From all Walks of Life...

What do all these things have in common? They are a few of the occupations our students have had before hearing the call to ministry later in life.

Sometimes these students arrive at seminary nervous about going back to school after so many years. Will they be able to handle the coursework? Will they be accepted? Maybe everyone will be “super spiritual” and not down to earth. Sometimes they come with no idea of what it will be like—they are just following a call.

What they find are real people with whom they form great relationships, and coursework that leads to not just “training” from one occupation to another, but a transformation of self.

As a manager in pediatric rehabilitation, senior Lisa Bolton-Hunt was living in the fast lane, working toward a position in upper management. “I loved clothes and fancy parties and being with important people back then,” she says. “But recently at a corporate party—a fancy, catered event—I struggled with all the wasted food, the huge expense, people drinking more than they should, the whole scene.”

“I’m so over this,” Lisa told her husband that night. “I’m not part of this anymore. I am somewhere else in my journey.” She says none of this would have happened to her if it were not for Western.

Lisa commutes to the seminary from Lansing while also working as a school speech therapist. At night she serves as a hospital chaplain. She has been at the bedside of those removed from life support; she has sat quietly with a wife whose husband just died at the age of 55. She has been present for families who have lost their children, parents, and siblings and those who are making hard decisions about life and death matters. “I have cried with them, remembered with them, and prayed with them,” Lisa reflects.

“During this time at seminary, I officiated at my father’s funeral, preached the Word of God to strangers, listened to the stories of poor men in Mexico trying to have a better life. I have been humbled by the hospitality of those with nothing who welcomed me into their homes and fed me. These moments are blessings. Every death I’ve attended is holy ground. Put simply,” she says, “My life is no longer my own.”

Her classmate, Dick Van Dop, has seen his life transformed as well. “When I started here in 2008, the
Spirit seemed to say to me, "Submit!" I figured if God really wanted me to go into this line of ministry, He was going to want to change me."

As a Special Agent in the IRS Criminal Investigation Division and with 27 years with the Navy, Dick was used to a tough, structured environment. As a result, some of the classes he had to take were outside his comfort zone, such as Care and Counseling, Spiritual Formation, and Pastor as Person. To his surprise, he found himself succeeding. "God really can teach an old dog new tricks!" he laughs. "I guess if he did it for Abraham and Moses, I shouldn't be surprised."

People ask Dick what made him want to become a pastor. "I never wanted to!—it was nowhere near the top of my career wish list!" he says. "However, I responded to God's call. It's like the Lake Michigan surf. You can stand up to the wave and try to fight it, but you'll end up knocked down and beat up. If you put your board on top of the wave and simply go where it takes you, you will be blessed. I have made both choices in my life and have experienced God's blessings every time I followed His leading. God took someone with a history of being a sheepdog, barking at and fighting the wolves and bears (criminals and terrorists), and decided to make him a shepherd instead. I used to be "Matthew, with a gun." Now, instead of kicking in doors, I am learning to knock gently."

Dick will graduate from Western Theological Seminary this spring and Lisa will finish her studies in December. They are two of many students whose life and seminary experiences are being used by God to transform them into what He needs for the next chapter in their lives.

Send news to:
advancement@westernsem.edu

An Invitation

Classes of '61, '71, and '86: You are invited to attend your Alumni/ae Day reunion on May 9, 2011. 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 Western Seminary Commons ($20/person). An invitation packet will arrive in the mail in April. For questions, call LuAnne VanSlooten at 616-392-8555, x109 or email luanne@westernsem.edu.

