

Five Fanning the Flame

For this Spring issue of *The Commons* we are turning our attention toward men and women who have graduated from Western in the last ten years. How is this generation having an impact? With so many recent graduates making a difference, it was difficult to choose just a few stories to fit on these pages. We wish we had room for them all! Here we introduce you to just five of our many Western Theological Seminary graduates on fire for the Lord...

Eddy M. Alemán

**Spanish Ministry Lead Pastor and
Pastor of Church Multiplication
Emmanuel Reformed Church,
Paramount, CA, 1 year
(prev. 4 yrs as Apostolic Regional
Missionary, Central California Classis)**

What part of your ministry fires you up?

It fires me up to see young leaders falling in love with Jesus and planting new churches. Since coming to California in 2004 I have spent a lot of time equipping leaders for ministry. I am an equipper by heart! This really keeps me excited about my calling.

It is rewarding to see people believing they can be used by God to make a difference in the world. In the last 5 years I have seen the birth of six new churches and a lot of people committing their lives to follow Jesus. In our training center we have 49 gifted young people in the pipeline to become great leaders for the church. Praise be to God from whom all blessings flow!

What is your favorite ministry story to tell?

One day I received an email from a person in Sacramento, CA. His name was Jose Bautista from El Salvador. He wanted to talk about ministry and church planting. When I finally sat down with him the following week, he was discouraged.

He had been trying to plant a church in Sacramento and nothing was happening. I was his last resort to see if God really called him to be a pastor and a leader in the church. His situation was really quite difficult with no support, no coach, and no training, but he had a huge heart to reach people for Jesus. I wanted people like him, and God had sent him my way.

The following week, Jose and his family began worshipping with us, driving two hours every Sunday from Sacramento to Chowchilla. I started investing a lot of time and energy equipping him for ministry. In four months he became an elder, and after six months he moved to Chowchilla to become more involved in the ministry. After a year of training, Christ Community Church in Carmichael partnered with us to provide all the necessary support to plant a new church. In 2007 we sent Jose and his family back to Sacramento with our blessing to plant Iglesia Cristiana Emmanuel de Sacramento. God has smiled at Iglesia Cristiana, and now Jose and Ana are commissioned pastors in the Classis of Central California, and Iglesia Cristiana Emmanuel de Sacramento is an official organized congregation within the Reformed Church in America.

When you sit down with fellow ministry leaders, what is most on your heart?

I love to discuss the different strategies to

involve ALL our people in ministry. For too many years people have felt ordained professional ministers are the only ones called to do ministry. It is time for all God's people to be immersed in ministry, using their God-given talents to bless the whole body of Christ. So when I sit down with my colleagues I love to hear what they are doing to equip their people for ministry.

Nathan and Andrea DeWard

Pastors, Church of the Living Christ, Fremont, MI, 6 1/2 years

Are you trying to lead your congregation into new areas?

One area where we have focused is missional engagement. Church of the Living Christ has a strong history of supporting missions, but we are still learning what it means to be missional.

In 2006, we launched Oasis, a new worship service with the goal of reaching the un-churched and de-churched with the Gospel. Three years later, God has blessed our congregation with several new believers and new families.

A man named Bob entered the kingdom in 2009 through our ministry. He was baptized and he and



his family joined CLC last fall. Bob was not raised in the church and was never taught to “do church” like a typical RCA member.

After a recent sermon—while the service was still going!—Bob came up to me (Nate) and said, “Were you talking right to me? That was exactly what I needed to hear. I know I need to change some things.”

Stunned by his honesty, I automatically said, “I was trying to preach to everyone, but you did hear the Holy Spirit.”

God is working through Church of the Living Christ as we have tried to live like missionaries to our local community.

How have you grown personally during your years of ministry?

