Parbatipur, Bangladesh is a long way from Holland, Michigan in distance, religious environment, culture, and standard of living. Twenty-one hours of flying and nine hours in a train will get you there (provided the engine doesn't break down), but no description can adequately convey the brutal force of the poverty and oppression. You have to see it yourself.

Dr. Jaco Hamman, Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling, traveled 8,500 miles to Bangladesh in late September for an onsite visit with Doctor of Ministry student, Debra Schout. Western's D.Min. program places great value on faculty mentors visiting students in their places of ministry, whether that's across the state or across an ocean (or two).

Doctor of Ministry work is fueled when a student’s passion lines up with a particular need, and in Deb's case, she ardently wants to help the women and children of Bangladesh. In a place where historically there has been no escape from the ravages of society, she is seeking ways to help villagers design and put into practice places of sanctuary which will give evidence of Christ’s love and where people of all faiths can work together toward reconciliation, justice and peace building.

Deb Schout grew up in Hudsonville, MI and is an experienced missionary and community developer. She was sent to Bangladesh by Interserve, a 160-year-old international community of interdenominational Christians bringing God’s love to the peoples of Asia and the Arab world through word and action.

Deb works as the director of a mission school in rural northwest Bangladesh founded by LAMB (Lutheran Aid to Medicine in Bangladesh). LAMB serves the poor through integrated rural health and development and has a 150 bed hospital, a school, and a training center.

Being immersed in Deb’s ministry context and meeting with her D.Min. accountability group (a diverse group of local Bangladeshis, Americans, and a Brit) helped Dr. Hamman gain a great deal of insight. He was able to advise Deb to focus her D.Min. project into a more practical approach to help women in the villages find sanctuary.

The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Psalm 9:9

(Cont.)
There may be future connections between WTS and northwest Bangladesh. Debra Schout has given the invitation for a seminary intern to come and teach at the school for either a summer or a one year commitment. It is our hope that one of our students will have the opportunity to be salt and light in one of the hardest places in the world, following Jesus’ commission to “go and make disciples of all nations.”

To gain full benefit of Dr. Hamman’s visit, Deb arranged several speaking engagements for him. He taught from the book of Joel at a 3-day Interserve Conference in Parbatipur; he trained chaplains on giving Solution-Focused Care at the LAMB hospital; he consulted with the faculty of the Christian College of Theology in Bangladesh regarding strengthening their pastoral care offerings, and he gave individual counseling sessions.

“I worked very hard!” he laughs, “but the visit was unforgettable and absolutely invaluable.”

Through his trip the WTS community had the privilege of touching the lives of some of the poorest of the poor in the world. Dr. Hamman invited students, faculty, and staff to donate to the LAMB Hospital’s “Poor Fund” that pays the bills of patients who cannot afford treatment. Due to arranged early marriages, many girls (as young as 14) become pregnant before their bodies are matured, complicating childbirth and making cesarean sections necessary. The Western community raised $300, which the Hamman family matched, and Jaco was able to hand $600 to Dr. Kris Prenger of LAMB Hospital, an amount that will assure the wellbeing of twelve young mothers and their babies.

Dr. Jaco Hamman (back, third from right) with the chaplains of LAMB Hospital

Interserv:  www.interserve.org
LAMB:  www.lambproject.org
Christian College of Theology in Bangladesh:  www.cctb.org.bd

The Doctor of Ministry degree at WTS is earned through a 3-year program offering tailored learning units, peer collegiality, faculty mentoring, and annual on-campus seminars to nourish ministry leadership growth.

www.westernsem.edu/about/programs/dmin
More info: admissions@westernsem.edu
Chris Dorsey, Faculty Fellow
2011-2012

If someone had told me six months ago that I would be teaching at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, MI, it would have sounded like they were predicting the Chicago Cubs would win the World Series. As unlikely as teaching at WTS might have one time seemed, I now find myself doing just that, thanks to the Faculty Fellow program that exists because of the imagination and commitment of the faculty, administration, and trustees and through the generosity of Western’s friends.