Richard C. Oudersluys '32
b. Grand Rapids, MI 11/21/1906
d. Holland, MI 11/20/2010
Calvin '29, WTS '32, Univ of Chicago Divinity School, Hope, Univ of Basel, Cambridge Univ
Reformed Churches served:
1932-41, First, Milwaukee, WI
Other service to the church:
1942-78, Professor of New Testament Language and Literature, WTS
1979-88, Greek instructor, Hope College
Robert Vander Schaaf '61
b. Leota, MN 12/16/1919
d. Fulton, IL 8/8/2011
Central '42, WTS '61
Reformed Churches served:
(1961-70) Immanuel, Belmond, IA
(1970-85) Trinity, Fulton, IL

John H. Muller '45
b. Grand Rapids, MI 12/8/1921
d. Spring Lake, MI 2/6/2011
Hope College '42, WTS '45
Winona Lake School of Theology (ThM), Fuller Theo. Sem. (DMin)
Reformed Churches served:
(1945-48) Pultneyville, Williamson, NY
(1948-51) Abbe, Clymer, NY
(1953-58) Bethany, Redlands, CA
(1958-62) Hope, Chicago, IL
(1962-66) Hope Community, Orlando, FL
(1966-74) Kendall Drive, Miami, FL
(1974-79) Bethel, Bellflower, CA
(1979-82) Hope Community, Los Angeles, CA
(1982-84) Hope, Orlando, FL
Other service to the church:
(1951-53) Chaplain, US Navy
(1984-90) Presbyterian pastor & seminary professor, Australia
Interim pastorate in NY, Ontario, MI and IL
(1962) Vice President, PSC

Necrologist: Rev. Merwin (Mike) VanDoornik '60
I had the privilege of knowing Dr. Oudersluys for 60 years – first as a student, 20 years later as his colleague, and since then as a special friend. What a joy and blessing it has been. He was one of my best teachers. When I was doing my doctoral studies at Basel University in Switzerland, I heard lectures on Romans and the Gospel of John by world renowned New Testament scholars, but I felt I learned little new, having had courses on both of these books with Dr. Oudersluys. He was that good.

He was arguably one of the finest lecturers to grace the halls of Western Theological Seminary, honing his lectures with a superb use of the English language. His course on the Gospel of John became so famous that after his retirement he taught it several times to a packed lecture room.

Yet, what made him so attractive was not simply his scholarship and teaching ability but his quiet modesty and the personal faith that undergirded his teaching and outstanding preaching. We stood in awe of him, but because he was quite reserved, some students couldn’t feel close to him.

A turning point came in 1973 when his beloved wife Marian was killed in a car accident in which he was driving. This might have destroyed some people, but he valiantly carried on and taught effectively for years thereafter, including teaching Greek at Hope College. The death of his wife marked a change in his personality. Whereas before he had been distant, he now opened up his heart to the outside world, needing to fill the void of the loss of Marian. Whereas before her death he was greatly respected, now he was also much loved by his colleagues, students and friends.

He continued to live alone in his large old house on 11th Street, but thanks to the kindness of six women he lived a comfortable life. Every week Jean, wife of Dr. Jim Cook (Dr. Oudersluys’ successor) invited him over for a meal, as did Edith, wife of Dr. Elton Eenigenburg; Margaret, wife of Dr. Eugene Osterhaven, baked him a pie; Mildred Schuppert, long-time librarian at the seminary, made him a pot of soup; and Alice DeRuiter, a Dutch immigrant, cleaned his house and brought food. These women all helped to keep him healthy and provide tender care, but pride of place goes to his daughter Judy, who upon retiring from Petoskey Hospital in 1998, came to live with her father. Without her expertise as a nurse and her loving care, it is not likely that Richard Oudersluys would have lived 104 years. No father ever had a more loyal, loving daughter.

One of the remarkable things about our friend is that he was sharp and alert until quite recently. He gave his last lecture when he was 90 and delivered a memorable address at his 100th birthday celebration at Western Theological Seminary. Up until that time he participated in Sunrise Saints at Third Church every Wednesday at 6:30am. This group of 25 men would gather for breakfast and then discuss a book. Dr. Oudersluys rarely spoke, but when it came to an exegetical issue, someone would often ask, “Dr. O., what do you think about this?” Dr. O. would pause, and we would wait in respectful silence for a word from Mt. Olympus.