God has used a number of hard ministry situations to refine us as pastors and leaders. Since 2003, it’s been the tough stuff of ministry that has catalyzed personal growth for us. Accepting and loving folks who leave our church. Rebuilding our Childcare Center after the State of Michigan threatened to close it down. Addressing congregational conflict that long precedes our tenure. God’s grace has been sufficient through each difficult season. We have had to own our limitations and ask for forgiveness, help, and support from the people we serve. That’s what building community as a pastor requires in the local church.

What did you learn in seminary that has stayed with you through these years?

[Nate]: Western Seminary taught me many life lessons, but two stand out. I’m continually amazed by the practical theology that emerges from studying church history. It is reassuring to know that many of the Church’s woes in our day pale in comparison to the historic controversies over the Trinity or Reformational theology. It would be easy to lose hope if it weren’t for the saints that have struggled before us. Thanks to Dennis Voskuil for teaching that.

Second, God has repeatedly taught me pastoral care insights that I first learned at WTS. Biggest insight? A church experiencing change is a church experiencing loss. As a pastor leading change and initiating personal transformation in the life of our congregation, I cannot forget that. Thank you, Dr. Jaco Hamman.



Rev. B.J. Van Kalsbeek

Chaplain/Spiritual Care Manager
Mercy Medical Center, Sioux City, IA
6 years

What has surprised you about working in a hospital?

I have really come to enjoy the idea of healthcare as ministry and being in a position to encourage other staff to see themselves in this way.

The role of the chaplain is very unique in that we interact with almost every department in the hospital, and so we can positively influence the “feel” of the workplace. Culture either shapes us or we shape the culture. I have served on teams in the hospital and a regional network who are choosing the latter idea.

The Catholic hospital where I work has a “Faith-Inspired Service and Heal-

This is why I remind you to keep using the gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you.



ing” initiative where we encourage both care-givers and those who support their work to live out this idea of intentionally creating a positive culture.

Although the regional network includes non-faith-based hospitals, our regional leadership team has much of the same focus working in an area called “Radical Loving Care,” centered on how we care for others and what motivates that care.

As a chaplain, I so appreciate the privilege of seeing people in each department and supporting and caring for my fellow co-workers.

If you could have one prayer answered for your ministry, what would it be?

I specifically want people I encounter to experience God through me. I want to consistently share the gospel through my presence and when necessary use words. I get fired up in ministry when I experience God in others, and I want others to likewise encounter God’s presence through me.

Now let it grow, as a small flame grows into a fire.

II Timothy 1:6

Edie Lenz

Pastor, First Reformed Church, Fulton, IL, 1+ year

(previously 6 years as Pastor of Church of the Good News, Chicago)

I have found unexpected joy in loss and in death. I have the dubious distinction of having closed the doors of my first call. Church of the Good News was a place where you always knew where you stood, a place where if you were willing to love and be honest, others would do the same. I cannot begin to express the wisdom, mistakes, and growth that happened in the care of that particular congregation.

The closing of Good News was one of the hardest things I have ever been a part of and one of my proudest moments as a pastor. The decision was made in January, but the doors were not closed for almost five months. We as a Consistory constructed a plan of celebration, mourning, honest conversation, and dying as we had lived.

I have experienced many losses in my life, but few involved the grace I witnessed as the members and community walked together toward that final Sunday. Certainly there was anger, frustration, and hurt, but there was also laughter, sharing, and communing together over our shared history.

Finding ways to embrace mourning was a tremendous undertaking as I led worship that final Sunday, but it meant the world to me. In the end, it was possible to celebrate, to believe in resurrection, and to anticipate what God might be doing next.

Good News solidified my belief that mourning done well can truly turn to dancing, and sometimes it is necessary to die that we might live. Closing a church is not the end of the world. Sometimes it is the beginning of a new one.

Following six months of unemployment I found myself accepting a call in a place that on the surface could not be more different than Good News.

First Reformed is an old, small-town, Midwest church. We are in a town of 4,000 people with four RCA churches and several other denominations. Our problems have much less to do with people not being exposed to the good news as much as their conscious efforts to avoid the church.