I arrived at WTS the middle of July, which gave me about a month to prepare my syllabus and prepare my mind for teaching a fall course on Multicultural Ministry and a spring course on Theology and Social Movements. During that month I also spent a fair amount of time asking myself and God: “Why am I here?”

I greatly appreciated the invitation to teach extended to me by President Tim Brown and Academic Dean Leanne Van Dyk. However, I couldn’t escape the uncertainty of wondering what it would mean to be part of a community that was working diligently to advance its commitment to unity, reconciliation and justice, but still had a way to go in terms of increasing diversity. As the beginning of the school year approached, I struggled to envision what the entire year and teaching experience would be like.

On the first day of class, the question of “Why am I here?” was answered loudly. The students in my class were eager to learn and seemed extremely appreciative of my presence as part of the faculty. I connected with the students in ways that far exceeded my expectations. I appreciated their openness and eagerness to digest the material I placed before them. Interestingly enough, their appreciation for the perspective and experiences that I brought to the class fueled my own enthusiasm for teaching in a powerful way.

In the short time I’ve been here, the staff and faculty have been a tremendous blessing to me. They have welcomed me unconditionally, helping to ease my transition into the community, both professionally and personally. I now know that I am here not only to teach, but to be nurtured and formed by a vibrantly spiritual and intellectual community of students, staff and faculty colleagues. It is truly a blessing!

So I look forward to the rest of my time at Western and I look forward to getting to know more of the students, as well as the alumni and friends of the seminary. As for the Chicago Cubs….maybe next year.

Bernard “Chris” Dorsey
b. Houston, TX
B.S. Univ. of Texas, Austin
M.Div., Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary
Grad. Cert. in African Studies, Northwestern University
Ph.D. Candidate, U of Chicago (dissertation on traditional medicine in Senegal, exploring the hermeneutics of healing)
Ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Positions held:
VP Development and Marketing, Chicago Theological Seminary
Chaplain, Clark Atlanta University
Senior Pastor, Woodlawn United Methodist Church
Youth Pastor, Park Manor Christian Church
Lead Chaplain, Cook County clinic servicing HIV/AIDS patients.

Jaco Hamman, Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling, has written a book for all persons, partners, and families feeling the tensions of life diminishing their well-being. A Play-Full Life: Slowing Down and Seeking Peace can help you imagine how slowing down in your intimate relationships or becoming a play-full parent can change your life. Dr. Hamman encourages finding balance between personhood, partnering, parenting, and one’s profession—The Four P’s of Life—drawing on the power of play.

March 2-30, 2012 – In partnership with Hope College and Herrick District Library, Western will present the historic exhibit, “Manifold Greatness: The Creation and Afterlife of the King James Bible,” in celebration of the book’s 400th anniversary. The exhibition will be held in Hope’s Van Wylene Library and is one of only 40 sites nationwide chosen to highlight the impact of the King James Bible. Other presentations will be offered in conjunction with the exhibit. www.manifoldgreatness.org/

Personnel changes at WTS:
Ken Neevel, former VP of Advancement & Communications, is now the Director of Advancement for the Reformed Church in America. John Nordstrom ’63 is interim VP while a nationwide search is conducted for the position.
Pat Dykhuis is now the Registrar and Financial Aid Administrator.
Carol Ann Bailey has been promoted to Continuing Education Associate of Journey.

For their October 2011 cover article, Christianity Today chose “How to Read the Bible” by J. Todd Billings, Associate Professor of Reformed Theology. The article is based on Dr. Billings’ book, The Word of God for the People of God, which explains why theological interpretation matters and how it can be done. Learn why new strategies for interpreting scripture turn out to be not so new—and deepen our life in Christ. www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/october/how-to-read-bible.html.
What should I do with my life? It’s a question of luxury, to be sure, but a question worth exploring—not to mention one that I am more keenly interested in as I near the end of my time at seminary. And for a Christian like me, it goes hand in hand with the question, “What is God’s call?” Frederick Buechner says God’s call is “the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” It is this understanding of vocation in ministry that sent me on a summer of exploration starting on an island off the coast of Scotland and finishing on an island in central Minnesota.