Richard Oudersluys never promoted himself; it was simply his desire to serve the church in any way possible, whether as an active member at church, serving on commissions, or writing 26 years of weekly columns for the Sunday School Guide and the Christian Endeavor Weekly.

And to the end he cared about the seminary. When we would call him, his first question was, “How are things going at the seminary?”

In those later years when he and I would go somewhere together, he would take my arm and with a twinkle in his eye say, “Lead on, MacDuff” (from Macbeth). Somehow he got a kick out of doing that. (My Shakespearean friends tell me the words are actually “Lay on, MacDuff,” but as Archie Bunker would say, “whatever.”)

I know it is a bit fanciful, but I like to imagine Richard Oudersluys in heaven, taking the arm of Jesus and saying, “Lead on; King Jesus, I’m home at last!”
Sometimes the best ideas start with a single conversation—a “what if...?” that hangs in the air until others finish the sentence, and from there the pieces start falling into place.

Ten years ago Western Theological Seminary was a school concentrating on students who lived in or could move to the geographical area of west Michigan to get their education. Ten years ago City Church in San Francisco was a young Presbyterian (PCA) church challenging its members to live out the gospel through outreach and service. Today Western Seminary has a thriving distance learning program and a strong desire to train men and women for missional ministry right where they live. And City Church today is an RCA church, part of the new Affinity Classis, and strongly committed to educating, forming and preparing leaders specifically for urban church planting.

Newbigin House of Studies emerged out of City Church’s desire to prepare the next generation for wise and relevant Christian engagement in the city of San Francisco. For several years now they have offered training by a faculty of scholar-pastors experienced in navigating the terrain of church planting in urban centers, church revitalization, social justice and mercy, lay theological training, pastoral care and counseling, and more.

A newly forged partnership with Western Theological Seminary and City Church San Francisco will build upon what the Newbigin House started. This new partnership will offer seminary education, lay theological training, a missional think tank, and an urban church planting training center to those on the West Coast. Newbigin House of Studies will link the strengths and gifts of both sponsoring institutions and create a top-notch center for training pastors for ministry in today’s world!

Dr. Scot Sherman and Dr. Chuck DeGroat are pastors of City Church and lead the Newbigin House of Studies—Dr. Sherman as the executive director and Dr. DeGroat as the academic dean. These two gifted men are tuned into the changing, challenging, cultural landscape and are experienced teachers, counselors, and church planters.

Western Theological Seminary has the technology in place to teach from a distance and offer accredited theological training to those in California. We could also teach using two-way interactive technology. At some point we may rotate faculty to teach onsite in San Francisco. Also, City Church could become an intercultural immersion site for our in-residence students. The “what if...?” questions are raising all sorts of exciting possibilities!

We will be hammering out the details of this new partnership throughout this year, but look for a launching conference in San Francisco in November.

We are very enthused to raise up a new generation of Reformed pastoral leaders who are trained to embrace the challenges of ministry in urban and multi-cultural contexts.
Congratulations to Associate Professor of Reformed Theology J. Todd Billings, whose book, The Word of God for the People of God, has won the 2011 Center for Catholic-Evangelical Dialogue Book Prize. Although not written with this purpose in mind, the book is being lauded for its contribution to biblical interpretation that serves a growing unity between Catholic and Evangelical Christians. The Center for Catholic-Evangelical Dialogue and Regent College are sponsoring a theological conference in Vancouver, BC in September where they will explore Dr. Billings’s book in a plenary session.

The Alban Institute has published Welcome to Theological Field Education. Director of Formation for Ministry Matthew Floding is the general editor and a contributor to the book.

In January, Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling Jaco Hamman consulted with the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa regarding the formation of their candidates and with the Dean of Stellenbosch University’s Faculty of Theology regarding sacramental teaching.


On April 23-25 in Orlando, FL, Professor of Missiology George Hunsberger will take part in a day of presentation and conversation with the Missional Church cohort of the Andrews University Doctor of Ministry program.

