A few years ago I preached a baccalaureate sermon at Northwestern College in which I informed the students, “You’ll never graduate.” I explained that as the Apostle Paul told the Philippians, in our Christian walk we must constantly “press on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” As servants of God, we never graduate—but we continue to learn and grow in our ministries.

To that end Western Theological Seminary, in cooperation with the Revitalization/Leadership Cluster of the Reformed Church in America, invited recent graduating classes to gather at the seminary in the middle of May for a few days of reacquaintance, renewal, and retreat. To date, the graduating classes of 2004 and 2005 have participated in the program.

Studies of church leaders have revealed that establishing ongoing peer relationships is one of the most effective ways to deter fatigue and burnout. Leaders who are able to participate in these peer groups early in their ministries are most likely to sustain energy and vision.

It is a joy, of course, for me to become reacquainted with friends and to hear them tell of the exciting things happening in their lives. It is also an opportunity to reflect on the challenges of Christian leadership.

When this program has been fully implemented, classes will be invited to participate in these “reunion” retreats one year, three years, and five years after graduation.

In a memorable radio ad, Tom Bodett tells his listeners that they are always welcome at Motel 6. He concludes with this hospitable phrase: “We’ll leave the light on for you.” It is my expectation that those who have graduated from Western Seminary will know that they are always welcome: “We’ll leave the light on.”
“Witness”
By Robert H. Schuller ’50

My vision for ministry started at Western Seminary. Dr. Simon Blocker, Professor of Homiletics, assigned a term paper to be written on a great preacher. One morning he said, “Schuller, you still haven’t picked a preacher.” I replied, “I don’t know any on the list you handed out.” “Fine,” he said. “I’ll give you one: George Truett.”

I had never heard of this Baptist preacher in Dallas, TX, but what I learned would inspire the direction of my ministry. George Truett came to a church in Dallas with about forty members. He came with the attitude that he would spend his whole life there and build it into a truly great church. Forty years later it was the largest Baptist church in the world.

I thought, “That’s what I’ll do. I’ll go to a big city where there are lots of unchurched people, and I can try to win them to Christ.”

The first church I served was in Chicago, and it grew tenfold in four years just through knocking on doors and inviting people. Then I accepted a call from the California Classis to start a church in Garden Grove.

My Uncle Henry, a former missionary to China who told me when I was four that I would grow up to be a preacher, said, “Bob, you have to make this a mission. You have to go after unchurched people.”

So I did. I rang doorbells.

One young woman told me, “My father was Jewish and my mother was Catholic, and they said when I grew up I could pick one. Now I’ve graduated from Stanford, I’m married with a child of my own, but I have no religion. What’s yours?”

I thought I would pick up on the Jewish part of her story. “Well, you know in the Old Testament...” She interrupted, “What do you mean, Old Testament?” I said, “Well, you know the Bible is made up of the Old Testament and the New Testament...”

She said, “Oh, you have two Bibles?” I started laughing and said, “Oh forget it, but I have a church you might like.”

So she came to church.

Dr. Robert Harold Schuller is the Founding Pastor of Crystal Cathedral Ministries in Garden Grove, CA. Dr. Schuller was Western Seminary’s first recipient of the Distinguished Alumnus award in 1997.

I had my sermon all prepared like I had been taught at seminary. There she was in the front row. Suddenly I thought, “If she doesn’t even know what the Old Testament is, this sermon will mean nothing to her!” I was talking to a person who knew nothing about the Bible! I had to switch to extemporaneous speaking. It was revolutionary. Later when I would end up on global TV, it became more important.

In Christ a teacher knows his students have certain prerequisites before they sit in his class. In my “class” none of them had prerequisites. It changed my entire “preaching” strategy. The pulpit went from a teaching post to a therapeutic place. Start with the heart; where are they troubled? What are their hurts? Just be Jesus to the people, wherever they are.

Jesus used two words: witness and preach. Don’t preach to unchurched people. Witness to unchurched people and preach to believers.

There’s the mission and there’s the church. A person has to know what his role is. If he’s going to be the pastor of a church, then he has to focus on covenant people. Choose whether you are called to witness or to preach—occasionally you can do both—but know your focus.

A pastor’s number one role in mission is to be the Body of Christ to others—smiling, loving, encouraging people.

My friend Mother Teresa once said, “Smile, it is the beginning of peace.” That is profound! Every message should start with a smile.