Last year I received a scholarship from the Fund for Theological Education (FTE) that was designed to help pay for school and give me a chance to try out anything that I sense is my “deep gladness” as it connects to God and the world. As I listened to my life (with the helpful guidance of a peer group), I realized that I experience deep gladness when I engage music and enter into song writing, when I find myself connected to natural wildness, and when I am standing with those who suffer injustice. I decided I would spend my summer exploring these themes.

The first place this exploration brought me was to the Isle of Iona in Scotland for a week. The Iona Community that began on this island is dedicated to worship and justice, so it seemed a fitting place to begin my own exploration of these themes. During this time I was able to meet with John Bell and Doug Gay, both respected theologians and talented song writers, who offered their own examples as encouragement to pursue writing music for worship.

For the second phase of summer I invited a partner along, photographer and musician Kallie Walker. We visited the Navajo reservation in Arizona, the Lakota Sioux in South Dakota, and the Ojibwa Cherokee in Minnesota. As we met people and listened to them, walking and sitting where they walked and sat, we began to form prayers in the shape of songs.

Finally, I spent a week in solitude at an island cabin in central Minnesota, living in a rhythm of work and worship and trying to write music that flowed from the experiences of the summer. As I slowed into the week’s rhythm, I discovered that music was not just something that was written for worship but also flowed from times of worship. My morning devotions with the Psalms would often begin to generate songs within me.

As I pursue my attraction for music, nature, and social justice, I am becoming aware of these as areas of deep need in our world.

Our relationship to the natural world has been reintroduced to us through the Green movement, but we still have a long way to go to find ourselves in natural rhythms that care for all of Creation. As a people we are hungry for connection and worship; music has the power to connect hearts to each other and to God. And finally, there are many people in need of our concerned attention to participate in life transformation through Christian solidarity and prayer.

This FTE summer has been a gift to be able to pay attention to these intersections of need and gladness in my life. I have been inspired to more intentionally write music, giving voice to themes of justice and nature in song. More broadly however, this summer’s experience has helped me to value listening to my life’s themes as faithful guides for where God may be calling me.

In August, Kallie and I reconvened in Michigan to record the songs we came up with. As of now we have four songs that have been recorded, and they can be found at www.andrewandkallie.blogspot.com, along with some pictures and comments.
Remember when you couldn’t wait to turn in that dull textbook at the end of the semester and receive a pittance from the campus bookstore? Well, along comes a textbook so compelling that not only will you want to keep it, you may want to buy one even if you’re not a student!

The world of textbook publishing is changing greatly, and Dr. Robert Van Voorst, Professor of New Testament, is on the cusp of this new wave. In October he announced the culmination of three years’ intense work with the publication of RELG: World, an innovative approach to teaching and learning about world religions.

No more text-heavy, long books with a few black & white photos scattered throughout. This book is concisely worded, richly illustrated, and most remarkably, comes as a fully interactive e-book linking to videos, maps, articles, and online study tools. Students can use their Ipads or other computers to read, take notes, watch videos, use Google Earth™ to zero in on geographic locations, and take quizzes that are instantly graded and returned.

The top three best sellers in World Religions textbooks average more than 600 pages and cost more than $100. RELG: World is 375 pages, includes an e-book, and costs $59.95.

“I have been looking to do a textbook like this for more than 10 years,” says Van Voorst, “but only recently has it become possible.”

Dr. Van Voorst worked with 4LTR Press of Cengage Learning, a brand of Wadsworth Publishing, Boston, MA. Over 100 professors served as peer reviewers, giving detailed critique along the way. Cengage ran student focus groups to test the product and also had an advisory panel of religion professors. In all, more than 50 people had a hand in shaping RELG: World.

It takes a lot of work to author a book like this. “In addition to supplying the text, I had to supply the electronic links and interactive pedagogy,” says Van Voorst. “I also researched and selected most of the photos.”

RELG: World will be available in Western’s bookstore, The Sacred Page, starting January 1, 2012. Contact bookstore@westernsem.edu or 616-392-8555, x148.