I want to breathe new life into a structure that has withstood the test of time. Even though I am on some level a traditionalist, I don’t believe it can be done if we stay who we have always been.

Just over a year ago, First committed to being a different place by doing something



unheard of in this area: they hired a woman minister—and a young female at that! Gone are the days when you must be 40 and male at First Reformed. Wanting to become more faithful, to

change in ways that are true to God’s calling for the church, we have spent the past year since I arrived praying for guidance.

As a result, we are beginning to work on two things to revitalize, encourage, and grow in our faith. The first is to work at our language, finding ways to share with others what God has done. The second is to serve others together as a community of faith, showing through our actions that we are more than a club that gets together on Sundays.

If you were to speak to the members of the RCA, what would you say?

Take heart, there is life; there is abundant life in the church. With our focus on church planting, I think we often lose sight of where we are already doing the work of God. With our constant reminders of how we are deficient, we need to be reminded of grace, of hope, of life. There is much that the church must do, but there is much the church is already doing. I pray daily that we will find ways to embrace our tradition and our past as we look to our future. The Spirit of God moves, even in the smallest of the local churches, if we only seek to be faithful to what we have been given and where we have been planted.



Ken Neevel

Remembering Well

Recently I was talking with a friend about the pastors who had cared for and cared about his parents when they were alive. Because Western Theological Seminary was so important to his parents, he has arranged to create an endowed faculty chair in their memory through his estate. This means that someday the cost of funding a professor's position will be covered through this endowment, and the professor will bear the name of my friend's parents in his or her title.

I was touched by the depth of his appreciation for his parents. What a meaningful way to honor them.

A gift in memory or honor of someone special not only acknowledges their role in your life but makes a statement about what is important to them, too. Plus, a gift to the seminary multiplies as trained Christian leaders spread the gospel throughout the world.

There are many opportunities for named gifts: endow a professorship, renovate a room, give a student scholarship, or install a sound system, to name a few (see list on right for more suggestions). For updates, simply go to www.westernsem.edu/support and click on "Special Giving Opportunities."

An anniversary, birthday, Mother's or Father's Day all provide wonderful occasions to honor someone meaningful to you while making a difference for others. Gifts can come in many forms: cash, check, stock, life insurance, real estate, or a designation in your will. We gratefully recognize every gift in a special section of our annual report each fall.

Whether you give in memory or in honor, your gift will make a lasting impact and leave a legacy to remember.

SPECIFIC PROJECTS TO FUND

Item	Cost
Launch/Endow a Master of Arts program in Youth Ministry	\$3,000,000
Endow a faculty chair in Worship & Ethics or Pastoral Care & Counseling	\$2,000,000
Complete funding for the Dennis & Betty Voskuil Chair in Old Testament	\$1,000,000
Endow annual book purchases for library	\$600,000
Renovate the John R. Mulder Chapel	\$500,000
Construct Distance Learning Office Suite in DeWitt Theological Center	\$250,000
Name a student apartment building	\$250,000
Name a student apartment unit	\$100,000
Replace Library Chiller (Air Conditioning)	\$62,000
Endow an internship in urban ministry	\$60,000
Replace carpeting throughout Cook Center	\$40,000
Computer hardware for a year	\$32,000
Replace boiler in Cook Center	\$30,000
Endow a student scholarship	\$25,000
Air conditioning/circulation for Mulder Chapel	\$25,000
New chairs for the Burggraaff Atrium	\$20,000
Replace carpet in Advancement office	\$9,000
John Deere Gator	\$8,500
Flooring for the Commons	\$8,400
Permanent sound & video systems in Semelink or Commons	\$7,000/room
Additional tables and chairs for 6th floor of Cook Center (4 tables, 8 chairs)	\$4,800
Replace Cook Center Exterior Sign (south)	\$4,000
Carpet for room 101	\$2,650

Questions? contact Ken Neevel at 616-392-8555, x111.