Unchurched people aren’t coming to church because there’s something attractive about church. We grew up in a church age, but now we’re in a mission age. If you’re going to be a mission, you can’t lay the law down and scold them for doing something you would consider a sin. That type of preaching is for people who have already made a commitment.

To realize your vision you have to decide: are you a mission or a church?

Réfle Xions of Min istry

2006

Regional Secretary of the American Bible Society (ABS). He also preached in Reformed churches in the Southland, including the drive-in movie theater where Robert Schuller was beginning his ministry.


Back in 1966, the Today’s English Version of the Scriptures was not met with universal joy and acclaim. Some conservative churches complained that it muted fundamental claims of Christian doctrine. For example, in Isaiah the KJV states, “a virgin shall conceive,” but the TEV says, “a young woman who is pregnant will have a son.” Some churches went so far as to burn as many copies of the new translation they could find.

Richard Ter Maat ’64

Dick and Helen (Meylink), his high school sweetheart, married in 1960 and moved to Holland, Michigan where Helen completed her studies at Hope College and Dick attended Western Seminary. Neither envisioned themselves serving in the city, but God had another plan. An internship in Denver printed them for what lay ahead. As graduation approached, a call to Ninth Reformed Church on the near West Side of Grand Rapids persisted, tugged at their hearts. In June of 1964, they moved into the parsonage and took the first step into what would become a lifelong ministry within a parish they fondly named Westtown.

As the Ter Maats immersed themselves in the life of their new congregation, they became increasingly aware of the church’s ineffectiveness in reaching its closest neighbors. God gave Dick a compelling vision. In a bold and faith-filled moment, Dick proposed that the church rent space in a storefront to begin an outreach to boys on the street. The leaders responded by allocating the...
When family and friends asked Jim what he felt about this reaction, he simply smiled and said, “It’s good publicity for us. For every book they burn, another will be bought by someone wanting to know what the hubbub’s about.”

In 1973, Jim wrote Quotations from the Bible for Modern Man, in which he gathered Bible passages to answer the difficult and troubling questions of life situations.

Throughout his career with the American Bible Society, Jim was privileged to present copies of the Bible to four standing Presidents: Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, Lyndon Johnson, and Gerald Ford. During the presentation to President Ford, Jim and the President discovered they had played football for opposing high schools. Ever the diplomat, Jim never told family and friends whether he agreed with Lyndon Johnson’s assessment of President Ford being who he was as a result of having played football without his helmet.

Jim’s wife Peggy died in 1975. Shortly thereafter, Jim retired from the American Bible Society and moved to Carlsbad, California. While maintaining his ties to the Reformed Church, Jim joined Pilgrim United Church of Christ in Carlsbad, where he met and married a widow named Pearl Goode in 1980. Jim and Pearl brought their families together on many occasions, hosting reunions and special weeks with the grandchildren.

During the early years of his retirement, Jim served two interims in United Church of Christ congregations in Escondido and Poway. He also served as the pastor to retired ministers for the California Classis of the RCA.

After Pearl’s death in 1999, Jim moved to a retirement community in San Marcos and then to one in Fullerton, where he is but five minutes away from his son Jon and family. Now 93 years old, he enjoys life and is deeply honored to be among the recipients of Western’s Distinguished Alumni/ae Award. When told of this award, Jim said, “I appreciate very much this honor. I value the education I received at Western, the preparation it gave me for ministry, and the friendships with classmates that I have enjoyed keeping throughout the years. May Western Theological Seminary continue to thrive in this new century and millennium!”

Dick Ter Maat

Distinguished Alumni

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A PUBLICATION OF WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Dr. Weeber is also engaged in pulpit supply for area churches, including the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church. He writes that he is deeply grateful to the Lord for the privilege of continuing ministry in the church.

Charles Kamp ’58 was elected chairman of the northwest cluster of churches in Maumee Valley Presbytery (Ohio). They named their cluster the Black Swamp Kirks, because the 12 churches are located in the corner of Ohio that was covered by the Black Swamp. One of their pastors came from the Church (Kirk) of Scotland. The clusters meet between presbytery meetings and plan activities for the churches in their areas.

Nick Vander Weide ’59 is the Congregational Care Team Leader at Penn Yan United Methodist Church, Penn Yan, NY. He is also a 3rd grade Reading Buddy with Retired Seniors Volunteer Program and serves as a member of the Board of Directors of Yates County Habitat for Humanity.

