At the General Synod of last June, following a painful judicial procedure related to the issue of homosexuality, Wes Granberg-Michaelson, General Secretary of the RCA, reminded us of our denominational commitment to congregational revitalization and church growth. “Let’s remember to keep the main thing the main thing.”

At Western Theological Seminary the “main thing” has long been, as our purpose statement puts it, “to prepare Christians called by God to lead the church in mission.” This purpose statement, of course, coheres nicely with the denomination’s ten-year goal of planting hundreds of new congregations and revitalizing hundreds of existing congregations. After all, competent and committed leadership is essential for all vital congregational ministries.

I think it is important to note that Western has been in the vanguard of seminaries that are seeking to prepare transformational mission-minded leaders—those inclined to embrace efforts at revitalization and new church plants. Our Master of Divinity curriculum, for instance, encourages students to bring biblical and theological resources to identify a congregation’s “mission.” Students are taught to be alert to the unique contours of their ministries’ culture and context. Specifically, courses in revitalization and new church development are being offered to M.Div. students. Also, Journey, our continuing education program for pastors and other congregational leaders, has focused upon congregational mission and revitalization.

Today, more than ever, it is important for Western “to keep the main thing the main thing”: to prepare leaders for the Church of Jesus Christ.

Thank you for your prayers and your financial support.

Grace and peace.

Dennis

Notes from Summers of Transformation

Students from Western Theological Seminary serve Christ in a variety of ways and in diverse locations each summer. Using their spiritual gifts and seminary training, they step into the roles of teachers, pastors, hospital chaplains, mission coordinators, worship leaders, and camp directors. Whatever the role, it is sure to lead to all sorts of self-discovery, and sometimes summer internships can even reveal an entirely new direction of call.

Lessons in the Shade of Blue

Racing toward us exuberantly, every inch of her five year old body radiating sheer delight, Nakiah called out from her perch on the bicycle. “Wait a minute, you guys! Is there going to be Bible Club tomorrow?”

I smiled in spite of the choked feeling inside me. It was 10:00 at night outside our apartment building in South Sioux City, and my husband Steven and I were preparing to head back to Michigan to begin our third and final year of studies at Western Seminary. We had tried to explain this to Nakiah dozens of times—but, as we stood there in the dusty, dirty parking lot, we realized that leaving was a story that needed to be told over and over again—partly for her, but mostly for us.

We had been called to South Sioux City by three RCA churches in Sioux City, Iowa, a city just across the river from South Sioux City, Nebraska. The churches, Sunnybrook Community, Peace Reformed, and New Hope Community, felt called to reach the Latinos in nearby South Sioux City, a town that was over 40% Hispanic.

We spent the summer “scouting the land,” prayerfully and practically learning the town and people of South Sioux City as we tried to grasp the Lord’s desires for His harvest there. We attended Spanish churches, met with couples in their homes to study the Bible, and talked to people on the streets who invited us first into their homes and then into their lives. We laughed and cried—and we knew that our lives were already a little different, and a lot richer, than when we first arrived. We had come as strangers, and we had been accepted as friends. But now the time had come to say goodbye.

Steven & Hope Germoso
Church Planting, South Sioux City, Nebraska

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We spent the summer “scouting the land,” prayerfully and practically learning the town and people of South Sioux City as we tried to grasp the Lord’s desires for His harvest there. We attended Spanish churches, met with pastors, shopped in local shops, and worked with social service agencies. We talked to people on the streets who invited us first into their homes and then into their lives. We laughed and cried—and we knew that our lives were already a little different, and a lot richer, than when we first arrived. We had come as strangers, and we had been accepted as friends. But now the time had come to say goodbye.

It had been a summer of surprises. Steven and I had felt sure that by the end of the summer we would have gathered a group of Latino adults, eager to study the Bible and start a new church.

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Instead, we ended up with an apartment full of kids from all different back-grounds, hungry to know more about Jesus. Although we hosted adult Bible Studies all summer, the little ones were the most eager to hear more about the Lord. We started two different Bible Clubs with a total of 3 kids, and by the end of our first week over 88 children were attending. The overwhelming majority of those kids—over 70—committed their lives to Christ. Most had never before set foot in a church.

