Expanding the Vision

Western Theological Seminary announces its newest and most unique certificate program—the Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry (GCDM), set to launch in the fall of 2016.

“What attracts me to this program is its relevance,” says recent M.Div. graduate Luke Soderstrom. “Anyone, at any point in their lives, can become disabled. Disability can be temporary or, as we age, inevitable. As leaders in the church, we need to prepare ourselves and equip our congregations to be receptive to the lives and gifts that those experiencing disability bring to the body of Christ.”

Dr. Ben Conner, associate professor of Christian discipleship, will lead the program.

One of the things that persuaded Dr. Conner to join the faculty of WTS in 2013 was the presence of the Ralph & Cheryl Schregardus Friendship House—an apartment-style housing unit where seminary students live alongside young adults with developmental disabilities.

Conner saw the value of future pastors learning to include and recognize the gifts of those with disabilities, and he saw an opportunity for the spirit of Friendship House to find a home in the academic curriculum.

With the encouragement of the faculty and the help of other leaders in disability ministry, WTS has developed a certificate program to allow students to explore this area of ministry.

Students in the GCDM program will take six core curriculum courses and 4-5 elective courses, a total of 24 credit hours. Electives include courses such as “Strategies for an Inclusive Church,” “Deaf Theology and Ministry,” and “Disability, Bible and the Pastoral Imagination,” among many others.

Many of the adjuncts who will teach the courses are on the mobile faculty of the Summer Institute on Theology and Disability, the leading North American discussion on theology and disability. Adjunct professor Erik Carter teaches at Vanderbilt University and
has published the widely popular *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities*. Bill Gaventa is the coordinator of the Summer Institute on Theology and Disability as well as the editor of *Gleanings*, the newsletter of the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Religion and Spirituality Division. “Deaf Theology and Ministry” will be taught by a professor from Gallaudet University (the nation’s leading university for the deaf in Washington, DC). WTS is very pleased to have so many leaders in the field of disability studies participating in this program.

The certificate is the first effort by a seminary in the Association of Theological Schools to offer a package of transcripted courses that focus on disability concerns. Just as the Friendship House was the first of its kind across the country, WTS is again leading the way.

“My interest in a program like this began when I spent a year living in the Friendship House and was taking a class called ‘Ministry at the Margins’ with Dr. Ben Conner,” says student Kyle Nesbitt. “This program will stir up a lot of thought and discussion over how to cross the cultural boundaries that so often prevent effective ministry with people with disabilities.”

When Dr. Conner speaks about disability and ministry, he never uses the phrase “ministering to people with disabilities,” but always “ministering with people with disabilities.” This is because the focus is not just on including those with disabilities in the life of the church, but recognizing that they are an integral part of the body of Christ. They have much to share with others, and the able-bodied can learn a great deal from them.

On May 23-26, 2016, WTS and Hope College will host the Summer Institute on Theology and Disability, led by Bill Gaventa. The institute brings together academics, theologians, practitioners and others—people with and without identified disabilities—to explore the inclusive intersections of theology and disability. Speakers will include Hans Reinders, John Swinton, and Barbara Newman among others. Registration will begin in January.

“It is the purpose of Western Theological Seminary to prepare men and women called by God to lead the church in a 21st century world—and that world will include people with disabilities,” Dr. Conner says. “Our hope is that the Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry will support those future leaders.”

For more information or to apply online:
go to: westernsem.edu/academics/degrees/gcmd
or call 800-392-8554 for admissions
Moving Toward a Better Theology of Disability

Although I graduated from WTS five years ago, when I heard that my alma mater was launching a certificate in disability and ministry, I wanted to enroll. I would love to learn how I can cross the bridge more effectively between the world of those who live with fully-able bodies and minds and those who do not. What a rich area of ministry!

This certificate program is important because the theological conversation around disability needs to change. It is rooted in shame rather than hope, love, acceptance, and redemption. I have cerebral palsy. Because of this, I wore my shame like a cloak for the first 28 years of my life. “I caused this. I’m broken. I cause my parents so much extra work/time. I’m imperfect. I don’t belong in this world. This is too difficult. Why would God do this? God must hate me.” And on and on and on. Even a person well-adjusted to life with disability will deal with these toxic thoughts.