Special Gifts to Western Theological Seminary -- Gifts received July 1, 2009 - February 22, 2010

In Memory of:

Mary Jane Baron

Pauline Lanting
Stanley & Nancy Rock
Todd & Nancy Kamstra

Robert DeBruyn

Margaret DeBruyn
Maxine DeBruyn

John DeHaan Jr.

Marguerite DeHaan

Eltan Eenigenburg

Paul & Lois Kleis

John Ettema

Robert & Cynthia Warn

Alvin Hospers

Richard & Annette Bethke
Stuart & Bernice Blauw
Clarence & Carol Boote
8th Reformed, Wyoming, MI
John & Etta Hesselink
Lary & Sarah Jackson
Paul & Minnie Luytjes
Virginia Mensink
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Raymond & Joyce Beckering
Dale & Kris DeWild
Richard & Sue Kuiper
Walker & Gayle Parmelee
Paul & Effie VanTol
Roger & Wilma Winkels
William & Judy McMurray

Timothy Mahlon

Robert & Betty Unger

Henry & Emily Mouw

Mary E. Mouw
Jerry & Laura Nyhuis
Roger & Wilma Winkels

Rev. Gerald Osland

First Reformed Church,
Aplington, IA

Marjorie Rottschafer

Daniel & Kate Bolt
Harvey & Margaret
Doorenbos
William & Sarah Unzicker
Jack & Margo Tanis

Alan Schreuder

Kathleen Schreuder

John Slagter

Kathleen DeVries
Thomas & Laura DeVries

August Tellinghuisen

Eleanor Tellinghuisen

Rev. & Mrs. H.M.

Veenschuten

Abe & Elin Moerland

Leonard Wezeman

Timothy & Nancy Wezeman

In Honor of:

Andrew Boersma

Mark & Jan Cichowski

Timothy Brown

Colts Neck Reformed Church,
Colts Neck, NJ

John & Marion Smith

60 yr. Anniversary
John M. & Marion Smith

Jon Brown and

Brian Boersma

Mark & Jan Cichowski
Timothy & Nancy
Wezeman

Lou Lotz

Murl & Donna Bogert

James R. Schoon

Robert & Betty Unger

Thomas E. Welmers

Ken & June Holtvluwer

Inauguration of Dr. Tom Boogaart

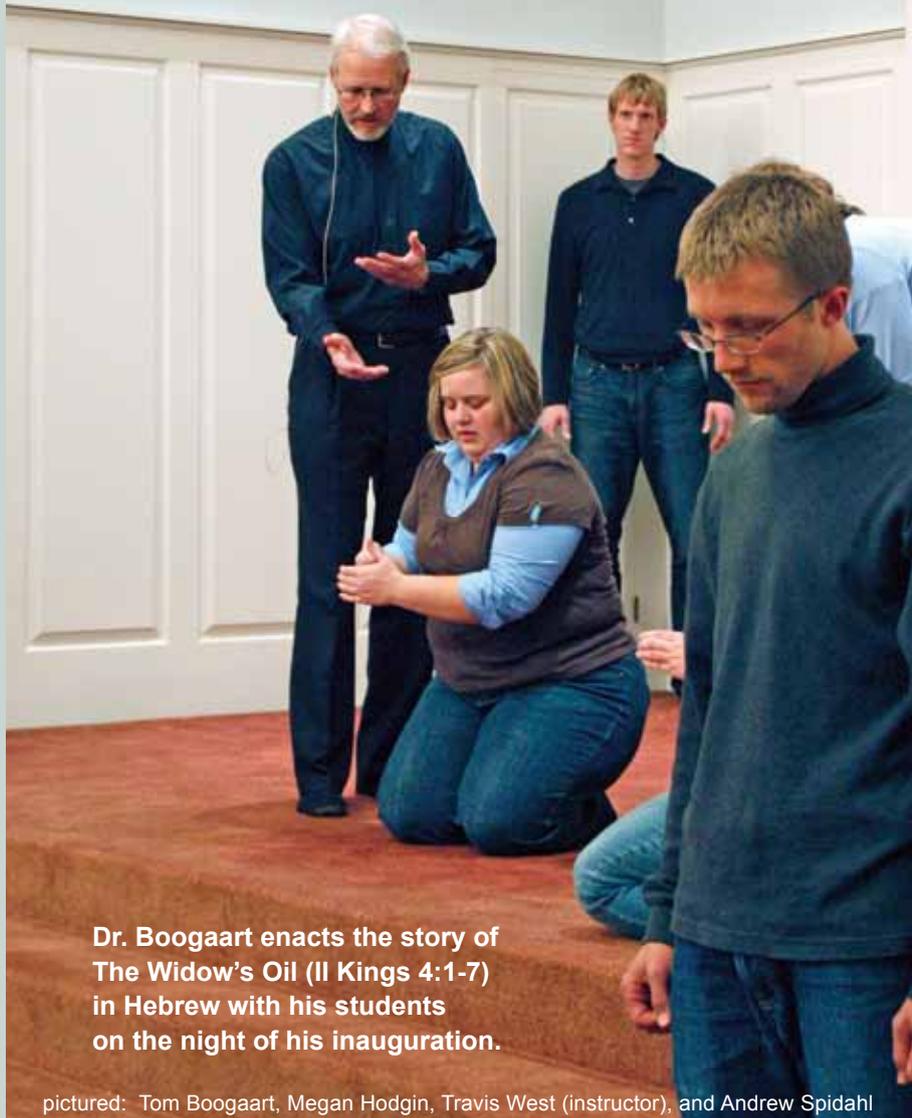
On October 27, 2009 Dr. Thomas Boogaart became the first holder of the Dennis and Betty Voskuil Chair in Old Testament.

Dr. Boogaart has made a remarkable contribution to the seminary community's life together over the last three decades. He has helped to form a generation of pastoral leaders through his unrelenting desire to hear the voice of the Lord through the biblical text. His wonderfully creative approach to learning Hebrew has sparked students' eagerness to learn and enter more deeply into the text.

Congratulations to Dr. Boogaart for this well-deserved honor!



Dennis and Betty Voskuil with Tom Boogaart



Dr. Boogaart enacts the story of The Widow's Oil (II Kings 4:1-7) in Hebrew with his students on the night of his inauguration.

pictured: Tom Boogaart, Megan Hodgkin, Travis West (instructor), and Andrew Spidahl

Meet our Professors

Dr. J. Todd Billings

April 11, 11:00am – Presentation with his wife, Rachel, of being missionaries to Ethiopia in 2009, First Reformed Church, Holland, MI

Dr. Tim Brown

April 4 – Hamilton Community Easter Sunrise Service, Hamilton Reformed Church, Hamilton, MI

April 11 – preaching, Thornapple Community Church, Grand Rapids, MI

April 25 – preaching, Emmanuel Reformed, Waupun, WI

May 30 – preaching, Gun Lake Chapel, Gun Lake, MI

Dr. Chris Kaiser

April 18-May 9 (Sunday morning adult class)

"Science and Faith," Eastminster Presbyterian Church, East Lansing, MI

Dr. Meri MacLeod

May 23 – Preaching at the ordination service of '09 WTS graduate Rebecca McDonnell, St. Thomas Reformed Church, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands

Faculty News

Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology **Chris Kaiser** lectured at the Sárospatak Theological Academy in Hungary in March on early Christological controversies and "Comenius and the Marks of God's Wisdom." On May 20 he will present "Discerning the Spirit in a Technoscientific World" at the Youngsan Theological Institute at Hansei University, Seoul, South Korea.