“This isn’t my bike, I’m just borrowing it. One day my Daddy’s going to buy me a bike—a blue one. Blue is my favorite color—and even if my Daddy can’t find a blue bike for me, he’s going to paint me one blue. A blue bike with a blue seat.”

Nakiah’s words broke into my thoughts, startling me out of my reverie. I looked down at her and smiled. She didn’t know how silly she looked. Even though it was August in Nebras-ka, close to 100 degrees, she was wearing velvet. A long-sleeved velvet dress that must have been rich burgundy at one time was now faded and impossibly dirty. The dress fell almost to her feet, upon which were flip-flops much too small for her, with plastic gems stuck all over them. Pushing her unkempt hair out of her face, Nakiah continued.

“And Daddy’s going to buy me a blue dress too—and a blue back-pack to start school with. Maybe two blue dresses, And do you know what he told me before he left? That our next house—it’s going to be like a cas-tle. A blue castle. And I’m going to live there, just me and Daddy, and I’m going to have my own room.”

“Really, Nakiah? A blue castle? I think maybe heaven is going to be like a blue castle.”

Again I smiled—but as I glanced at Steve, I could tell his smile might be close to brimming over too. We had never met Nakiah’s father; all we knew was that he some-times brought her to one of the apart-ments in the com-plex where we lived. The other kids had told us Nakiah was homeless. She and her Dad sometimes stayed in the complex with friends, sometimes stayed in hotels, and sometimes stayed in other spots. I knew that there was no blue castle anytime soon in Nakiah’s future—nor a blue dress or backpack for that matter.

How do you say goodbye to a kid like Nakiah? How do you say goodbye to a five year old with no foreseeable future, who has recently told you she wants to make Jesus her “forever friend”? How do you even begin to share her story—or the countless others that have touched your heart during a 10-week internship whose impact on your ministry will be lifelong? How do you say goodbye to Bill, who at 7 is repeating first grade and can’t read his own name, but memorized 10 Bible

Krista Veenstra
TASC, Flatbush Dutch Protestant Reformed Church, Brooklyn, New York

Experiencing life in Brooklyn, New York was very different than in Holland, Michigan: cars beeping constantly, an ice cream truck on every corner, trash on the streets, and we were the only white people in the neighborhood (besides Pastor Dan and the secretary, Ann). I co-directed Taking a Stand for Christ (TASC) at Flatbush Dutch Protestant Reformed Church. My wonderful co-director, Emily, our summer volunteer, Mallory, and I all stayed in the very large church house. It had a basket-ball court in the basement with score boards for “Dutch vs. Visitor”, a huge kitchen, and an auditorium on the main level with many other rooms and offices. We stayed on the top floor in old Sunday school rooms. The church property is 351 years old. How awesome to be part of one of the oldest Reformed churches in America.

As the co-director of TASC, I was privileged to facilitate youth group mission trips. The first group of high school kids came from Hamilton, MI. As a work crew, they built bunk beds, scraped and painted the huge iron fence sur-

rounding the churchyard, and did many other odds and ends. The rest of the groups came from West Michigan and Canada to work with the kids at Fairweather Bible Camp. We had the same 80 children all summer—all African American kids from the neighborhood, ranging from 4 to 10 years old.

Monday through Friday we spent mornings with the little ones singing songs, eating breakfast, doing arts and crafts, bible sto-ries, games, tutoring, and finally lunch time. It was such a be-au-tiful picture to see the racial barriers come crashing down. The kids fell in love with the “Michigans” and never wanted them to leave. We were all one body of Christ!

In the afternoons we took the high schoolers into Manhattan to immerse them in the culture and show its variety. We’d go every-where from South Street Sea Port to Ground Zero, to ChinaTown, to the Staten Island Ferry, to Central Park and Times Square, and back to Flatbush.

On Wednesday evenings the kids held a street side service on Flatbush Avenue. They planned it all by themselves and stood on the streets reading Scripture, praying, and mostly dancing and singing for Jesus. It was incredible! People would stop and watch. Some would sing or dance as they walked by,
verses and teaches them to all his friends? How do you say goodbye to Malia, who at 4 has offered to pay you a dollar to tell her a Bible story?

Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it. It’s funny, after two years of learning much in seminary; we thought we had a lot to teach others about the kingdom of God. We thought our internship would be a time to showcase our skills and demonstrate our ability to lead. That was all until we met Nakiah and others like her, who turned our notions upside down and showed us that maybe the kingdom of God isn’t only about the lame being healed and the captives being freed, but it’s also about the Lord of Lords knowing you intimately enough to paint your bicycle blue.

I led devotional times each evening, and my favorite part of every week was the Thursday night devotions on the roof of the church house. We washed each other’s feet as Jesus washed his disciples’ feet. The kids were scared at first, but every week some sort of transformation occurred. It was like the group actually became whole and became a true community.

Anointing with oil has been a significant part of my life, so I brought it with me. They had not experienced this in Edgerton. For the ill and especially those facing surgery, anointing can be a ceremony that helps to make the presence of the Holy Spirit very real. I shared scripture, and we prayed together for healing and a sense of peace.

At our farewell party, I expressed my thanks to the congregation for the warm welcome we had received. I felt like I had been able to minister to them and that, in turn, they had ministered to us. This was the way ministry was supposed to be: a mutually beneficial relationship.

So, as my senior year begins, my sense is that I am being called to pastoral ministry. Terry’s sense is that she can be a pastor’s wife. In a small town where once only buffalo used to roam, a community of believers showed me that the unexpected can happen. God truly moves in ways I do not begin to understand. All I can do is to continue to be faithful to the call on my life. Amen.

A Summer Where the Buffalo Roam

It was not my idea to go to First Reformed Church in Edgerton, Minnesota. In my mind I thought I would do a street ministry in Grand Rapids for my internship. I came to WTS feeling called to full-time ministry with prisoners either as a chaplain or working in a post-release program. As time has gone on, I have been encouraged to follow my gifts in preaching and teaching. I have been challenged that I might better serve the Lord by equipping the saints for all kinds of ministry as a pastor in a church.

The street ministry in Grand Rapids didn’t work out, and the position in Edgerton was available, so I went in part to discern if we are being called to a pastoral ministry. I say “we” because my wife Terry was not sure whether she is cut out to be a pastor’s wife any more than I am sure that I am cut out to be a pastor after being an engineer for 27 years.

Edgerton is in southwest Minnesota, with the largest buffalo herd in North America only a few miles away. I envisioned a nice little church in a small town; I could probably handle that by myself. First Reformed, Edgerton, has about 260 families, and Sunday morning attendance is in the 200+ range. I planned to preach mornings and evenings and use my business background to help organize. I got the preaching part right, but I found a church where members have risen to the task of not having a head administrator. What they needed was a pastor—not an organizer.

There was lots of sickness, surgery, members in the nursing home, shut-ins, and some folks that simply needed a visit. So, I became their pastor for ten weeks.

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Reflections of Ministry

In March of 2006, I will lead my last Genesis event. For me, Genesis has modeled what the RCA is all about—a covenant family working together to nurture the faith of our own children in order to send them out into the world as faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ.

In 1977 the Synod of the Great Lakes began sponsoring an event involving “Genesis”, a discipling event for the high school youth of its churches. The bi-annual weekend event involves general sessions, seminars, reflection time, and recreation. I got my first taste as a youth leader in 1982. Jonathan Oudersluys, who was also there that year, later asked me to help lead my last Genesis event. For me, Genesis has modeled what the RCA is all about—a covenant family working together to nurture the faith of our own children in order to send them out into the world as faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ.

In 1984, I became involved with the Synod of the Heartlands and Far West. In 1986 I began serving as the coordinator of youth ministry for the synods of the Heartlands and Far West. When I moved into the Synod of the Great Lakes in 1989, I became involved with Genesis once again, and in 1986 I began serving as the chairperson. Through the years it has been a tremendous honor to work with the youth leadership and young people who have served on the team. Leading Genesis has allowed me to utilize administrative gifts in ways I never could have in my congregation.