What message does the church offer? In my experience, the church responds to disability in one of three ways:

1. God made you this way because he knew you were special enough/strong enough to handle it.
2. You have a disability because of the sin that exists in our world. You are an example of what “original sin” can do.
3. God made a mistake. Something happened (perhaps Satan tried to destroy you), but God stepped in just in time.

I’ve had all three of these justifications said to my face.

For those of us who have disabilities, we (wish we could) respond like this:

1. I am not strong, nor am I special. If this is what strong and special looks like, you can have it.
2. Why am I an example of original sin? I didn’t do anything to deserve this. (Many who have physical disabilities—like me—were born with them).
3. I thought God didn’t make mistakes. And I thought he was stronger than the devil. Is God imperfect or weak?

Obviously, the church’s theology on disability leaves a lot to be desired. There has to be a way to approach disability from a theological perspective that does not involve shame, sin, or mistakes.

I borrow heavily from theologian and sociologist Nancy Eisland [paraphrasing], “Somewhere within God exists the possibility for disability. God is so huge, who are we to say what is encompassed within the character of God? Therefore, we cannot say that disability is a sort of imperfection or mistake. It is something deliberately, intentionally given to us by God.”

This statement may be hard to swallow for both able-bodied and the disabled. Disability looks like a mistake to us. But is it a mistake from God’s perspective? I choose to believe that my cerebral palsy (CP) was given to me with purpose. Indeed, I am certain that CP has formed me for the better. How then, is my CP a mistake?

Further, if one is going to espouse the idea of disability from original sin, then one also needs to make sure it is abundantly clear that in Christ, our disability has been fully redeemed. We know that Jesus redeemed the world and saved us from the power of sin through his death and resurrection. We believe that he brings hope into seemingly hopeless situations. Many of us bear witness to his inbreaking power. Why do we think that the human body or mind is off-limits to God? Can’t his power reach that far? I’m not speaking exclusively of miraculous healing—although God is certainly able to do that if he chooses. I’m talking about the glorious mystery that occurs when a person or family thanks God for the difficulty of disability; when they find hope in times of desperation; and when the glory of God shines brightly in an imperfect physical or mental existence. That is redemption only God can bring. It is no less a miracle than being fully healed.

This is the theology of disability the church needs to adopt. The world only offers a message of shame, and to a large extent, this is what the church has offered too—except we cloak it in religious language, or we try to make it better by saying, “But you’re made in the image of God too.” Too? Oh, thanks for making room for me. No. People with disabilities are made in the image of God. Period. There is no too.

The perspective of a person with a disability is needed and valuable. Back in seminary, I brought my disability into a couple of sermons. Later, someone said to me, “It wasn’t really necessary for you to talk about your CP. You make it sound like that’s all you ever think about.” I was taken aback and felt a split second of shame and doubt. But disability is the filter through which I view the world. As much as someone (or I) might like, I cannot get away from it. This classmate was in no way mean-spirited, but he made me realize that some find my CP uncomfortable and would rather pretend it doesn’t exist or influence my life in any way. In that instance, I heard that my perspective wasn’t important and didn’t matter.

People with disabilities are not going away anytime soon. In fact, with the aging of the population and the rise (and associated risk) of multiple births, they are increasing in number. The church must reexamine its theology of disability, and then must use that theology to do a better job of connecting the worlds of the able-bodied and the disabled. The GCDM is a step in that direction. I applaud WTS for this important new program.
Duane Loynes describes himself first and foremost as a family man—husband to Ericka and father to 12-year-old Duane, Jr.—but he is also a scholar at heart.

Growing up with a mother who made sure he got the best education possible, Duane pursued a degree in engineering from Stevens Institute of Technology in his home state of New Jersey. He quickly realized he hated it.

“One day I looked at my bookshelf and saw that all the books I was reading for fun dealt with theology, philosophy, and religion,” he says.

He left Stevens, packed his bags and headed to Chicago. There he worked in the Information Technology department of Wheaton College while finishing a bachelors in Communication and Organizational Leadership at Trinity International University.

Eleven days after graduation he began taking graduate courses at Wheaton, earning his MA in theology in 2005. Two years later, he earned a masters in philosophy from Northern Illinois University.

