From Rubble to Renewal

Amid the upheaval and inconvenience of a major construction project, the WTS community looks forward to a renewed facility with many benefits to come.
Memories of Semelink Hall always include the stately tree just outside the window, and many will be pleased to learn that it will carry on in a different form.

Last spring when four trees were taken down—a walnut, linden, maple, and the basswood outside Semelink—the wood was saved. At the initiative of David Becker, superintendent of building and grounds, the trunks were milled and planed, and the wood was carefully stacked outside to dry. In October the wood was taken inside to be heated and dried to its final state.
The walnut yielded some beautiful pieces and will be made into the seminary’s new front door, tables, and two fireplace mantles. The linden and maple will be used for countertops and other applications. The basswood is excellent for carving, and two huge trunk pieces have been saved. Other ideas continue to be set forth for the wood, and all will depend on how it dries.

Making way for the new is often coupled with loss of the old. This creative initiative is a healing balm!
Miss Shaelee,” she said, holding out a tan piece of construction paper, “I drew this for you!”

I put my arm around her little shoulder, looked over the ice cream cone masterpiece, and replied, “How did you know ice cream is my favorite food ever?! Like ever, ever!” Her brown eyes lit up with joy as she shrugged her shoulders, saying, “I don’t know… I just drew it!”

The kingdom of heaven is like…

Recently I have been mulling over passages in Matthew 13. Jesus gives his followers a vision of the kingdom of heaven by using parables. He moves from mustard seeds to leavened bread to a merchant in search of fine pearls, even to a net that catches an array of fish.

Through these many visions, I always go back to this: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds…”

The smallest of all seeds. It takes 185,000 mustard seeds to make one pound. If every person in Des Moines, IA was a mustard seed—it would only weigh one pound!

I learned in my internship that the kingdom of heaven is already present and moving. The stirring in our hearts helps us to step in—to actively participate in the coming of God’s kingdom. What “surprisingly surprised” me is that this movement is not fast, loud, or big. Rather, it is fairly slow.

Getting to know kids, getting a glimpse of their lives outside the three hours each weekday we would spend with them, learning their stories, meeting parents, and beginning to understand the needs of the neighborhood… takes a long time.

Sometimes this work of creating authentic relationships felt insignificant as we played tag, painted rocks, or led the kids in exercises… but that was just what God was calling us to do. God was asking us to lean in, love, encourage, and ask questions in a way that brings life and joy.

The mustard seed is a powerful seed. When the seed is planted, it grows underground for a period of time. When it finally sprouts, its growth becomes almost impossible to stop.

This is what Jesus was saying. The coming of the kingdom is in the small and seemingly insignificant—but it is powerful, strong, and unstoppable. In some moments we see the sprouting forth from the earth, giving us glimpses of the kingdom of God advancing. But in the meantime, this slow process is a pull on my heart to remain faithful in the work God is inviting us to lean into.

The kingdom of heaven is like… twenty kids playing toilet tag.

The kingdom of heaven is like… children singing to Beach Boys songs while shaking plastic egg maracas.

The kingdom of heaven is like… exercising to Moana—and giggling.

The kingdom of heaven is like… talking while making robots out of soup cans.

The kingdom of heaven is like… holding a child’s hand.

The seemingly small. Outwardly insignificant. This is where power lies. The seeds have already been planted… only God knows how much they are spreading.

The kingdom of heaven is like an ice cream cone, a masterpiece made of crayon and marker, that finds its forever home on a tan piece of construction paper. This small act of generosity and thoughtfulness shows that God is working in this little girl’s life. And to be honest… I almost missed it. How often do we miss the work of God in those around us? Or perhaps even in our own hearts? All because it sometimes feels small or insignificant.

The kingdom of heaven is like…
Suddenly....the pastor!
Middler student Alex Regets finds his dreams coming true sooner than he imagined.

I am someone who never expected to end up in ministry, but God does unexpected things.

I had started out in a pre-law program in college, but early on I felt the call to ministry, so I switched schools and finished my undergrad with a bachelor’s degree in religious studies.