From its inception, the purpose of Genesis has been to move young people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and equip them to live out their faith in their families, schools, and world. The 40 hours spent at Genesis have been life-changing for thousands of youth and their adult leaders. I have watched youth culture change dramatically, and that change gets reflected in how we communicate to the youth—more visual information, for instance, as well as drama and expressive music led by worship leaders rather than performance bands. One thing remains constant, though—the basic need of the young people to know they are loved and valued, their life has purpose, and they can make a difference. All of that can be found in a relationship with Jesus Christ, and that is what Genesis has been all about: bringing youth to a full awareness of the claim and call of Christ upon their lives and an understanding of the depth of His love for them.

In my 29 years of leading Rocky Mountain High and Genesis, one story stands out above all others. At Genesis 2002 a 15-year-old boy, a foster child from a family that lived across the road from a youth group leader, came to accept Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. Tragically, five hours after the Genesis event ended, he was struck by a car and died. As tragic as it was, his conversion experience at Genesis brought hope and peace to his family and friends, and the testimony of his brief but passionate relationship with Christ led many of his peers to the Lord.

At a time when large youth gatherings appear to be on the decline across the country, Genesis remains strong. Many of the leaders in RCA churches look back on their Genesis experience as a milestone in their spiritual formation. We have signed contracts for hotel space as far out as 2010. Genesis will continue to transform lives and build leadership for Christ’s church.

I have reached the point where I believe it is time for someone else to have the privilege of leading the design team, someone younger who will bring a new perspective and take Genesis to an even higher level. It has been a blessed experience, one I will surely miss.

On October 25, friends of the seminary gathered to celebrate the inauguration of Dr. Vernon Sterk into the Richard C. Oudersluys Chair of Missiology and Evangelism. The seminary extends its gratefulness to two anonymous donors who made this new chair possible.

Dr. Oudersluys, who turns 99 this month, addressed the crowd to express his appreciation for the honor bestowed upon him. Dr. Oudersluys taught New Testament at the seminary from 1942-1977. In retirement he taught Greek at Hope College and continued to teach at Western as needed, culminating in 1996 with his classics course, “The Gospel According to John,” offered in his 90th year!

Dr. Sterk spoke on “Building Bridges or Barriers: Missiological Factors in the Communication of the Gospel in the 21st Century.” Vern Sterk and his wife Carla have served as RCA missionaries for 37 years in Chiapas, Mexico. They helped establish the Tzotzil Bible School and coordinated the translation of the first complete Bible in the Tzotzil language. Response to persecution is a major part of Dr. Sterk’s work in Chiapas, and he continues to coordinate the Chiapas Mission Agency.

Dr. Sterk is serving a three-year appointment at Western. He hopes that this Chair of Missiology and Evangelism will initiate new courses and study opportunities in the important areas of cross-cultural ministry and communicating the Gospel.

“One dream I have is to develop a dual competency program, making it possible for students to do Master’s level work in missiology while earning a Master of Divinity degree,” says Dr. Sterk. “My overriding goal is to motivate all Western students to be involved in ministry across cultural barriers, so they will be ready to reach out to the multicultural world all around us.”

Richard Heusinkveld ’77 is the pastor of Immanuel Reformed Church, Lansing, MI.

One thousand students from thirty-eight churches in the Synod of the Great Lakes are already registered for Genesis 2006 in Traverse City, MI. The event has expanded to two weekends just to accommodate all who wish to participate!
Faculty Interview

with David Stubbs

What is something surprising about you?

When I was in college, I wanted to be an astronaut.

What stopped you?

Eventually, I found out I was too tall! There are hardly any astronauts over six feet. I thought I would pursue astronautical engineering as a way of moving toward it, but that changed too.

What happened?

After my second year of college, I toured with a Christian rock band for a year playing keyboard and guitars. We averaged seven concerts a week, mostly in churches. At one point in our three trips around the U.S. we played at an Urbana Missions Conference. There I became convicted that being an astronaut was selfish. I thought, “Well, then what should I do with my life?” I went to all the booths at the conference and found out they needed doctors and civil engineers. I decided to be a civil engineer, do development work overseas, and be a “tentmaker” spreading the Gospel on the side.