Duane is now in a doctoral program at Marquette University, working on his dissertation. He is examining the way Christian theology makes space for racism—for instance, the KKK uses the Christian cross as its symbol, yet somehow many people are not scandalized by that. He is delving into the philosophical foundations for the way Christians engage the world, including issues of apologetics, atheism, gender, and race.

Yet, at the end of the day, the most important thing to Duane is his family.

“I wasn’t raised by a father, so when I get to heaven I don’t want God to say, ‘You were a great scholar, great pastor, great student…but you weren’t there for your son.’ Being a father is very important to me.”

As a Faculty Fellow at Western, Duane will teach a church history class in the spring as well as serve on the Master of Theology committee and work on diversity initiatives.

“I love teaching. I try to drum up interest in the subject and get everyone to see why it’s important,” he shares. “I’d love to teach a course on apologetics to make sure that when our students encounter people who challenge the Christian faith, they will have up-to-date defenses for why they believe what they believe.”

In his work with Dr. Theresa Latini, Associate Dean of Diversity and Cultural Competency, Duane hopes to see WTS take leaps and bounds in cultural competency.

“I would love to see a change in the way we view diversity and cultural competence,” he says. “I’d like it to be addressed not just in terms of ‘being nice’ to different people, but penetrating to the core of who we are. We’re looking to change not just people’s behaviors, but the DNA or genetic code of the institution.”

Rev. Dr. Dynna Castillo Portugal’s path to ministry began in an unexpected place: computer science engineering. She also has a masters degree in human development and worked as a computer programmer, website developer, database manager and an audio-visual technician.

Her interest turned to theology largely from the influence of her family over the years. Her grandfather was a church planter who started over 50 churches. Her father is the senior pastor of her home church in Mexico City, Mexico, and her mother serves beside him as a great example of courage and strength.

“From my dad I learned how to be patient and engaged in ministry. From my mom I learned to be fully committed and disciplined,” she says. “I am inspired by their testimony.”

Dynna came to the U.S. in 2002 to study at Bethel Seminary in St. Paul, MN. After graduating, she worked as a hospital chaplain in the Twin Cities for a year and continued as a church leader in a local Free Methodist church. She returned to Mexico and was ordained in 2007 as an associate pastor at Templo Evangélico Gethsemani in Mexico City. While there, she also earned a diploma in choir conducting.

In 2008 she came back to the States for another year of hospital chaplaincy and then entered a Ph.D. program at Luther Seminary in Minneapolis. Her dissertation focused on ministering to victims of domestic violence in Mexico.

“Families in my home church are struggling with domestic violence, and in my experience as a pastor there, we have not provided the care these victims need,” she explains. “It was difficult for me to work on my dissertation because violence is a sad reality for many families in Mexico. At the same time, I felt that God was talking to me and comforting me. It was a spiritual journey much more than a thesis.”

Dr. Castillo Portugal hopes to translate her thesis into Spanish to become a resource to leaders in her home church as well as in Latin America.

As a Faculty Fellow at Western, she is teaching the distance learning course, “Practice of Counsel and Care.”

Many of the distance learning students are heavily involved in their own ministries, so they have many questions and concerns from their own contexts.

“It’s a constant learning, and that’s what makes me feel energized,” she shares.

She also believes that pastoral care is not just the ministry of the church leaders, but also of the congregation.

“It is sharing both in sorrow and joy,” she said. “When the church is active in the world, pastoral care and counseling is part of the ministry that the church offers to those in need.”

A Student’s Story: Godfrey Kyome

Master of Theology student Rev. Godfrey Kyome has lived on the streets of Uganda, has worked at a home for blind youth, was ordained in the Anglican church, and now serves as the assistant executive director for Words of Hope Uganda radio ministry.

“My life has witnessed the grace, presence, and providence of the Lord,” says Godfrey.

Godfrey’s father was a hard man and mistreated his mother. Rather than stay under his father’s roof, 12-year-old Godfrey took to the street shortly after primary school.

One night he ended up sleeping on a church pew. When he woke up, people had filled the church and were worshipping. He immediately sat up, thinking, “I should be worshipping, too, not sleeping!” He began spending his days looking for churches to be part of.

“Life on the street away from my family was a time that God used to prepare me for my ministry,” he observes. “Like a prodigal son, the time came when I thought, ‘I shouldn’t be living this kind of life.’”

Eventually he moved in with an aunt who encouraged him to go back to school.