For someone who never expected to end up in ministry, once I was called, I knew what I wanted: rural ministry. I entered seminary with a clear idea of where I wanted to end up. Right from the start, I would tell anyone who’d listen that when all was said and done, I wanted to be the pastor of a small church in the middle of nowhere. I also said that I’d love it if I could just stay there forever.

I wanted to go to the kind of church that often gets overlooked. The kind that gets viewed as a stepping stone to bigger and better things. And I always said that if this small, middle-of-nowhere church could be close to my hometown—well, that would be even better.

When it came time to start looking for a summer Internship after my second year at Western, I figured I’d look for a place that checked all those boxes. What I found was a small Presbyterian church in a rural town of about 4,000, averaging around 20 people each week in attendance, and it was only ten minutes from my hometown of Manteno, IL, the place where my family and my wife’s family still live.

It seemed like a great fit for my internship, but when I looked up the church, I noticed something interesting.

They were currently without a pastor. I figured that was a plus, since it would help me get a sense for what the job is really like, but there was something else. Where the listing asked for required experience, this church didn’t say “First Ordained Call,” the way so many others do. Instead, it simply said none.

Suddenly, what started out as a possible landing spot for my summer internship looked like it had the potential to be something more!

After a handful of conversations with the elders of the church, we came to an agreement that I’d serve there for the summer, fulfilling my requirements for the 10-week internship, and if it seemed like a good fit for me and for them, they would make me an offer before it was over.

Well, it was a good fit.

So here I am, serving as the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Peotone, Illinois, the sort of church I always said I wanted to work with!

I am finishing up my Master of Divinity degree by switching to Western’s distance learning program. It’s a little unorthodox, and it means jumping through some hoops with the Presbytery to make sure it’s all done “decently and in order,” but I am grateful for the opportunity.

It feels like a great fit in every way, and while my ordination will come a little slower, I’m already getting to experience what it’s like to pastor the church I have always dreamed of.
Hebrew Camp

For eleven days each summer, students taking Advanced Hebrew immerse themselves in Hebrew at the Hermitage, a retreat community in southwest Michigan.

According to professors Pam “Qiqayon” Bush and Travis “Moshe” West, the class is about 70% Hebrew and 30% spiritual formation—and sometimes the other way around.

“Hebrew Camp” aims to prepare students who will become lab leaders for the Biblical Hebrew course. Students develop a dramatic enactment of the story of Naaman from 2 Kings 5, as well as study grammar and vocabulary for many hours each day. The class is a rich exercise in community building, collaboration, and developing spiritual practices.

“It’s the most challenging, exhausting, rewarding, and life-giving educational experience that I’ve encountered in my life—every single year,” says Professor West.

The Table

Each morning, students practice silence during breakfast until the time for morning prayers. Then the group prays and sings together in Hebrew. Lunch is also in Hebrew—which many students find challenging at first.

“The first lunch was basically silent,” confesses 2016 Hebrew Camp student Emily Scatterday-Holehan. “But by the end of the week, you’re making jokes in Hebrew.”

Students like Emily are volunteers from previous years who form a hospitality team to prepare and serve each meal. The team creates healthy dishes and decorates the table with flowers or candles to make it a beautiful experience each day.

Many students say dinners together are the best part of camp. The group eats around one big table, sharing the joys and sorrows of the day. Professor Bush asks everyone to answer: “What are you grateful for?” as well as a second, probing question about the day.

“We all came with our stress, frustration, or joys, and everything landed on the table at dinner,” recalls Chelsea Reynhout, a 2016 participant. “It was like the great equalizer, the embodiment of communion.”

Being together 24/7 with fellow students is challenging yet beneficial.

“You can’t get in your car and drive away when you’re frustrated; you have to come back to the table,” explains Alisha Riepma.

“No one told us we had to share personal things with each other,” says Cassie Nelson-Rogalski, “but it happened because we were living together, and it was really beautiful to hold each other’s grief, pain, and joy.”

The Sabbath

On Friday evening, the group watches the sunset in preparation for Shabbat—the Sabbath. The table is laid out with special care for the evening meal.

“To watch the sunset with your community, sing together, and then come back to the dinner table all set... was a homey feeling of being really loved,” Laurel Pals reflects.

