, *Reading the New Testament Today,* was published in Chinese and will be used in the religious-studies degree programs in select Chinese universities.

In April, the Discovery Channel will televise an as-yet untitled three-segment program on Jesus in which Dr. Van Voorst is interviewed. He explains and defends an orthodox Christian understanding of Jesus and his family background, particularly against the anti-Jesus polemic carried out in late antiquity and the Middle Ages that this program examines. Check your local listings for broadcast information.

### News from WTS Beardslee Library:

**March 2-30,** In partnership with Hope College’s Van Wylen Library and Herrick District Library, Western is taking part in an exhibit on the history and influence of the King James Bible. Beardslee Library is exhibiting the history of the “Staten Bijbel”, the Dutch Bible translated in the early 17th century that became the standard for several centuries, the equivalent of the King James Bible for the Netherlands. [www.hope.edu/lib/manifoldgreatness/](http://www.hope.edu/lib/manifoldgreatness/)

Also, be sure to check out our electronic resources for theological study, including 180 e-journals, 41 databases, and nearly 100,000 e-books. Go to the “Electronic Book Collections” bar in blue on the library’s homepage: [www.westernsem.edu/library](http://www.westernsem.edu/library)
Fundraising as Ministry

After 29 years in youth ministry with Young Life in the United States and Europe, Jeff Munroe ’88 became the seminary’s Vice President for Advancement and Communications in January, 2012.

“So, when did you decide to leave ministry to become a fundraiser?”

I can understand the question, but I don’t agree with it. In Henri Nouwen’s book, A Spirituality of Fundraising, he writes that fundraising is, first and foremost, a form of ministry. We don’t often think of it that way. Because of that preconception, Nouwen argues that fundraising is always a call to conversion, and the call comes to both those who seek funds and those who give funds.

The first time I sat down and asked someone to give money to a ministry project was in 1998. My mouth was dry, my palms were sweaty, and my stomach felt like a roller coaster ride. I was in the executive dining room of a large company with the CEO and his wife. They couldn’t have been more gracious to me, and they were delighted to say “yes” to my request. This gave me temporary euphoria, which almost made up for the anxiety I felt beforehand. Almost. I remember sitting in my car after our lunch praying, “Lord, I don’t think I can do this.”

Do you see the cause of my anxiety? Look at my prayer—it was all about me. I was worried they wouldn’t like me enough to give me their money. But I was wrong—it wasn’t their money and they weren’t giving it to me. God’s gentle nudging over the years has freed me from that sort of fear. Surprisingly, this conversion took place when I began to come to grips with my role not as an asker but a giver. As long as I put my trust in money more than in God, I would be afraid to ask others to give. As long as I viewed my money as a scarce commodity to be hoarded instead of something of God’s that he has in abundance, my knees shook and my mouth was dry.

Do I still get nervous when I get into financial conversations? Sometimes, because I’m only human. But what I’ve come to experience more and more is freedom—freedom from worrying about money. When I truly believe my security comes from God, I see money as a tool to be used for building his kingdom.

So when did I decide to leave ministry to become a fundraiser? Never. Over the past 30 years my ministry has changed in ways I could not have anticipated. Three decades ago I was a kid with a full head of hair, clad in blue jeans, a flannel shirt and baseball cap, talking with high school kids about God through Young Life and taking classes from giants like Gene Osterhaven, Jim Cook and John Hesselink at Western Theological Seminary. Today I have a lot less hair and wear nicer clothes, but I’m still talking about God and rubbing shoulders with giants at Western Theological Seminary. What a joy it is to serve God at this place and to be able to ask people to invest the resources God has placed in their trust in the good work that happens here. I hope you will join me in praying that we all trust God more and more and that he would continue to work fruitfully through Western Theological Seminary.