Class of 2011

Master of Divinity graduates:
Nathaniel Bull—Pastor of new church start, Vanguard, Kalamazoo, MI
Joshua Cooper—Associate Pastor, Compass Church, Byron Center, MI
Chad De Jager—Community Pastor, First Reformed Church, Pompton Plains, NJ
Lindsey De Kruif—Master of Theology Program, WTS
Jeremy Dowsett—Pastor of new church start, Blacksoil, Lansing, MI
Curtis Gruel—writer, spiritual director, and preacher, Edmond, OK
Sarah Hoogendoorn—Director of Outreach, Inglewood CRC, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
Kristen Livingston—Chapel Assistant, WTS
Noah Livingston—Chapel Assistant, WTS
Michael Manning—Pastoral Intern, Faith Community Reformed Church, Dyer, IN
Sarah Palmsa—Associate Pastor, New Hope Reformed Church, Powell, OH
Michael Parker—Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Ashland, OH
Bethany Popkes—Youth Pastor, Whidbey Presbyterian Church, Oak Harbor, WA
Ryan Sweet—Associate Pastor, Addisville Reformed Church, Richboro, PA
Brett Vander Berg—Pastor, First Reformed Church, Aplington, IA
Stephen VanderWoude—Pastor, First Reformed Church, Ravenna, MI
Mark Van Drunen—Community Worker/Evangelist, First Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI
Kay Vinci—Ministry in North Carolina
Dean Wierenga—On to Glory, 7/7/2011

Doctor of Ministry graduate:
Rev. Dan Smith—Pastor, Zion Evangelical United Church of Christ, St.Joseph, MI

Master of Theology graduates:
Charles Michael Burgess—Ethics Instructor, US Army Chaplain School and Center, Fort Jackson, SC
Kim Sung Ran—Finishing Th.M. thesis, Madison, WI
Kim, Yo-Han—Language School, Chicago
José Macias B.—Pastor of Cross-Cultural Discipleship, New Community Fourth Reformed, Holland, MI

Graduate Certificate in Urban Pastoral Ministry:
Edward Wayne Coleman—Pastor, Imagine Fellowship, Holland, MI
Michael Jackson—Undergrad work preparing to pursue M.Div. at WTS

In Search Process as of 11/1/11
Ralph Beidler
Nancy Boote
Wayne Bowerman
Norman Buursma, Jr.
Nico Dipzinski
Jason Fulkerson
Jessica Kast-Keat
Bradley Kautz
Jennifer Legg
Mark VandenBosch
Richard Van Dop
Tammi VanDrum
Nicholas Van Slett
Craig Vereke
“Those of us who have seen children live in the shadows know that a country as rich as ours cannot possibly justify this neglect.”

--President John F. Kennedy (1961)

Fifty years ago there were more than 6.5 million children and adults with intellectual disabilities in the United States. One of them was President Kennedy’s own sister, Rose Marie “Rosemary” Kennedy. His family’s first-hand experience led the President to call our nation’s attention to the deplorable living conditions in institutions and the limited opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). His commitment inspired the nation to action, fueling many parental and family-led advocacy groups and leading to various legislation passed throughout the years.

Half a century later, where do we stand? Are people with I/DD still living in the shadows? The Arc, the nation’s leading advocacy and service organization for I/DD, decided to find out. They surveyed parents, siblings and caregivers to learn how those with I/DD are doing in school, the workplace, and in life in general.

The results were disappointing, showing that despite gains in many areas, efforts have fallen short of the vision where people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are accepted and have the supports they need to live to their full potential in the community.

Many have dropped out of school, the vast majority are not employed, and families are exhausted with no hope of community support to lighten the load.

Into this mix comes the Ralph and Cheryl Schregardus Friendship House, an innovative housing solution that opened the Fall of 2007 on the campus of Western Theological Seminary. No one quite realized the impact this special home would have on the residents, parents, and the community. In its fifth year of operation, Friendship House is a stunning success.

In each of the six apartment pods, three seminary students live with one young adult with an I/DD. These young adults formerly lived at home with their parents. While living in Friendship House, they are expected to be employed, care for themselves, be a friend to seminarians, and keep growing in independent living skills.

One of the goals was to have seminary students become closely connected to the world of the person with an I/DD to better understand them and their family’s experience, and thus be better equipped as a future ministry professional.