Ron Rienstra, Assistant Professor of Preaching and Worship Arts, will give a plenary address at the Symposium on Christian Worship at Alliance Bible Seminary in Hong Kong, May 19-21, 2011. The seminary partners with the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship.

Professor of Ethics and Theology David Stubbs has been appointed as the Co-Chair of the Systematic Theology Section of the American Academy of Religion.

Robert Van Voorst, Professor of New Testament, has a chapter on Jesus in Jewish and Roman writings in the new Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus published by E. J. Brill in Leiden. This four-volume work deals with almost every aspect of our knowledge of Jesus and points the way to future avenues for research. The publisher describes the book, “Drawing from first-class scholarship throughout the world, the Handbook offers an assembly of 100 leading experts presenting their approaches to the historical Jesus.”

Faculty Speaking Engagements

Dr. J. Todd Billings
Feb 24, 7pm – “Ministry in Union with Christ: A Constructive Critique of Incarnational Ministry,” public lecture at Fuller Seminary, Pasadena, CA.
Feb 25, 3:30pm – Public lecture at Westmont College, Santa Barbara, CA
April 8, 9am – “Luther and Calvin on Participation in Christ” at Calvin Studies Society Conference, Luther Seminary, Minneapolis, MN

Dr. Tim Brown, preaching
Feb 27 – Desert Haven Comm., Scottsdale, AZ
Mar 6 – Central Wesleyan, Holland, MI
Mar 13 – Prairie Ridge Church, Ankeny, IA
Mar 22 – Gun Lake Comm. Church, Wayland, MI
Mar 27 – First Reformed, Orange City, IA (am)
First Reformed, Sioux Center, IA (pm)
May 1 – Wyckoff Reformed, Wyckoff, NJ
May 8 – Tulip Time Community Service, Pella, IA
May 22 – Trinity Reformed, Holland, MI
May 29 – Gun Lake Chapel, Wayland, MI

Dr. Jim Brownson
Feb and March – “Parables” Sunday School class at 5th Reformed, Grand Rapids, MI
Mar 26 – Seminar at City Church, San Francisco, CA
April – “Parables” Sunday School class at Third Reformed, Holland, MI

Dr. Matthew Floding
Feb 17 – “Four Things That Matter Most: An Ethic for Living in the Senior Years,” Ivarnest CRC, Grandville, MI

Dr. Jaco Hamman
Feb 22 – Lecture, J.C. Wynn Conference on Family Ministries, Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, Rochester, NY

Dr. George Hunsberger
Mar 3-4 – Keynote presenter at Missional Conference, Houston Graduate School of Theology, Houston, TX

Prof. Ron Rienstra
Feb 26 & Mar 6 – “Public Prayer” Education Hour workshop, Christ Community Church, Grand Rapids

Dr. David Stubbs
Feb 14, 7:15pm – “Temple and Eucharist” with the St. Mary’s Circle, Grace Episcopal Church, Holland
Mar 16, 23, 30 & Apr 13, 6pm – “The High Calling and Failures of the People of God: Numbers,” St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, Grand Rapids, MI
April 17, 9am – “War, Peace, and Peacemaking” at Calvary CRC, Grand Rapids, MI

Prof. Travis West
May 15 & 22 - Old Testament narratives, Sunday School, Calvary CRC, Holland, MI

Upcoming Learning Opportunities

April 11-15: John Bell Week at Western
April 18-20: 1 3 5 Gathering for recent grads
May 5-6: Youth Ministry Conference with Mark DeVries
May 10: Prepare/Enrich Training

1-800-392-8554, x167
journey@westernsemin.edu
When doctoral student Eric Williams agreed to go to the 218th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) as an Ecumenical Advisory Delegate representing the Church of God in Christ, he had no idea where that one decision would lead. This experienced world traveler adept in urban ministry would not have guessed it would land him in Holland, Michigan!