Owen (Ted) Bechtel ’56 and his wife have recently moved to Fletcher, NC, which is just south of Asheville.

Since retiring in October of 1992, Gilbert L. Visser ’58 was interim pastor at his home church in Salkicka, IA 1996-1997 as well as an interim at the Newton, IA church 1999-2001. From the time he retired and between these interims, he has served as the part-time visitation pastor of his home church.

Gerald Bates ’64 (Th.M.) is president of Friends of Hope Africa University, Inc., an organization which assisted in the launch and development of the school, now six years old. Hope Africa University in Burundi, Africa, now enrolls 760 students. Info: njewkes@comcast.com

Bruce J. Hoffman ’64 will be completing a 20-month interim at Clinton Ave. Reformed Church in Bergenfield, NJ on June 30.

Fritz Kruithof ’64 is serving with the RCA Senior Minister program, calling on pastoral retirees and families. Also, from April to July of this year he is covering a three month sabbatical at Bethany Reformed in Kalamazoo, MI.

William N. Herold ’65 is now a member of The Sons of The American Revolution as well as a member of Mayflower

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Henry B. Poppen ’44 celebrated his 60th anniversary of ordination at the church in which he was ordained: Immanuel Reformed Church, Belmont, IA. He and his wife Cornelia have served eight churches in Iowa, Wisconsin, Chicago, Colorado, and Minnesota, as well as served as interim pastor at Palm Springs Reformed in Lake Worth, FL, First Reformed in Wilmar, MN, and First Reformed of Orange City, IA. They are now retired and living in Orange City.

Harvey Heeckstra ’47 is a retired missionary Bible translator and Chairman of the Board for Talking Bibles International. Bibles in audio format enable families in oral, non-reading cultures to hear God’s Word in a daily listening program. He invites everyone to check out www.talkingbibles.org and www.audiorecords.org.

Donald P. Buteyn ’48 retired on June 30, 2004 as Pastor of Mission at the Rancho Bernardo Community Presbyterian Church in San Diego, CA. He and Marian have moved back to Holland, MI, where they met at Hope College fifty years ago.

In October 2005, Arthur “Bud” Van Eck ’51 and his wife participated in the Footsteps of St. Paul Tour, which led to Bud teaching a 4-week seminar on Paul in Traverse City, MI. He will also head a men’s retreat about Paul in October ’06. The Van Ecks completed their 179 chapterlcy cruise on Holland America in March.

The ministry of Donald Nienhuis ’54 took him all over the United States: Washington, Montana, South Dakota, Michigan, New Jersey, Florida, and Idaho. His daughters and their families heard the call to mission around the world. Family members have spread the Gospel in Venezuela, Taiwan, Russia, Romania, Moldova, Japan, Africa, Thailand, and soon, the Philippines.

After living in 17 homes in eight states and serving six churches, where he delivered 3,704 sermons, baptized 342 people, received 657 new members, and conducted 172 weddings, William Hoffman ’56 and his wife Albernda retired to Stewartville, MN. Bill is still preaching in retirement and writes that if he knew he had only one sermon left to preach, he would choose “The Cross and Christ’s Resurrection.”

Nineteen years ago Louis P. Kraay ’56 retired from full-time ministry and has since continued part-time as calling pastor for First Reformed Church, Grand Haven, MI. After Margaret passed away, he married Ruth Larkin in November 2005.

At Knox Theological Seminary in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, Collins D. Weeber, ’56 directs the Doctor of Ministry Program and is Adjunct Professor of Practical Theology. The seminary was granted full accreditation in 2005 by ATS and is enjoying steady growth training men and women from over twenty denominations.

Dr. Weeber is also engaged in pulp sup-

1956
Burrell Pennings, George Myuensken, Carl Schroeder, Joe Myuensken, Carl Van Farowe, Louis Kraay


1966
Front Row: Stan Rock, Larry Teitsma, Sherwin Werner, Stan Vugetveen
Back Row: George Boerhiger, Donald Vunurens, Ed Seely, Franklin Spoelstra


1981
Front Row: Jim Dykstra, Bill Harris, Ed Schmidt, Jim Lester, Abram Blaak
Back Row: Steven Bakker, David Blauw, Wayne Sneller

NOT PICTURED: Phil Asink, Leroy Ausema, Thomas Bartha, David Boogerd, John Brown, Robert Faulman, James Heneveld, Steven Hooijenwerf, Robert Livingston, David Lovess, James McDonald, Ernst Monogram*, James ’OConnell, Nolan Patama, David Rock, David Schreuder, David Schwabauer, Earl Smith, Phillip Sneller, Eugene Sutton, Donald Topp, Doug VanAartsen, Stephen vanBorkhorst, David VanderLeest, Jeff VanDerWeele, Charles VanDommelen, Ken Westrate

* deceased
Bruce Lauerman  ’65 retired on September 30, 2005, but he is still active training coaches in Natural Church Development. He is also the president of the RCA’s Southwest Classis.