G.W. and Eddie Haworth Professor of Christian Education **George Brown, Jr.** taught a 3-week adult Sunday school class on Dietrich Bonhoeffer at Hope Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI on February 21, 28, and March 7.

Visiting Assistant Professor of Preaching and Worship **Ron Rienstra** took part in the Staley Lecture Series at Central College, Pella, Iowa, March 22-23. He led the workshop, "Worship Words: Crafting Language for Liturgy," at 2nd Reformed Church and spoke at chapel at Central College. His chapter, "Table Teaching: Practicing the Lord's Supper at Seminary" appears in *Common Worship in Theological Education* (Jan. 2010). His article, "The Wetter the Better: Remembering Our Baptism Every Week," was featured in *Reformed Worship* (Mar. 2010).

News

Free research tool for Alumni/ae of WTS!

Beardslee Library is pleased to announce the ATLAS for ALUM program is available without cost for all alumni/ae of Western Theological Seminary.

ATLAS for ALUM, funded through a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., provides access to ATLASerials® (ATLAS®), an online collection of more than 140 major religion and theology journals selected by leading religion scholars and theologians.

Within ATLAS, users can research the history of a topic from as early as 1924 to the present

through more than 238,000 articles and book reviews combined. ATLAS can retrieve .pdfs of articles from these journals, with fully searchable text that allows for keyword proximity and citation set searches.

This database is a great benefit in preparing for preaching and teaching, as well as researching topics of interest.

To register to use ATLAS for ALUM, email or call Paul Smith, Director of Beardslee Library (paul.smith@westernsem.edu or 616-392-8555, x143).

Commencement is May 10, 2010 at 7:30pm in Dimnent Chapel on the Hope College campus.

An Invitation

Classes of '60, '70, and '85: You are invited to attend your Alumni/ae Day reunion on May 10, 2010. Luncheons will be offered for \$10/person for the 25th, 40th, and 50th reunion classes. A special lecture by the commencement speaker in the afternoon will be followed by the Alumni/ae Banquet at 5:00 in the Maas Center of Hope College (\$20/person). Please hold the date. An invitation packet including registration forms will arrive in the mail in April. For questions, call LuAnne VanSlooten at 616-392-8555, x109 or email luanne@westernsem.edu.

Associate Professor of Reformed Theology **J. Todd Billings** has written a book for those who are preaching the Word. In *The Word of God for the People of God*, Dr. Billings provides a straightforward entryway for pastors and seminary students to understand why theological interpretation matters and how it can be done. For an interview about the book, go to: <http://woodwardtheologicalsociety.org/>

Dr. Billings' article, "Calvin's Comeback? The Irresistible Reformer" was featured on the cover of *The Christian Century*. (Dec. 1, 2009) <http://christiancentury.org/article.lasso?id=8009>

After returning from five months of teaching in Ethiopia with his wife, Rachel, Dr. Billings lectured at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, IL) in January and spent a week in February lecturing in Scotland at the Universities of Aberdeen, St. Andrews, and Edinburgh. His topic was "Calvin and Bavinck on Union with God and Divine Incomprehensibility."

Professor of New Testament **Robert Van Voorst** has authored the 7th edition of his *Anthology of World Scriptures*. His article on the opening sections of Paul's Letter to the Galatians, "Why is There No Thanksgiving Period in Galatians? An Assessment of an Exegetical Commonplace," is in the spring 2010 issue of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*.

on to Glory...