Secondary school was a turning point for Godfrey. As a teenager, he began organizing small-scale mission projects in different schools and found local pastors interested in discipling young people. One of those pastors was Bishop Stephen Kazimba (Th.M. ’03, D.Min. ’07). Rev. Dr. Kazimba became a mentor for Godfrey, along with Captain Titus Baraka (Th.M. ’02).

“They are always helping insignificant people see the gifts they can use in the community and the church,” he says.

Godfrey went on to Uganda Christian University, where he earned a bachelors degree in social work and administration.

When he was on the street, in desperate times he had bargained with God, promising to serve him if he would answer his prayers. When he got his degree in social work, he followed his passion to work with disabled youth and volunteered at a home for the blind. He thought, “This is what I’m going to do. It’s enough for God.” But God convicted him that he had made a pledge to serve Him, leading Godfrey to complete a Master of Divinity degree in Uganda and seek ordination in the Anglican church.

Many of Godfrey’s mentors came through Western Theological Seminary, and it became a dream for him to study here as well. Last year WTS President Timothy Brown and Words of Hope President David Bast took a trip to Uganda, and Godfrey was their interpreter. He applied for the Master of Theology (Th.M.) program and was accepted.

“Being here is a dream come true,” he says. “It’s a confirmation of what God wants me to do in Uganda.”

Godfrey’s research centers on congregational transformation through leadership. He is interested in how a leader can use teamwork to transform his or her community by recognizing and using different gifts, talents, and abilities in the congregation.

“I believe if all people are given an opportunity to participate in church or in ministry, there will always be a tremendous transformation,” he says.

His current work as assistant executive director of Words of Hope Uganda allows him to connect people and help them work together. He organizes Words of Hope’s radio ministry in the country’s fifteen dioceses to make sure they are airing quality material. On his radio program on Saturday mornings he records sermons for them to use. He also organizes listener’s conferences for those who wish to share their testimonies.

He attributes much of his success to his mother, who prayed for him from the time he was a boy.

“I remember nights when I was sleeping… she would put her hands on me and pray for me, and I kept pushing them away because they were so cold!” he recalls. “But I am what I am because of the knees of that woman.”

Godfrey is thoroughly enjoying his time at WTS.

“It’s such an encouraging environment as I meet people from different areas of the world, like India and China,” he says. “We share ideas in the Th.M. program, and I have learned so many things that are happening in the church around the world.”

The program is also helping him to look inward and know himself more deeply. “You think wide. You think like a scholar. And I believe a good pastor should be a scholar,” he says.

“By God’s grace, when I go back I would love to have a leadership conference, especially in the Mityana diocese, where we have a low level of education,” he says. “I want to see how we can equip them with this kind of knowledge in leadership and discipleship, but also how I can advance our ministry doing discipleship through media. Whatever God brings my way, I will do it for the glory of the Kingdom.”
The Momentum Continues...

Ridder Church Renewal (RCR) is in its seventh year, and 96 churches are involved right now—that’s 63 Reformed Church in America churches and 33 Christian Reformed Church in North America churches. Beginning with 15 churches in 2008, Ridder Church Renewal has added more churches with each two year cycle. To date, 129 churches have taken part in the process. RCR has gained momentum in both the U.S. and Canada and has expanded into a Pacific NW region and the “Heartland region” in Iowa, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and Minnesota.

The Ridder movement is a partnership of Western Theological Seminary, the Christian Reformed Church, and the Reformed Church in America. It aims to help churches and their leaders move into more vibrant mission and life as a congregation.

This year marks the start of a new module cycle in Ridder. Churches beginning Module 1 are sending their pastors to their first Faithwalking retreat, where they will delve into what it means to be in mission for God with integrity, authenticity, love, and courage.

“A lot of what we tend to see in the first module is transformation in the lives of pastors. Then, as it goes on, churches begin to help their members see how God is call-

“For me, the best part of Ridder is the stories. They’re not sensational, but they’re deep and they reflect the kind of change that has staying power—the kind that doesn’t end when a retreat or a module has ended.

In the Ridder process I see pastors growing in their maturity, congregations growing in their openness to change and to engage the world as it is and not as it used to be—and that gives me a great deal of hope. I believe that we’re nourishing the ground that the future leaders are going to come from.”