Daryl A. Vetter  ’66 retired in June 2005 but continues to work part-time at Lake- land Reformed Church in Vicksburg, MI. He moved to Holland in April 2006.

The Joint Venture Firms in China, led by George Boerger, 90, continue to progress. He will dedicate several new manufacturing and office buildings in China this year.

After serving in the RCA for ten years, Don Vuurens  ’66 spent the rest of his ministry serving churches in the West Michigan United Methodist Conference. He was also a “circuit riding preacher” for various Methodist churches in Michigan and Indiana.

For 32 years he served as a mis- sions program of gardens to feed hungry people. He is still playing lots of music, instruments and singing in church.

Sherwin Weiner  ’66 retired in January 2006 after serving in the RCA for nearly 40 years. He was privileged to serve as pas- tor of First Reformed of Astoria (New York City), Bethel Reformed (Sterling, IL) and Fellowship Reformed (Muskegon, MI). For the last ten years, he has been the Execu- tive Minister of the Synod of the Great Lakes.

Vern Eisenberg 77 is involved with a great sexual abstinence program for 6-12th graders called Silver Ring Thing. It’s a great sexual abstinence program for young people.

The day started with a welcome reception in the Borgenraaff Atrium. Later in the morning, two students gave a presentation on their Oman Intercultural Trip. After luncheon for the classes of 1956, 1960, and 1981, guests were treated to a panel discussion between two seminary presidents: Dr. Dennis Voskuijl and Dr. Neil Martinus, Jr.

The fall semester and winter break are having a wonderful ministry. Last year people are having a wonderful ministry. Last year 450,000 people received the daily Bible Read- ings series covering the whole of Scripture in three formats. It can be online at www.silverringthing.org.

Steven J. Bakker 91 is a Pastoral Senior of Pohang (Wf) United Church since October of 1991. His wife, Brenda, is a full-time reading aide at their local elementary school. He writes that they are having a wonderful ministry. Last year the congregation dedicated a $1.3 million building addition to the church, and already they are seeing it bear fruit in their community.

After 20 years of active service as a Navy Chaplain, David Schwabauer 91 is about to retire. He currently lives in California.

Paul Hansen 92 in the process of earning a Doctorate in Worship, pending completion of his dissertation in 2007.

Since 2001 Gordon I. Waddill 92 has been on the board of Alongside, a ministry to pastors and missionaries. He earned an M.A. and teaches Gospel Literature as an adjunct professor at Cornerstone Uni- versity in Grand Rapids, MI. He also teaches at North Hills Classical Academy, a Christian school.

Cindi Veldheer DeYoung 90 joined the Pastoral Care Staff at Spectrum Health, Butterworth Hospital (Grand Rapids, MI) in December, 2005 after 14 years serving as Hospice chaplain. She previously trained her canine, Wilson Waldo, to pass the AKC Canine Good Citizen Test last November. Wilson’s middle name, Waldo, is in honor of the Waldensians.

Dave Van Netten 96 has been pastoring the Grace Reformed Church in Waterloo, IA for more than eight years. He is enjoying God’s blessing on their growing ministry. And yes, the “Bummer-Preachers” is still playing drums in the church’s praise band too!

After serving Faith Reformed Church in Kingsville, Ontario, Canada, for nine years, Carson Cole 90 has accepted the call to be the pastor of Christ Community Church in Welland, Ontario, effective June 20, 2006.

In May 2006 Christopher Dorn 99 received his PhD in Religious Studies from Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI. His dissertation: “Tradition and Trans- formation: The Celebration of the Lord’s Supper in the RCA.”

In February Rodney Haveman 91 and Gretchen Schoon Tanis 92 were among 800 delegates attending The Ninth Assem- bly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre, Brazil. WTS M.Div. student Kate Davilaar also attended. Rod and Kate posted their reflections on the RCA’s website, www.rca.org.