At the Assembly, he met Dr. Cynthia Holder Rich, who told him about the Urban Pastoral Ministry program she was directing at Western Theological Seminary. That led to an invitation to visit, which he did (“Driving through a blizzard to get here!” Eric recalls.) He then learned that a professor both he and Cynthia had at McCormick Theological Seminary had consulted with Western on diversity issues. Dr. David Daniels III had advised the seminary to start a faculty fellows program, bringing in scholars from different racial-ethnic backgrounds to teach.

“And it just so happened, providentially, that I would be that person!” Eric beams. “How fitting that two people Dr. Daniels trained would be instrumental in starting this.”

The fellowship is designed for Ph.D. candidates to teach part-time while they finish their doctoral dissertations. Eric began his fellowship in the fall of 2009 and will complete the full draft of his dissertation before June. “It’s been a gift,” he says. “I pray that Western has benefited a fraction of how I have benefited!”

Eric’s dissertation is on the neglect of the doctrine of the Spirit within modern Black Theology. This neglect within Christian theology in the West is often lamented, and he argues that liberation theology has also inherited this flaw. He is looking at ways this gap can be overcome. Classes he has taught, “The Spirit and the Disinherited” and “Roots and Routes of Modern Black Theology,” have provided opportunities for him to read new literature and to pursue his own questions.

“It has been life-giving to me personally and to my work to engage with students in thinking through issues,” he says. “It’s been a win-win because the students in my courses were starved to know a body of literature they hadn’t been exposed to here.”

Being at Western has made Eric a stronger scholar. “There is a difference when one reads for teaching,” he explains. “You read with another level of intensity, anticipating the questions that will be raised!”

He also values the time spent in faculty meetings, seeing how faculty members sort through issues.

“It’s really beautiful to hear these scholars talk about their passion for preparing people to serve the church. It’s about faithfulness and their love for the church.”

Eric helped to start the Leonard Stoutemire Lecture Series in Multi-Cultural Ministry. What began as an idea to have students publicly present their papers from Black Theology class on Fridays in February turned into a yearly lecture series during Black History Month, backed by the Diversity Committee and funded by the seminary. This year Dr. William Turner from Duke University came to speak.

“This year we brought in an African American,” Eric says. “Next year it might be an Asian or Hispanic. This series will increase intercultural competency, because we all need it.”

Eric has been gratified overhearing his students quote from works he has exposed them to. On an intercultural trip he led to towns along the U.S.-Mexico border, he heard one of his students engaging with an activist using ideas gleaned from José Comblin, a theologian of Latin America.

“As an educator, I owe it to the students to allow those voices to be heard, to create space for alternative vision,” Eric believes. “It’s not that you have to agree with them! But as students go forth and do their work, they will know there are others in the body of Christ who see things in a different way.”

Although Eric grins and describes himself as “denominationally, racially, and ethnically an outsider to most” here, he feels a significant bond with faculty, students, and staff. His co-workers have made him feel very valued for bringing something to Western that was not here before.

“I really believe in this Faculty Fellows program. I think everyone wins—the students, the institution, and certainly the faculty fellow. New scholars will come! They will teach new things. It’s been exciting and a blessing to have been the very first one.”
Unusual Gifts

There are pictures on this page of two unusual gifts received by Western this year: Mr. Semelink’s classic cane and beautiful paintings in memory of student Chuck Breen. As I thought about these particular gifts, it suddenly struck me that Western receives unusual gifts every day—simply because every gift Western receives is unusual.

If we stop to think about it, we might conclude that giving is illogical. (Maybe it’s a good thing we don’t!) Yet not only do we give often—there are numerous studies showing the United States is the most generous nation in the history of the world—but we do it with great joy.

Apparently I’m not the only one thinking about these things, because if you search “cheerful giver” on the internet, you will find 1,870,000 pages on the subject. That makes me smile.

The Bible is full of encouragement and teaching about giving. My favorite verse on the matter is 2 Corinthians 9:7 which says, “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” In fact, the Greek word translated to “cheerful” is actually the same word from which we derive the word “hilarious”. I know how much joy the donors who gave the paintings and cane got from giving them. I know how cheerful many of you are when you send a check supporting the ministry of Western Theological Seminary. Your unusual gifts are the backbone of Western. Winston Churchill said, “You make a living by what you make, you make a life by what you give.”