How did that work out?

I graduated with a degree in civil engineering. Then I took another year off to work in college ministries at a Presbyterian church. I went back for a Masters degree in Engineering and worked at a civil engineering firm. I became involved in urban ministries and played with another Christian band at churches and bars in San Francisco. At that point I was going in three directions: music, engineering, and church ministry.

What was going through your mind?

I began to question some of the motives and outcomes of typical development work and wondered if engineering was what I really wanted to do. At the firm we were doing good by making San Francisco safe for earthquakes, and I was gaining valuable skills that I hoped to use overseas, but I thought, “Is this going to be my life’s work?” John Perkins had told a group of us in college to ask ourselves, “What will I be doing 25 years from now?” I asked myself the same question.

What did it feel like to quit your job and move across the country?

I thought everyone in my firm would think I was crazy, but interestingly, most of them were almost envious, saying, “Wow, I wish that I had something so passionate about.” As I approached the move, it was certainly scary, but it was also freeing. I remember later in the bowels of the Duke Library sitting at a steel desk with books in front of me, a shower curtain and concrete blocks beside me, and bad lighting. I recalled my nice oak desk looking out over the financial district of San Francisco, and I realized, “I’d rather be here!”

After nine years of further schooling, you became a seminary professor. Now you’re in your fifth year here. Are you different than when you came?

The interesting question for me is: what would I be like if I had taken a position at some other place? The advice I got when looking for jobs was to be careful about my first position, because it forms you in many ways. In the interview process at Western, I found people who had a very similar heart and vision of God’s action in the world—but they used a slightly different language. I had come to similar conclusions using quite different dialogue partners. So, it’s been a wonderful fit. It has also enriched me in a whole new discussion. If I had gone to a research university or an undergraduate college—surrounded by different colleagues and driven by different questions—my theological trajectory, my work, and even how I approach teaching would be very different.

Did any teacher ever make a big impact on your life?

Yes! My piano teacher, Alan Boehmer. He taught me piano from elementary school through high school. He was also the accompanist for the Pasadena Boys Choir, which was an important place for me; David Stubbs and the boys choir gave me a vision of beauty, excellence and a full human life that I never had before.

LifeNotes

b. Harbor City, CA 1964

Education:

- B.S. Civil Engineering, Stanford University, 1987
- M.S. Construction Engineering Mgmt., Stanford University, 1990
- M.Div. Princeton Theological Seminary, 1995
- Ph.D. Duke University, 2001

Married to Lynn Richards, 1992. Children: Connor (9), Anna (7)

Musical instruments: piano, acoustic guitar, electric bass, recorder

As a teacher yourself, how do you hope to influence your students?

Broadly, I want them to see, experience, and love how the mind and the heart can go together and should go together in our relationship to God and our church. Often people feel like there is a choice between being more “academic” or being a “heart” person and minister. It is foolish to separate them; I want to help students make connections between them.

More specifically, I’d like to broaden students’ understanding of salvation. Often we see it as a very private, inner “spiritual” thing, but God wants to save more than souls. He wants to heal all of Creation, all the relationships between us and God, each other, and the earth. Those relationships have been broken because of sin. Redemption and God’s victory over sin is the healing of all those relationships and bringing us into fullness of life. Salvation is much more than merely a personal, individual relationship to God.

How do your students influence you?

They lend me their love of God. They help me to see that what I’m doing matters. Their feedback and lives keep reminding me the larger work of the church is vitally important, and theology and ethics plays an important role in that work. So, they give me heart and purpose, and I hope to give them heart too.

You continue your music by playing in churches and with student groups here. Do you miss engineering?

Music, theology, and engineering can all be ways of entering deeply into the world around us. You can approach each of them in different ways. You can see music as a technique for playing things, or you can listen to the harmonies and dissonances and enter into their beauty and pathos. Theology can be just mimicking pious language, or it can be a way to enter into the world’s larger history and the deep patterns of God. As an engineer I had a strong sense of engaging in the larger harmonies of the world, the laws of nature, and the way the world functions, but as I practiced it, I got bored with using the same equations over and over again.

How does your musical background affect your teaching of ethics and theology?