All of Saturday is spent resting. Some students have continued the tradition of Shabbat after camp is over.

“I’ve never allowed myself to rest before without feeling guilty,” admits Nelson-Rogalski. Now, she and her husband try to practice Sabbath weekly, preparing everything on Friday afternoon so that Saturday can be a full day of rest.

The Enactment

“Part of [the challenge] is exegeting the passage as a collective whole,” Riepma says. “Some of us value excellence in language and grammar. Some value artistic flair. And then others care about the theological implications.”

Students come to camp prepared with their own creative response to the story of Naaman—whether a song, a skit, or even a news report. The story connects to each student differently, and everyone draws something unique from it.

Cameron Beidler wrote a song from the perspective of Naaman’s inner journey of despair to proclamation. “God is stronger than our unbelief,” was Beidler’s favorite line. “No matter how much we push back at God...He’s stronger than anything we can throw at him.”
By the end of the week, the story takes shape. The students are practicing to perform their enactment for the entire WTS community soon after the beginning of the fall semester.

The Impact

Ultimately, Hebrew Camp is about learning Hebrew. “Our teachers managed to teach us to love Hebrew— to love a language—which in turn has taught me to love scripture,” says Reynhout.

It is a strain to focus on Hebrew for that many hours, day after day—but ultimately, according to Pals, “it’s less daunting and more familiar now.” Hebrew students from past years are still using what they learned at camp in their lives and ministries.

Reynhout had entered seminary with a vision for ministry that did not involve being a pastor, but she left Hebrew Camp with her call transformed. “My imagination was sparked for the way things could be—the way we could learn together, how we could take these lessons into churches.” One year later, Reynhout is discerning a call to be a lead pastor.

“Our professors gave us each a blessing, laying hands on our heads and speaking words of truth over us,” remembers Rev. Audrey Edewaard, a 2015 participant. “The blessing I received— ‘May you go to the depths of your soul, which can be hidden by exuberance’—is framed in my office and serves as a daily reminder to have courage to stand in the tension of pain, confusion, and hopelessness with the people I serve and within my own person.”

Rev. Edewaard has also taught songs and enacted stories for high school students at North Holland Reformed Church.

In Rev. Jonathan Gabhart’s role as a pastor of worship arts, he writes songs for his church to sing. “Because of Hebrew studies at WTS, I translate the Psalms as a part of a songwriting method. It’s enjoyable and meaningful to burrow into the rhythm and sound of the Hebrew text.”

Scatterday-Holehan is pregnant with her first child and has been singing a specific Hebrew prayer to her growing baby: Barukh ‘attah Adonai ‘eloheinu, melekh ha’olam. Shehecheyanu, veqiyanu, vekigganu li’am hazer. “Blessed are you, Oh Lord our God, ruler of the universe who gives us life, who sustains us, and has brought us to this very moment.” (in Hebrew below)

She has also used Hebrew prayers and word studies as small group coordinator at Hope College Campus Ministries.

“Hebrew Camp affected my life and decisions, the way I view God and my calling, and my interaction with the Sabbath,” she shares. “Who thought 11 days speaking Hebrew would do that?”
The Gifts of Rome

Last year I was given a treasured gift: time off from teaching and administrative work in order to devote myself to research and writing. My main project was writing a book called *Temple and Table*, and my wife Lynn and I decided the best context for that work would be in Rome.

I contacted the Waldensian Theological Seminary in Rome (if you are an Italian Protestant, you are probably a Waldensian). The dean of the seminary, Fulvio Ferrario, opened the arms of his institution, offered an apartment we could rent, and kindly helped us navigate the mysteries of Italian bureaucracy to secure a visa for our time there.

What a rich context in which to research, write, and live!

**Snapshot 1: Typical Research Day**

My day would begin with a commute by foot of about 25 minutes. After breakfast, sometimes shared with the students at the Waldensian seminary, I’d walk across the Bernini Bridge of Angels with its view of St. Peter’s Cathedral, past the Pantheon and the Trevi Fountain to the “Greg”—the Pontifical Gregorian University. The Greg is a world-renowned center of learning with deep resources. I would often pop in my ear-buds and study Italian on the way, or simply take in the sights and sounds of Rome. Once I arrived, I would check my backpack into a locker, bring my books and computer with me, and find a desk alongside about 200 other people, mostly Roman Catholic men and women from around the world, and get to work.