—Trisha Taylor, Counselor, Co-author of The Leader’s Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal Congregational Transformation, and one of the two main presenters for Ridder

“I really sensed a call through this process to engage my neighborhood. I’ve had deep and meaningful conversations with my neighbors. One family was sending a member to drug rehab and they asked my wife and me to come over and pray with them. If I hadn’t been attuned to that movement of the Spirit and the mission of God in the world, I would have missed some of the most meaningful ministry.”

—Andrew Nunn, Youth Pastor at Bethel Christian Reformed Church, Acton, Ontario, Canada

“Recognizing that in the person of Jesus Christ, all my sins past, present and future are forgiven has enabled me to see where God is gently exposing sin so that I can repent from it and move forward. Ridder has really gotten me to a place of joy and freedom in which I can leave shame behind and just move forward in learning.”

—Ryan Braam, Pastor at Brighton Fellowship Christian Reformed Church, Brighton, Ontario, Canada
ing them to their own ministries in their community,” says Chris DeVos, who directs Ridder Church Renewal at WTS.

Pastors entering Module 2 will also participate in the Faithwalking retreat, and many are bringing stories with them of how Ridder has impacted their lives over the last two years.

“The stories from pastors are the most impactful,” says Trisha Taylor, one of the co-founders of Faithwalking.

One pastor told her, “I wouldn’t still be in the pastor-ate if it wasn’t for Ridder, and I definitely wouldn’t still be in my church if it wasn’t for Ridder.”

“I regularly hear ‘I am a different person; I am a different pastor; I am a different father or mother; I’am a different partner to my spouse,’” she shares.

Jack Tacoma, ministry specialist for the Christian Reformed Church, has been involved in church renewal for the past 20 years, and he says Ridder is the best process he has ever used.

He believes that part of the reason RCR is so successful is that it is self-sustaining. As pastors go through the process, they tell their colleagues at other churches about it. Then as they move deeper into the process, they become coaches and mentors for the newer people.

“It’s really a movement,” says Chris DeVos. “We emphasize the fact that it’s not a packaged program. It is a process of transformation for pastors and churches.”

“Because I’m striving to be authentic, I can help grow and nurture that culture in our congregation. I just feel so much more full now, so much more fully alive. It’s like I’m living into this and taking little baby steps to be the person that God created me to be.

There are times at home when I know my cup runs over…but when I’m here [at Faithwalking] I just feel like ‘surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.’ That becomes real to me.”

—Barb Boss, Pastor at Family of God Community Church (RCA), Newaygo, MI

“One of the reasons why Ridder is as crucial as it is, is that this process recognizes that God has already placed the leaders in every church. This is a snowballing process that’s not dependent on some out-of-town person to come in and fix the leaders, but it instead uses what’s already there.

Ridder is helping them discover that they can be torchbearers for hope. It’s by bringing their best selves to the job—not by pretending they’re Billy Graham—but by bringing the person that God designed them to be.”

—Jack Tacoma, Ministry Specialist in Church Renewal for the Christian Reformed Church

“The authenticity piece has been important for me. My family went through a significant trauma where my son…he took his own life. The work that Christ had done in me through Ridder really forced me to see ‘I can’t keep this back. I can’t not let the people know what’s happening.’ And the response of the people was just incredible. It was really overwhelming, to say the least.”

—Pete Burrill, Pastor at Emmanuel Reformed Church (RCA), Woodstock, Ontario, Canada

“Pete Burrill

Barb Boss

Jack Tacoma

Barb Boss, Pastor at Family of God Community Church (RCA), Newaygo, MI
Keep Your Hat on!

Sometimes I feel like I wear as many hats as a hat rack. I have the privilege of being involved in lots of different aspects of Western—from fundraising to continuing education to admissions. One of the hats I most enjoy putting on is implementing the seminary’s strategic plan.

I don’t expect all of you to be well versed in the plan. If you are a strategic plan geek like me, you can see the whole kit and caboodle on our website at westernsem.edu/academics/publications.

There are five different areas of emphasis to the plan and 29 separate goals under the five headings. Although I love to expound at length about each part of the plan, today I want to emphasize one aspect: “Facility Expansion and Renovation for Living into the Vision.” There are two parts of that title I want to unpack. Let me start with the second first.