Flama Rakkau 91 (Th.M.) is now the prin- cipal of the Talau Seminary for the Presby- terian Church in Vanuatu (islands in the southwest Pacific Ocean).

Andrew and Julie VanDeVeun Van Til 91, married July 3, 2004, praise God for the birth of their daughter, Eva Claire, on Janu- ary 11, 2006. Julie is the pastor of Ada Community Reformed Church, Ada, MI.

Shane ’01 and Jill ’03 VerSteeg are the proud parents of healthy twins, Will and Owen, born March 10, 2006. The Ver- Steegs live in Johnston, IA.

John Culp 97, a chaplain and Manager of the Pastoral Care Dept. at Mercy Medical Center in Sioux City, IA. He and his wife, Manda, had their first child, Kames, on December 20, 2005. Manda works for the Girl Scouts doing develop- ment and marketing.

Kent Fren 93 and his wife, Betsy, cele- brated the birth of a daughter, Josie Jeanne, on February 10, 2006. Born 1 b 2 oz. as of April 12 she weighed 2 lbs 7 oz. “Bless the Lord, O my soul…”

Jason Olson 93 is working with Cross- roads Community, an RCA new church start in East Sioux Classis. They converted a Dept. of Transportation garage into a church facility. Recently 100 teenage girls from a local residential treatment facility accepted Christ after watching Passion of the Christ. On a personal note, Samuel Christian was born to Jason and his wife on May 7, 2005.

Joshua Vis 93 ‘03 earned his M.A. from the University of Chicago in 2005. Last fall he started a Ph.D. in Hebrew Bible at Duke University.

Matt and Jess Shults 94 welcomed a son, William John, into their family on June 7, 2005.

Daniel Teerman 94 is now the Director of Spiritual Life at Bradenton Christian School. He counsels students, works with small groups, works on spiritual develop- ment with elementary students, evaluates and develops school-wide Bible curricu- lum, and calls on sick or injured students and their families. He also still teaches. He writes that the Lord is using the min- istry as a place where people are healed and disciples are growing. He would not be surprised if a church is soon planted, as God is moving in the Bradenton, FL area.

In February 2006 Amy Avery 95 joined Worthington Presbyterian Church in Wor- thington, OH as an associate pastor. She serves mainly in the areas of pastoral care, Stephen Ministry, Ministry of Faith, and Growth and Renewal.

On May 7 Bill Freeman 95 was ordained and installed at The First Congregational Church in Belding, MI.

The Christ Community Church in Vanuatu (islands in the southwest Pacific Ocean).
Pray with me please...

We are a community of a family of, a people of prayer. Every Tuesday morning a small group led by Dennis Vouskull gathers in my office to pray for the seminary community and our supporters. Each weekday during the academic year the community gathers after chapel for fellowship and sharing of prayer concerns. And regularly throughout the year a group of prayer partners is lifting up the seminary in prayer.

You may recall my invitation last year to join us as an email prayer partner. The joys and concerns of the community are shared regularly with these supporters (thanks to Beth Smith), and they have been praying faithfully. What a tremendous blessing this has been for us. To those of you who have been part of this ministry, "Thank you."

As we look toward a new academic year, the challenges will be great, but through Christ, all things are possible. Will you consider becoming a prayer partner this year? Simply email ken@westernsem.edu to let me know. Nothing sustains the students, staff and faculty of Western Seminary more than knowing prayers of support are being lifted up every day. We are a community of, a family of, a people of prayer. Amen!

--Ken Neveel
Vice President of Advancement and Communications

The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. James 5:16
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**Not pictured:**

- **Scott R. Lokers**, B.A., M.Div., D.Min.

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**Reflections from a third-generation WTS graduate**

Now that the transcript has been finalized and the diploma is firmly affixed to the wall, I’ve had a bit of time to reflect on the many ways my three years at Western Seminary have shaped my ministerial self.

The unmediated educational experience of my last thirty months has been only the most recent appendix to a lifetime of instruction rooted in Western’s rich heritage. Long before I set foot on campus, I was witnessing a family of WTS graduates model the vision that my time in Holland would bring to sharper focus.