Most students have no previous experience in this area, but as their uncertainties give way to the joy of getting to know their Friendship House “Friend”, bonds form and prejudices disappear.

The Friends themselves have grown so much in areas of social skills, confidence, and independence that a different instrument than one used in admission now has to be used.

The parents are thrilled. “My child has just blossomed!”

The Friendship House model is being noticed by other communities in which groups of families with adult children with an I/DD are partnering with a seminary or divinity school to explore having a Friendship House. One currently underway is in Durham, NC in which friend residents will invite Duke Divinity School students to join them for a life-changing experience in their Friendship House.

To facilitate the Durham project and others like it, Dr. Matthew Floding, the professor who spearheaded the project, has organized Friendship House Partners, a consulting team to work with persons with I/DD and their families, to secure safe, affordable, community-oriented housing.

America as a whole may not be where it needs to be, but the Friendship House model shows that a few individuals in a community can make a huge difference working together to fill great needs, one family at a time.

Background information obtained from a June 2011 report by The Arc.
on to Glory...

Robert Folkert ‘52
b. Overisel, MI 11/22/1924
d. Adrian, MI 10/25/2011
Hope ‘49; WTS ‘52
*Reformed Churches served:
(1955-53) Eddyville, IA
Other service to the church:
1954 – Dismissed to the Congregational Danish Assoc.
Served churches in Keosaqua, Eldon, Antioch, and Clay, IA, as well as Richmond, Columbus, and Addison, MI

Dick Vriesman ‘53
b. Muskegon, MI 3/22/1924
d. Lynden, WA 5/22/2011
Hope ‘47; WTS ‘53
*Reformed Churches served:
(1953-57) First, Prairie City, IA
(1957-61) Gibsonville, WI
(1961-65) Calvary, South Holland, IL
(1965-72) Third, Kalamazoo, MI
(1972-78) Grace, Holland, MI
(1978-89) Faith, Lynden, WA
Other service to the church:
(1947-50) Missionary, Tindivanam, India

Darrell Franken ‘55
b. Eddyville, IA 10/28/1930
d. Holland, MI 7/29/2011
Central Coll ‘52; WTS ‘55
U of Chicago (MA ‘56);
La Salle U (Ph.D. ’59)
*Reformed Churches served:
(1957-59) Hope, Chicago, IL
(1959-62) Everglade, Grand Rapids, MI
Other service to the church:
(1955-57) General Secretary, Mich. Christian Endeavor
(1963-71) Missionary, Bahrain
(1972-95) Counselor, Christian Counseling Serv., Holland, MI

Earl Kragt ‘55
b. Kent Co., MI 9/2/1926
d. Spring Lake, MI 10/16/2011
Hope ‘49, Prairie Bible Inst ‘51 (cert.);
WTS ‘55
Princeton Theo. Sem. ‘61 (Th.M.);
Hartford Theo. Sem. ‘66 (MRE)
*Reformed Churches served:
(1966-71) Hope, Grand Haven, MI
(1974-81) Casnovia, MI
Other service to the church:
(1955-66 &1971-74) Missionary, Philippines
Teacher, Tiyuan Univ., China
Resource & Referrals for China, Berkeley, CA
Interim Minister, PC(USA)

Burrell Pennings ‘56
b. Hudson, NY 5/19/1927
Hope ‘50; WTS ‘56
United Theo. Sem. ‘58 (DMin)
*Reformed Churches served:
(1956-60) Keystone, Indianapolis, IN
(1960-66) Hope, Lincoln, NE
(1966-69) Bethany, Des Moines, IA
(1969-81) Bethany, Clara City, MN
(1981-87) First, Alexander, IA
(1987-92) Sixth, North Haledor, NJ
Other service to the church:
(1950-53 Teacher, Meiji Gakuin University, Japan
(retirement) Visitation Pastor, First, Zeeland, MI

Robert Wallinga ’60
b. Hull, IA 6/6/1936
d. Pella, IA 9/14/2011
Central Coll ’57; WTS ’60
*Reformed Churches served:
(1960-64) Washington, Ackley, IA
(1964-77) Morningside, Sioux City, SD
Other service to the church:
(1977-84) VPRes Development, Northwestern C, Orange City, IA
(1984-90) Development, Synod of the West
Financial Resources Consultant, Heartland/Far West Synod