Music sensitizes people to certain ways of engaging scripture. Ethics becomes a way of learning how to make our lives a pleasing musical composition rather than following simple, mechanical rules. Similarly, theology becomes the arena where we listen for the grand melody of God and attune our hearts, minds, and lives to it.

A PUBLICATION OF WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
New Faculty Share First Impressions

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoled us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. (2 Cor. 1:3-4)

J. Todd Billings, Assistant Professor of Reformed Theology, successfully defended his dissertation on September 16 in Cambridge, MA. The Thesis title is, “Calvin, Participation and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ.” This signals the completion of the Ph.D. degree for Professor Billings.

In addition, Dr. Chase has written dictionary articles on Intercessory Prayer and on Missional Systems. The study involved judicatories and churches from four denominations.

Cynthia Holder Rich, Associate Professor of Continuing Education, presented “Spirit and the Spirit: The Shepherd Movement of Missional Ecclesiology” at the Theological Reformed Church of South Africa, June 22-24, which met at Stellenbosch University.

She will participate in “Daughters of Thunder Speak Out” week of women’s preaching, co-sponsored by Journey and Preach Sista, March 20-24, 2006.

On October 13, Christopher Kaiser, Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology, lectured on “Beliefs in Natural Science, Then and Now” at the Meeter Center for Calvin Studies, Calvin College. Some of the beliefs of early modern scientists have persisted in surprising consistencies. These beliefs are so basic to scientific endeavor that it could not be sustained without them. Modern science actually turns out to be a faith-based enterprise.

David Stubbs, Assistant Professor of Ethics and Theology, co-wrote a report on sectarian theology called, “Invitation to Christ,” for the PC(USA) Office of Theology and Worship. He also wrote “Kari Barth and the Pietist Christiologie” as part of a Wabash Summer Research Fellowship.

Dr. Stubbs taught a mini-series, “Ethics in Science and Engineering,” to Summer Research students at Hope College. He will teach a 3-week series at First Reformed Church of Grandville. MI on “John Calvin and His Theology” (Jan. 29, Feb. 5, Feb. 12, 2006 at 11am). He will teach “Ethics and the Sacraments” Feb. 19 at Trinity Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. All are welcome to these classes.

Leanne Van Dyk, Academic Dean and Professor of Reformed Theology, was the keynote speaker at the Welsh Lectures in Reformed Theology at the University of Wales on November 4-6. In addition, on September 10 she spoke at the Santa Barbara Presbytery Leadership Training event on “Reformed Theology for the Church Today.”

Dr. Van Dyk wrote a chapter entitled, “A Conversation with the Ecumenical Creeds” in Conversations with the Confessions (edited by Joseph Small, published by Geneva Press).

Robert Van Voorst, Professor of New Testament, led worship for three Sundays at First Reformed Church of Grand Haven, MI and taught adult education for three weeks at the Community Church of Ferrysburg (CRC). He also led two workshops for women and church office for the consistory and congregation of South Blended Reformed Church. His new textbook, Reading the New Testament Today: An Introduction for “Living Stones” lay education course in the Albany Synod.

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Cynthia Holder Rich, Associate Professor of Continuing Education, presented “Spirit and the Spirit: The Shepherd Movement of Missional Ecclesiology” at the Theological Reformed Church of South Africa, June 22-24, which met at Stellenbosch University.

She will participate in “Daughters of Thunder Speak Out” week of women’s preaching, co-sponsored by Journey and Preach Sista, March 20-24, 2006.

On October 13, Christopher Kaiser, Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology, lectured on “Beliefs in Natural Science, Then and Now” at the Meeter Center for Calvin Studies, Calvin College. Some of the beliefs of early modern scientists have persisted in surprising consistencies. These beliefs are so basic to scientific endeavor that it could not be sustained without them. Modern science actually turns out to be a faith-based enterprise.

David Stubbs, Assistant Professor of Ethics and Theology, co-wrote a report on sectarian theology called, “Invitation to Christ,” for the PC(USA) Office of Theology and Worship. He also wrote “Kari Barth and the Pietist Christiologie” as part of a Wabash Summer Research Fellowship.