Thank you for making a life that includes Western. And I’m imagining you smiling when you think of giving your next unusual gift.

Ken Neevel
Vice President of Advancement and Communications

The first seminary building, named Semelink Family Hall, was provided by a gift from local farmer Peter Semelink in 1895. Mr. Semelink was an immigrant settler who lived frugally yet came to be known for his generous spirit in business dealings, as well as his support for mission work and education. Our current Semelink Hall sits on the site of the original building. Mr. Semelink’s cane was given to the seminary by Peter Van Putten of Byron Center, MI, who acquired it through a relative who was a long-time maid of Mr. Semelink.

“Childs Play” and “Walking with Friends” by native African artist Junior Fungai Mudoviwa were given by anonymous donors in memory of WTS student Charlton “Chuck” Breen (1974-2010). As Coordinator of the Michigan Darfur Coalition, Chuck had great compassion for the people of Darfur, Sudan, Africa. www.michigandarfurcoalition.org

In Memory of:

Jack O. Boerigter
Robert & Mary Boerigter
Chuck Breen
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Anonymous
Carl Hyvink Droppers
Karen Miller
Elton Eenigenberg
Paul & Lois Kleis
John Ettema
Robert & Cynthia Warn
Marjorie Franken
Darrell & Marilyn Franken
Al Gemmen
Larry & Faye Gemmen
Larry & Barbara VanNoord
David J. Hager
Daniel L. Hager
Paul Kranendonk
Giets & Shirley Montanari
Harold Leestma
David & Janet Brown
Iris Doiron
Florence A. Enmeier
Mary Grava
Elizabeth D. Hodge
Lavina Hoogeveen
Robert & Beatrice Lee
David & Patti Leestma
Lois Leestma
Jean Mast
Frederick & Sandra Murray
Ruth C. Norris
Northern Trust
Leatherby Family
Jack & Eva Orquist
Thomas & Barbara Park
Frank & Suzanne PETTINGA
Jenaid & Elsie Redeker
Michael & Betsy Ridderman
Judy Rigdon
Sandra Rodebaugh
Bernice Luan Sands
Allen & Carole Scholten
Paul & Janicee Swats
Kenneth & Kathy VanderBroek
Henry & Emily Mouw
Richard & Barbara Poppe
Richard Oudenskuyt
Charles & Marilyn Aardema
Carol M. Bechtel & Tom Mullens

In Honor of:

Don & Suzanne (Rich) Butyn
Vernon & Lois Boersma
Michael Holleman
John & Nancy Sage

Special Gifts to Western Theological Seminary

received July 1, 2010 - January 31, 2011
Earlier this school year the Western Theological Seminary family said goodbye to one of our most beloved patriarchs. Eight hours before his 104th birthday, Richard C. Oudersluys slipped quietly from this world to the next to meet the living Christ whom he had loved and so nobly served decade after decade, raising up generations of pastoral leaders. He now knows a joy which we can merely anticipate.

I want you to come with me and one of my colleagues, Dr. Tom Boogaart, to Hospice House of Holland where our dear professor spent his last days receiving a steady stream of admiring visitors, all while quietly knocking on heaven’s door. We counted ourselves so privileged to sit in his company if only for a moment. We remembered and wept and wondered with him what heaven would be like. When it was time to go, Tom recited a Psalm in Hebrew and I offered a prayer. As we got up to leave, Dr. Oudersluys gathered up the strength to shake our hands and say, “I am proud of you boys.”

“I am proud of you boys!” His words were wind beneath our wings!

There are several Scriptures that enjoin us all to “encourage one another,” and that day our old professor became a living commentary of all of them. The man who taught us once was teaching us again, and we were grateful. We are proud of you, Dr. Oudersluys!

Tim Brown