Harvard Kruizenga ’63
b. Hull, IA 1/12/1938
d. Pella, IA 9/14/2011
Central Coll ’60; WTS ’63
Dubuque Theo. Sem. (DMin)
*Reformed Churches served:
(1963-68) Aurora, Stckney, SD
(1968-71) Sandham Memorial, Monroe, SD
(1968-71) Monroe, SD
Other service to the church:
Pastor to Presbyterian churches in Arkansas & Missouri

Dean Wierenga ‘11
b. 6/9/1964
d. Jenison, MI 7/7/2011
Hope ‘88; WTS ‘11
*Reformed Churches served:
(1990-1999) Youth Dir., Woodhaven, MI
(1999-2005) Youth Dir., Fellowship, Hudsonville, MI

In July L. John Hesselink ‘53 traveled to South Africa to attend the Int’l Reformed Theological Institute Conference in Potchefstroom and to lecture at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Stellenbosch.

John D. Hood ’65 moved to Howard, OH in July, and later that month he served as Local Arrangements Committee Chairman for the 63rd Annual Family Conference of the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference in Cleveland, OH.

On November 14, 2010, Eldert Zwart ’76 retired after serving Beverly Reformed Church in Wisconsin, WI for 15 years. The congregation surprised El and Mary Etta with an Alaskan cruise, which they took in July. Rev. Zwartz served churches in Allendale and Hamilton, MI as well as Faith Reformed in Wisconsin, WI. He continues to serve as Beverly’s calling pastor and as pulpits supply. Thus far retirement has been wonderful, although “far busier than we ever imagined!” El and Mary Etta are amazed by the abundance of God’s grace and goodness through all of these years.

The Louisville Institute has awarded Carol Bechtel ’84 a grant for a project, “Have you Considered My Servant Job?” which will allow her to write the stories of a group of RCA chaplains and their struggles to come to terms with suffering and injustice. As part of the grant she will also write a historical novel based on the life of her great-uncle, Ralph Bielmea ’34, who was a chaplain in WWII.

Gretchen Schoon Tanis ’02 has received her Ph.D. in youth ministry and theology from King’s College, London. Her research topic was the theology of Young Life.

Nate and Andrea DeWard ’03 moved to Florida in August to plant a new church called LifeSpring Church, along with several others (another church planter is Aaron Klein ’02). Five Florida churches are being planted with a launch date of spring 2012. For updates, the website is GoShowLove.org. The DeWards are very excited about this new opportunity.

Upcoming Learning Opportunities

Jan 6-Mar 16: Online course, “10 Most Important Events in the History of the Church” by Dennis Voskuil
Jan 15-16: Osterhaven Lectures: Richard Bauckham
Feb 16: Stoutmire Diversity Lecture: Frank M. Yamada
April 17-19: Transition into Ministry Summit for recent grads
May 3-4: Youth Ministry Conference: Kara Powell

journey@westernsem.edu
1-800-392-8554, x167
I didn’t grow up in the church.  
I wasn’t even a believer when I entered Hope College.  
But one day in 1970 on spring break in Daytona Beach, I stumbled upon a Campus Crusade for Christ ministry team, and a guy started preaching from II Cor. 5:17.  
Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has passed away. Behold the new has come!  
I felt awakened, enlivened—it was the preaching of the Word calling forth life. That day I knelt in the sand and became a new creation—a Christian!  
Preaching can do that. It can dramatically change the way a person sees everything.  

Here at Western Theological Seminary the center of our focus is not human capacity, giftedness, or charisma, but rather God’s sovereign grace and power that brings life out of death and calls into being those things which do not exist.  
It is our passion to form men and women who can hear this call and make themselves available to be used by God in these great purposes.  
The culture is becoming more and more secularized, with no “Christian memory,” as we call it. Yet, this is a wonderful opportunity for our students.  
I don’t think anything so confirms the Gospel in your own soul than when you try to articulate it to someone who doesn’t accept it.  
May our students be ever more in love with God and eager to preach!