By using the phrase, “Living into the Vision,” we are reminding ourselves that buildings are here to serve the mission and vision of the seminary. We won’t build for the sake of building; we’ll build for the sake of our students. Here’s an example of how this plays out: as you know, Western has made a strong commitment by launching the Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry. It is incongruent, then, for us to have entrances and other parts of the building that are inaccessible. We can’t have our buildings saying different things than our curriculum.

There is no doubt our facilities need attention. The main part of our building, created (just like me) when Dwight Eisenhower was President, has multiple heating and cooling issues, is not energy efficient, and in many places is just plain worn out. While that is true, we have even more pressing needs with a newer part of our building. The tower that holds the Cook Center for Theological Research and Beardslee Library has problems. The building opened in 1981, just before the digital technology explosion. Think of it—when that building debuted no one had a personal computer, cell phone, Kindle or iPad, and no one had heard of email or the Internet. Since our library was built, a technological revolution occurred in the way we access information.

It gets worse. Within a few years of opening, we began to have water issues in the building. It began flooding after heavy rains. The flooding eventually caused the seminary to stop using the building’s basement. That space, which was originally designed with observation laboratories for teaching pastoral counseling, has been abandoned. Throughout the building, moisture not only comes in through the ceilings and windows, it comes straight through the brick exterior. It is impossible to keep the building humidified in the winter and dehumidified in the summer.

Eleven years ago some of the brick facade of the building started splitting. The problem was rust on the steel frame behind the bricks, which was forcing the bricks apart. We spent $100,000 back then fixing the problem. This year we have learned the entire steel frame of the building is coated with rust. To fix that would involve removing every brick on the tower and cost over one million dollars. Even if we did that, there is another issue that would need to be addressed to continue to use the building. The mechanical systems that are housed on top of the tower provide HVAC for the entire seminary and need to be replaced. We need 13.5 feet between each floor to have adequate space for the ductwork that a new
mechanical system requires. We have 12 feet of space between each floor.

As a result of these realities, the seminary’s board of trustees has instructed us to develop a plan for a new learning center/library that does not renovate the existing tower but replaces it. Our plan is that sometime in the not-too-distant future the library tower will come down.

For several months, a team of seminary faculty, staff, and board members has been working to prioritize and balance the need to replace our existing library with the pressing needs of the older parts of our facilities. We’ve been working with an architectural firm and construction company as we sort this all out. At the same time, President Brown and I have been working with our development staff and a consulting firm doing feasibility on a capital campaign to support not only our building needs but all parts of our strategic plan.

We’re not ready yet to go public with either our building plans or our campaign goals. In other words, to keep with the opening image of this article, keep your hat on. Stay tuned to future issues of The Commons for more information. And please, as always, pray for your seminary as we figure out the best ways to move forward.
In a decision by the president and academic dean to utilize gifts most effectively, Kyle Small and John Brogan exchanged roles as of June 1, 2015. Dr. Small now serves as dean of formation for ministry and Dr. Brogan serves as associate academic dean.

In mid-August, Pam Bush, associate director of Journey (Discipleship) and instructional assistant of Hebrew, began an additional role as associate director of student care in the Formation for Ministry office. Pam is responsible for the pastoral concerns of residential and distance learning students during times of crisis and discernment.

For the 2015-16 academic year, Theresa Latini is serving as associate dean of diversity and cultural competence. Dr. Latini will work closely with CJ Kingdom-Grier, whose work as assistant to the president for racial initiatives has already identified and implemented areas of growth and change for WTS in this area. Both are serving on the President’s Council this year.

After earning her doctorate in May, former Faculty Fellow Han-uen Kantzer Komline was promoted to assistant professor of church history and theology on July 1. She won a two-year post-doctoral fellowship from the Louisville Institute at Louisville Theological Seminary, which will allow her to teach and become vocationally formed to better respond to the needs of faith communities and their future leadership. Her mentor is colleague Suzanne McDonald.

Suzanne McDonald was granted tenure and became professor of historical and systematic theology on July 1.

After completing his Ph.D. in October, Ron Rienstra was promoted to associate professor of preaching and worship arts. Dr. Rienstra is on sabbatical, working on an annotated collection of essays on worship and ecclesiology by Swiss theologian Jean-Jacques von Allmen. He is also consulting with local churches seeking liturgical revitalization.