David A. Laman ’39
b. Baldwin, WI 10/10/1914
d. Pella, IA 11/7/2011
Hope ’36; WTS ’39
Reformed Churches served:
(1939-43) Grant, MI
(1943-52) Forest Home, Muskegon, MI
(1952-57) Maurice, IA
(1957-64) Central, Oskaloosa, IA
(1964-76) New Life Community, Artesia, CA
(1976-80) Carmel, Rock Valley, IA
(1980-83) Associate, Emmanuel, Paramount, CA
(1985-2000) Pastor to Seniors, Calvary, Ripon, CA

Wayne Lemmen ’47
b. Holland, MI 12/11/1921
d. Traverse City, MI 1/16/2012
Hope ’43; WTS ’47
Reformed Churches served:
(1947-51) Atwood, Ellsworth, MI
(1951-55) American, Hull, IA
(1955-60) Hingham, WI
(1960-66) Home Acres, Grand Rapids, MI
(1968-76) Glen Lake Community, Glen Arbor, MI
(1976-85) Ebenezer, Morrison, IL

Elton Van Pernis ’51
b. Wellprint, IA 5/3/1918
d. Grand Rapids, MI 1/29/2012
Hope ’48; WTS ’51
Reformed churches served:
(1951-54) Byron Center, MI
(1954-63) Beechwood, Holland, MI
(1963-69) Westwood, NJ
(1970-81) Home Acres, Grand Rapids, MI
(1981-85) Emmanuel, Waupun, WI

Carl Van Farowe ’56
b. Williamson, NY 5/22/1931
d. Des Moines, IA 2/3/2012
Hope ’53; WTS ’56
Reformed churches served:
(1956-61) Community, Southgate, MI
(1961-68) First, Tampa, FL
(1968-77) Meredith Drive, Des Moines, IA
Other service to the church:
(1992-98) Stover Mem Church of the Brethren, Des Moines, IA

Levi W. Akker ’57
b. Morrison, IL 9/11/1925
d. Bettendorf, IA 11/9/2011
Hope ’51; WTS ’57
Reformed Churches served:
(1957-60) First, Appleton, IA
(1960-63) Peace, St. Paul, MN
(1963-67) Corinth, Byron Center, MI
(1967-69) First, Oostburg, WI
(1970-78) Rockford, MI
(1979-82) American, Woodstock, MN
(1983-88) Calvary, Venice, FL
Other service to the church:
(1989) Mission Associate for World Missions
(1991-95) Sr Pas, Board of Pensions
Other service to the church:
(1982) Vice President, PSW
(1988-88) Stated Clerk, Classis FL

Wilfred Fiet ’61
b. Morrison, IL 11/24/1936
d. Indianapolis, IN 11/15/2011
Central ’58; WTS ’61
Reformed Churches served:
(1961-66) Olivet, Muskegon, MI
(1966-73) Community, Dolton, IL
(1973-78) Community, Ada, MI
(1978-85) Brooklyn, Cleveland, OH
(1985-91) Church of the Rockies, Denver, CO
(1991-96) Chr. Park, Indianapolis, IN
(1997-98) Interim, Emmanuel, Clinton, WI
(1998-99) Interim, First, WIchert, St. Anne, IL
(1999-2000) Interim, American, De Mole, IN

Alumni/ae Day: For questions, call LuAnne VanSlooten at 616-392-8555, x109 or email luanne@westernsem.edu

On to Glory...

Send news to: advancement@westernsem.edu

Alumni/ae Banquet, Western Theological Seminary Commons
7:30 Commencement, Dimnent Chapel, Hope College

May 7, 2012

Wendell Karsen ’63 presents his book, The Church Under the Cross, Vol. 2, Maas Hall classroom
5:00 Alumni/ae Banquet, Western Theological Seminary Commons
7:30 Commencement, Dimnent Chapel, Hope College

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A Spirituality of Fundraising

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These remarkable words are found on nearly the last page of the New Testament: *Behold, I make all things new... Write: for these words are true and faithful.*

I consider it pure joy to share this issue of *The Commons* with you so you can see all the new things God is doing among us at Western Theological Seminary. You will read about the changing makeup of our community, resulting in a more diverse group better representing the whole body of Christ. You also will get a glimpse of a physical transformation here — the wonderfully renovated John R. Mulder Memorial Chapel. What a delight it has been to worship in that beautiful space these past few months! And we have the changes that goodbyes and hellos bring as we bless the Lord for the years given to WTS by retiring faculty and staff, and we are fully getting to know those stepping into their big shoes.

One change not covered in this issue but affecting us greatly is the new WTS-Newbigin Distance Learning Master of Divinity Program. This venture with City Church San Francisco is going to uniquely prepare men and women to reach a highly secularized world for Christ. We are stretching and growing as we meet the challenge of launching this important new program.

While some things may be different, we remain true and faithful to our mission of preparing men and women called by God to lead the church in mission. Their formation here is built on the solid rock of Jesus Christ!

These are exciting days at Western Theological Seminary. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!

Tim Brown