Watching Dad, I learned about the great joys and profound responsibilities of the pastoral life. Through Uncle Dave’s ministry, I came to appreciate the resonance of the gospel’s creative core. And Grandpa’s stalwart faith has long served as a signpost to the simple dignity of Reformed theology. To these ministers, and to the institution that formed them, I’ll always be thankful.

—Tim Breen ’06
During the last ten years, Western has transitioned from a small to a mid-sized seminary, with consistent growth in students, programs, financial needs and donor support. To respond to this growth, the Board of Trustees evaluated the current structure of Western’s administrative staff and approved several changes.

The new administrative structure creates three vice presidential positions: the Vice President of Finance (Norm Donkersloot), and the Vice President of Academic Affairs (Leanne Van Dyk), the Vice President of Advancement and Communications (Ken Neevel).

The administrative restructure creates three vice presidential positions: the Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs (Leanne Van Dyk), the Vice President of Finance (Norm Donkersloot), and the Vice President of Advancement and Communications (Ken Neevel).

The president and the three vice presidents will meet regularly and will have the authority to manage, evaluate and act upon matters of internal administration related to their areas. They will continue to work closely with their direct reports and represent the needs of their specific areas to each other and to the president. These changes will become effective July 1, 2006.

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

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Editorial Council: Dr. Dennis Voskuil, Dr. George Brown, Dr. Robert Van Voorst, Dr. Matthew Floding, Ken Neevel

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dr. leanne van dyk
Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs

norm donkersloot
Vice President of Finance

keneth neevell
Vice President of Advancement and Communications

Eastern Theological Seminary
Special Gifts made to Western Theological Seminary
In Memory of Marion Koets
Myra W. Barten
Ethel VanderBunte
Bob & Ruth VanderBunte
Harlan & Becky VanderBunte
Roger & Dawn VanderBunte
In Memory of Bruce Mogk
Mr. & Mrs. Earl Mogk
In Memory of Emily Mouw
Mary Mouw
In Memory of Henry Mouw
Emily Mouw
Mary Mouw
In Memory of Robert VanVoorst, Sr.
Rev. & Mrs. Robert G. Vrooman
In Memory of Sonja Stewart
Dr. & Mrs. George Brown, Jr.
Mr. Clarence & Rev. Mary Merrill
Presbyterian Church (USA), Office of Theology & Worship
In Memory of Rev. Harold Oppermann
Zion Evangelical & Reformed Church
Gifs made February 9 - May 18, 2006

New Administrative Structure

Dr. Leanne Van Dyk
Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs

Norman Donkersloot
Vice President of Finance

Kenneth Neevel
Vice President of Advancement and Communications

Many words describe Sonja Stewart. She was a daughter, sister, mother, and grandmother. To Westminster Presbyterian Church in Grand Rapids, MI, she was a deacon and later an elder. Sonja was a student—earning degrees at Muskingum College, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and the University of Notre Dame—and a teacher, serving on Western’s faculty from 1970 until ill health led to early retirement in 2002. “Author” would describe her. Young Children and Worship (1989), co-authored with Jerome Berryman, became a best-seller. It was followed in 2000 by Following Jesus.

Sonja engaged children in a fresh and creative way. Unlike the classroom model of teaching and learning, she fashioned her distinctive approach around the rhythm of Christian worship. In the years following Sonja’s development of Children and Worship, many an M.Div. student at Western Seminary could be seen carrying a familiar gold box into Sonja’s classroom to present a story.

In 2005 Sonja took part in a 20th anniversary celebration of the Children and Worship training program, a cooperative ministry of the RCA, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Children and Worship has impacted hundreds of congregations in North America, El Salvador, Hungary, India, Japan, Nicaragua, Russia, South Africa, Spain, and Zimbabwe.

Sonja also gave visionary leadership to a new Master of Religious Education program at WTS, launched in 1985. The new design included innovative features such as intercultural immersion and engaging students in learning projects directly related to their ministries.

Dr. Sonja Stewart played a pioneering role in theological education in the RCA. When she began teaching at Western in 1970, women in leadership roles was still quite new for the RCA. Those years were filled with the challenge of confronting stereotypes and helping change expectations and attitudes.

In the last years of her ministry, Sonja maintained a positive spirit during her battle with cancer. Grounded in a deep spirituality, hers was a steady, confident witness to God’s grace and power, a legacy admired and remembered by those privileged to serve with her in this school of faith.

—Dr. George Brown, Jr.
Associate Dean and G.W. and Eddie Haworth Professor of Christian Education