During her sabbatical last semester, Assistant Professor of Liturgical Theology Sue Rozeboom presented a paper on liturgies for the Lord’s Supper to the Calvin Studies Society. She also met with RCA leaders in New York to present on the sacraments and their significance for the life of discipleship. She continues to work on a chapter on liturgy for the Oxford Handbook of the Reformed Tradition.

J. Todd Billings, the Gordon H. Girod research professor of Reformed theology, has been selected as a blogger for the Huffington Post at huffingtonpost.com/j-todd-billings/. Earlier this year his article on prayer and healing was featured. In September the Post published, “Why Does God Turn to Poetry? A Dialogue With Christian Wiman.” Dr. Billings is grateful for the wide audience this exposure provides for the message of faith in Christ.

Welcome to new faculty, staff and trustees:

David Komline is visiting assistant professor of church history. He has deep family roots in the RCA and is excited to teach for a school that is evangelical, ecumenical, and Reformed. He has degrees from Wheaton College, Princeton Theological Seminary, and the University of Notre Dame. He has taught in Germany and China and has a passion for both the global and local body of Christ.

Shanna Housman began work on June 29 as the new administrative assistant for Journey Center for Learning. Shanna’s vocational roots are in Young Life, both in Holland and in Cheyenne, WY, as a staff trainer and area director. Shanna also served as student ministry director for Cheyenne Hills Church.

On August 17, Gretchen Torres began working as the morning receptionist at WTS. A native of Puerto Rico, Gretchen is also a student in the Graduate Certificate in Urban Pastoral Ministry program. She administers Instituto Biblico Ebenezer (IBE), an educational program serving Latino pastors in the Holland area.

Three new members have joined the WTS Board of Trustees this fall. Rev. Dr. Kenneth Harris is the founding pastor of Detroit Bible Tabernacle. He is vice president of academic affairs, academic dean, and professor of biblical studies at the Ecumenical Theological Seminary, a seminary in the heart of Detroit. He earned his Th.M. at Western in 1998, and he is the father of M.Div. graduate Rev. Kenita Harris ’09.

Rev. Cora W. Taitt is the pastor of Highbridge Community Church (RCA) in the Bronx, NY. Rev. Taitt connects and works with community organizations, as well as the Prison Ministry Network and the Young Urban Christian Association. She is part of a Bast Preaching Group and participates in Ridder Church Renewal.

Rev. Dr. Andrea Godwin-Stremler is an RCA pastor serving in military chaplain ministry in Hawaii, giving support to spouses and families. She also supports female clergy in the UCC in Hawaii.

journey.westernsem.edu
Learning Opportunities from Journey

January-April: Adult Learning Styles Focus Group

January 25: “Ways to Help Children Face and Overcome Fears” with Candace Vander Weide

March 11-12: Celebrating Women’s Leadership in the Church

February 15-16: Osterhaven Lectures in Theology with Katherine Sondergager

April 19-21: Transition into Ministry Summit

May 23-26: Institute on Theology and Disability

616.392.8555, x133
On to glory...

Karel Hanhart '49
b. 2/16/1927 Tillburg, Netherlands
d. 8/19/2015 's-Hertogenbosch, Netherlands
WTS '49, U Amsterdam '51 (BTh) '66 (ThD)
Churches served:
- (1952-53) Monarch, Alberta, Canada
- (1952-56) Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada
- (1952-60) Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada
- (1960-64) London, Ontario, Canada
- (1972-89) Protestant Ch., Brussels, Belgium
Other service:
- (1964-72) Professor, Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque, IA
- (1989-91) Ecumenical Inst., Colleugville, MN

Peter Breen '52
b. 9/2/1919 Coopersville, MI
d. 10/25/2015 Grand Rapids, MI
Hope '49, WTS '52
Reformed Churches served:
- (1957-67) Fremont, MI
- (1952-57) Corinth, Byron Center, MI

Curtis Ross Liesveld '76
b. 2/4/51 Holland, NE
d. 5/16/2015 Lincoln, NE
U Nebraska '73 & '88 (MA), WTS '76
Reformed Churches served:
- (1970-76) First, Harriston, Ontario, Canada
- (1964-72) Professor, Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque, IA
- (1984-90) Director, Camp Shalom, Cambridge, Ontario, Canada