When lunch time came, some days I would find Johannes, a kind, bearded, grey-robed Austrian monk in his 40s working on his Ph.D., who became my friend. We’d grab lunch at the café and talk about American or Italian politics, Roman Catholic youth ministry in Austria, what it is like to be a monk, the finer points of his work on the theology of Aquinas, or my own project.

Back to work, then home at 5—when Lynn and I would meet with our Italian tutor, Marta, or explore some new church, museum, or Roman ruin before dinner at 9pm. *When in Rome*…

**Snapshot 2: Churches Coming Together**

Every few weeks a group called “Churches Together in Rome” would meet. Pastors, priests, and lay leaders from the English-speaking churches of the city—spanning from Pentecostal to Methodist to Roman Catholic—created this group and regularly gather for fellowship and projects. They invited me to join them during the year. During our meetings, we read and talked our way through the ecumenical document, *From Conflict to Communion*, a...
commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, written jointly by Lutherans and Catholics. On some weekends, I worked side by side in an ecumenical garden with Russell, a Franciscan monk doing important work for the order in Rome, and Dana, an Anglican priest.

What a gift to be part of this group, talking with these brothers and sisters from so many different backgrounds, seeing in one another signs of hope of the healing of the deep wounds of division within Christianity …right there in the epicenter of the Roman Catholic Church.

Snapshot 3: Immersion

I often tell people that as you walk the streets of Rome it is as if 25 centuries of history are constantly whispering to you. It shapes your imagination. It shapes the conversations you have with people. Part of my writing project involves trying to understand more deeply how the early Christian church imagined what was happening as they celebrated the Eucharist together. Physical evidence of that is found in the catacombs surrounding Rome and in the beautiful mosaics that decorate some of the oldest surviving Christian church buildings in the world. Experiencing those places while doing my work was a deeply moving and formative experience.

Writing about the Eucharist while experiencing contemporary Roman culture was also formative. I felt the divisions within Christianity and ecumenical possibilities in a new way, watched from afar the growing divisions within the United States, saw firsthand the refugee crisis that affects Italy more than most countries, watched the papacy of Francis and the growing secularism of Europe unfold at the same time, tasted the beauty of a carefully prepared Roman meal, saw what Protestantism means in a place where it is a minority, and shared meals and conversations with refugees, monks, deans from English universities, ambassadors from Nigeria, ecumenical delegates, and artists in residence. Rome is a global crossroads and was an immensely fertile ground for contemplating what the central meanings of Eucharist have to say to us today.

Rome was a gift, a wonderful place in which to do my work. I have nearly completed my writing project, Temple and Table: The Jewish Roots of the Christian Eucharist (forthcoming from Eerdmans), and I have high hopes that it will be a helpful contribution to the church and academy. But Rome also worked on me. It broadened and deepened my understanding of Christianity and the place of Protestantism in it, of the Eucharist, and of this chaotic but lovely world that God created and continues to hold in his hands.

David Stubbs teaches ethics and theology at Western and is available to share more about Temple and Table in churches and other settings. In his book he identifies five central meanings of the Eucharist and draws bold lines of connection from the Jewish Temple to the contemporary church. He also offers a series for churches, “Walking in the Way: Christian Ethics for Everyday Christians.” Contact him at 616-392-8555, x124.
Record Enrollment includes Paradox

I’ve mentioned before in this space that seminary enrollments are rapidly changing. The macro trend, according to the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), is one of declining enrollments, especially in these areas:

- White
- Male
- In-residence
- Master of Divinity
- Affiliated with a mainline denomination

In other words, the shrinking demographic is the one that historically drove the enrollment of most North American seminaries. It’s almost predictable these days to see news of another seminary that is closing or merging into another institution.