Dr. Stubbs taught a mini-series, “Ethics in Science and Engineering,” to Summer Research students at Hope College. He will teach a 3-week series at First Reformed Church of Grandville. MI on “John Calvin and His Theology” (Jan. 29, Feb. 5, Feb. 12, 2006 at 11am). He will teach “Ethics and the Sacraments” Feb. 19 at Trinity Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. All are welcome to these classes.

Leanne Van Dyk, Academic Dean and Professor of Reformed Theology, was the keynote speaker at the Welsh Lectures in Reformed Theology at the University of Wales on November 4-6. In addition, on September 10 she spoke at the Santa Barbara Presbytery Leadership Training event on “Reformed Theology for the Church Today.”

Dr. Van Dyk wrote a chapter entitled, “A Conversation with the Ecumenical Creeds” in Conversations with the Confessions (edited by Joseph Small, published by Geneva Press).

Robert Van Voorst, Professor of New Testament, led worship for three Sundays at First Reformed Church of Grand Haven, MI and taught adult education for three weeks at the Community Church of Ferrysburg (CRC). He also led two workshops for women and church office for the consistory and congregation of South Blended Reformed Church. His new textbook, Reading the New Testament Today: An Introduction for “Living Stones” lay education course in the Albany Synod.
During the last ten years, Western Theological Seminary’s student enrollment has tripled, but student housing has fallen behind the need. At the same time, another need has developed in the Holland community. The number of persons living with cognitive disabilities has increased, and their families have been unable to find appropriate housing for them.

The Friendship House concept resulted from “out of the box” thinking. How could we address both of those needs at the same time? The innovative solution is a housing structure on the campus of Western Seminary that will house 15 Western students, six people with cognitive impairments, and a resident director. Each special-needs adult will share an apartment with three seminary students, interacting and engaging in friendships, yet functioning independently.

In the process of conceiving the Friendship House, the steering committee met with many families of special needs children. The most difficult stories to hear were of pastors unable to relate to these children and their families. The Church became a very awkward place for them.

One primary goal, in addition to addressing the real need for housing, is to have every graduate of Western equipped to minister to persons with disabilities and to their families.

This will include:

• The ability to lead a Bible study developmentally suited to persons with cognitive impairments
• Communication skills that engage persons with disabilities in appropriate ways
• Basic counseling competencies to support families of persons with disabilities
• The conviction that church campuses should be accessible to those with a variety of physical challenges.

By virtue of living in community with people who have cognitive impairments, Western students will become more aware of the challenges faced by persons with a variety of disabilities. As we celebrate Communion together each Friday in our chapel, we will witness a poignant reminder that our Lord’s love and compassion is toward all regardless of able-mindedness or able-bodiedness.

Imagine the ripple effects of those who live in Friendship House taking their experience into the church—every minister that graduates from WTS will influence congregations and ministry with the care and sensitivity persons with special needs deserve.

This project is in the fundraising stage. For information on how you may become involved, please contact Ken Neevel at 616-392-8555.
May. She is a 1995 graduate of Western. Glenn's ministry and teaching career has been devoted to Western and ministry education. He was a part of the Teaching Church program for in residence and distance learning. Glenn gives direction and oversight to the Religious Education Program. With a background in elementary education, experience as an executive assistant at Hydro Automotive Structures in Holland, and her religious education training at Western, she brings a unique perspective and combination of skills to her job as Administrative Assistant to Distance Learning.

Jan Poppen is a graduate of Western Seminary with a Master of Religious Education degree. She is excited to be back at WTS and involved in the new Master of Divinity distance learning program. With a background in elementary education, experience as an executive assistant at Hydro Automotive Structures in Holland, and her religious education training at Western, she brings a unique perspective and combination of skills to her job as Administrative Assistant to Distance Learning.

Kyle Nevenzel graduated from Hope College in 2005 with a teaching degree in Physical Education and History. He works second-shift at the seminary as the Maintenance and Grounds Assistant, which gives him the opportunity to coach soccer at a local middle school and to serve as a part-time youth director at Central Park Reformed Church in Holland.

Welcome!

Glenn Swier
Associate Director of Formation for Ministry

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