Brook Stephens '60
b. 7/30/1930 Los Angeles, CA
d. 7/24/2015 Sioux Center, IA
Kansas U '52, WTS '60
Reformed Churches served:
- (1960-67) First, Waterloo, IA
- (1967-75) Carmel, Rock Valley, IA
- (1975-86) Newhall, Wyoming, MI
- (1986-95) Bethany, Lynnwood, WA

Robert J. De Young '63
b. 7/11/1937 Muskegon, MI
d. 8/25/2015 Pella, IA
Central '59, WTS '63
Reformed Churches served:
- (1961-62) int., Garden Grove, CA
- (1963-65) assoc., Bellevue, Schenectady, NY
- (1965-2002) Christ Comm, Clifton Park, NY

Eugene Kraaen '63
b. 8/9/1937
d. 10/17/2015 Holland, MI
Hope '59, WTS '63, Emory U (MA), Harvard (PhD)
(1968-2006) professor, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT

Gordon R. Van Hoeven '64
b. 7/29/1927 Grand Rapids, MI
d. 7/11/2015 Muskegon, MI
Hope '50, WTS '64
Reformed Churches served:
- (1964-69) Hope, Spencer, IA
- (1968-71) Homewood, IL
- (1971-89) Christ Comm., Spring Lake, MI

George Beukema '66
b. 7/6/1933 Chicago, IL
d. 6/5/2015 Belmont, CA
Hope '63, WTS '66 & '82 (DMin)
Reformed Churches served:
- (1966-75) Calvary Reformed, Cleveland, OH
- (1975-83) Urban Field Secretary for the Synod of Michigan, Grand Rapids, MI
- (1983-92) Founder and Director of Heartside Ministry, Grand Rapids, MI

Siebrand Wilts '70
b. 7/28/1944 Harpel, Netherlands
d. 9/30/2014 Kitchener, Ontario, Canada
Hope '67, WTS '70
Reformed Churches served:
- (1970-76) First, Harriston, Ontario, Canada
- (1964-72) Professor, Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque, IA
- (1990-2006) Countryside, Ontario, Canada

Other service:

Matthew Floding '96 (DMin), director of ministerial formation and field education at Duke Divinity School, has co-edited *Brimming with God: Reflecting Theologically on Cases in Ministry* with Barbara J. Blodgett of Lexington Theological Seminary. The book offers a variety of approaches to theological reflection in ministry, as well as case studies in theological education and pastoral practice.

Beginning in August, Sarah Crance Stobie '01 began her new call as pastor of St. John Lutheran Church in Blue Bell, PA. She had been serving as associate pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church of Grand Rapids, MI. Rev. Stobie is ordained in the ELCA.

In September, Jill Ver Steeg '03 joined the RCA staff as the coordinator for transformational equipping. She leads the Transformational Experiences team, as the coordinator for transformational equipping. In September, Jill Ver Steeg '03 joined the RCA staff as the coordinator for transformational equipping. She leads the Transformational Experiences team, as the coordinator for transformational equipping.

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This past summer, Wendell Karsen '63 and his wife, Renske, visited Barna Kali '04 (ThM) in Romania. Barna and his wife, Tunde, are ordained pastors in the Hungarian Reformed Church. They each serve two parishes in northern Romania. Read the full story at westernsem.edu/blog/bloom-where-you-are-planted/

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Perhaps you saw the news story about one of our country’s premier educational institutions announcing a plan to spend $50 million to diversify their faculty. Wow!

We at Western certainly don’t have the resources of top-tier Ivy League institutions, but we have the same desire for diversity. I’d even make the argument that based on the eschatological vision of Revelation 9:7 of a “great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and people and languages,” that diversity isn’t just something that would be nice to do, it’s a biblical mandate.

But how do we do it? In this issue of The Commons you’ll read about Duane Loynes and Dynna Castillo Portugal, Western’s two Faculty Fellows for the 2015-16 academic year. Both Duane and Dynna are first rate scholars, delightful people, and deeply committed followers of Jesus Christ. I so want you to meet both of them. We couldn’t ask for better additions to our seminary community than Duane and Dynna.

Please pray for them and their ministry at Western, and pray for Western as we continue the hard work of transforming a historically mono-cultural school into a multi-racial, multi-ethnic representation of the kingdom of God.