Henry Vermeer '40

b. Sioux Center, IA 3/1/1913
d. Pella, IA 1/24/2010
Hope '37, WestminsterTS, WTS '40
Reformed Churches served:
1940-43, Falmouth, MI
1940-43, Moddersville, MI
1943-46, Central Park, Holland, MI
1946-51, 1st Roseland, Chicago, IL
1951-55, Hope, Sheboygan, WI
1955-61, Hope, Grand Rapids, MI
1961-66, First, Denver, CO
1966-73, First, Pella, IA
1973-77, First, Hospers, IA
Other service to the church:
1961, President, Part. Synod of MI
RCA Board of Domestic Missions
Sr. Pastor for retired ministers, RCA Midwest

Leroy Sandee '51

b. Oostburg, WI 9/20/1920
d. Waupun, WI 1/6/2010
Hope '47; WTS '51
Reformed Churches served:
1951-53, Sandham Mem, Monroe, SD
1953-57, First, Alton, IA
1957-65, Alto, Waupun, WI
1966-76, Emmanuel, Clinton, WI
1976-82, Bethel, Abbotsford, BC, Can
1982-85, Elim, Kings, IL

Howard Hanko '55

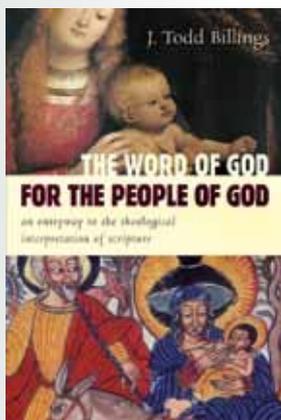
b. Chicago, IL 6/22/1931
d. Columbus, GA 7/31/2009
Central '52, WTS '55
Reformed Churches served:
1955-59, First, Ireton, IA
1959-65, Newton, IA
1965-66, Woodstock, MN
1972-74, Calvary, Venice, FL
Other ministry:
1967-72, youth director, YMCA,
Minneapolis, MN
Naval Reserve Chaplain

Nancy Herlein '90

b. Muskegon, MI 1/19/1942
d. Muskegon, MI 11/7/2009
Hope '63, WMU (M.A.) '75, WTS '90
Reformed Churches served:
1990-92. assoc. pastor, Central,
Muskegon, MI

Ryan Dean Ende, '09

b. 11/5/1978
d. Hamilton, MI 12/27/2009
Grand Valley State U '03, WTS '09
Intern, Douglas Congregational
UCC, Douglas, MI
Intern, Extended Grace Church,
Grand Haven, MI



Spring 2010 Journey Learning Opportunities

April 19-21: 1-3-5 Gathering for recent graduates

April 29-30: Relational Youth Ministry with Andy Root of Luther Seminary

May 11: Prepare/Enrich Marriage Counseling Workshop

May 12-14: Ridder Leadership Initiative: Integrative Seminar

June 14-18: Bast Preaching Fellowship for Pastors

June 22-24: Children and Worship

journey@westernsem.edu

1-800-392-8554, x167

A Note from President Tim Brown

In one of his epistles the Apostle Paul pleads with his hearers saying, "You must help us by prayer..." He lived with the keen awareness that apart from the sustaining gift of friends holding him up in prayer he could not survive in the tasks God had laid upon him.

Every one of us at Western Theological Seminary is living with that same keen awareness of desperate need, so I am saying to you as urgently as I can, "You must help us by prayer..." Please pray for two members of our seminary family who are in life and death struggles with cancer. One of our students, Chuck Breen, was diagnosed

with malignant melanoma, and John Funches, one of the caretakers of our building, was diagnosed with stomach cancer. They both remain hopeful that God's healing mercies will rain upon them, but their struggles are steep and painful.

In addition to these heartfelt concerns, please help us in praying for our graduating seniors finishing up their last semester. This year 32 men and women will turn their tassels toward the future in hopes that years of training will be followed by the Lord opening doors of a ministry specially prepared just for them. This is an anxious time for them and for their families, so again I say: "You must help us by prayer..."

I think it was the great German theologian Helmut Thielecke who once said, "*What matters most in all the world is a small band of believers bearing up the concerns of the whole world through their prayers.*" What do you think of that? If he's right, and I have no reason to believe he isn't, then we need to get serious about helping one another through prayer. Once again, and with gratitude for all you have done in the past, I echo the Apostle Paul: "You must help us by prayer..."

Tim Brown



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