In the midst of that, this fall WTS enjoyed its largest incoming class and has the largest headcount in its long history. 126 new students enrolled this year and our total enrollment is now at 337. (Our total enrollment has never been over 300 before.) But we aren’t throwing any parties to congratulate ourselves on these accomplishments. There is paradox in our numbers, and as we recognize our accomplishments we have places of concern.

We’re following the ATS trend of declining M.Div. in-residence enrollment. Our in-residence M.Div. enrollment peaked in 2010 and has declined every year since—yet our total headcount is up by almost 98 students during the same time period. In 2010 we did not offer a Master of Arts degree; today we have 43 students in this degree program. In 2010 we had 68 students in our distance learning M.Div. program; today there are 96 students seeking a distance learning M.Div.

Without question, however, the largest driver of our head count jump is the successful launch of our Hispanic Ministry Program. Since June, 55 new students have participated in WTS classes in Delaware and Los Angeles as part of our Graduate Certificate in Urban Pastoral Ministry program. We are working on launching a local GCUPM cohort soon.

The name of the game is flexibility, and WTS has been more nimble than many. For example, the structural changes to our facility that we are currently undergoing are not to add square footage but to accommodate the changing educational needs of both distance and in-residence students. We aren’t making our facility bigger, we’re making it better, in an effort to move ahead with grace into an uncertain future.

We aren’t sure how this is all going to shake out, so, to paraphrase the Pulitzer prize-winning poet Stanley Kunitz, we are not done with our changes. There aren’t a lot of certainties beyond this: theological schools unwilling to change are on an endangered species list.

Thanks for supporting us through times of upheaval and change.

Have you seen the latest Luxcast?

Season 3: Faith and Vocation

theluxcast.org

A podcast of Western Theological Seminary where faith and culture meet

Barbara Brown Taylor and Isaac Anderson on writing as an act of faith

Dwight Baker and Elizabeth Palmer on faith and the Christian publishing industry

James Vlisides and Eric Sarwar on connecting with Muslim neighbors in Pakistan using the Psalms

Isaac Wardell and David Bailey on faith and work

Sarah Arthur and Marijke Strong on literary fiction, faith, and the call to write

Josh Larsen and Eric Kuiper on the relationship of film and faith

THE COMMONS, FALL 2017

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When I was asked to speak on why I came here, at first I didn’t know how I would answer.

But then I began thinking about junior high and the first time I went into an environment where I felt different. A teacher from my inner-city elementary school saw academic promise in me and told me I needed to go to J.R. Masterman School (where Will Smith attended!). So, in 6th grade, I took two buses for an hour to get to school in downtown Philadelphia.

I soon realized that I was different there. The school was of mixed ethnicity, race, and color, so I did not really see a difference, but others did. I stood out because of my poverty, my tattered clothes. I came from an inner-city school where everyone had tattered clothes, so I never knew I looked poor visually. Here that made me different.

This was also the first time I had daily contact with white people (other than Marcia, Greg, and the Brady Bunch!). Robert Donohue was the first to befriend me. Our greatest similarity was our love for the Philadelphia Flyers, but we couldn’t have been more different. He was short and round with freckles, red hair, and braces. I was tall, gangly, and skinny as a rail. But we became fast friends.

Fast forward to early 2017.

I was wondering what I would do when I finished my dissertation, so I went to a job fair for African American Ph.D.s. As I walked in, I was happy to be around a group who looked and talked like me.

We soon started talking about our dissertations. I heard worthy topics like African Americans in the inner city, African American studies and psychology, etc.

Then it came around to me.

I said, “I’m writing on John Calvin’s understanding of testimony and the dynamics in his theology as a lawyer in the juridic context and as a theologian.”

Crickets.

Most people looked at me as if to say, “We don’t even understand what you’re doing. It has nothing to do with the African American community.”

Therefore, I had a group of people with whom I had commonality, and they were looking at me as different.

So I thought, I’m an African-American studying John Calvin—maybe the only one in the world!—I’m from North Philadelphia, and I have this story. Where can I find a place where the similarities are appreciated and the differences celebrated?

When I got the email about Western’s Faculty Fellow position, I wasn’t going to apply. I didn’t know of Western Theological Seminary and had never heard of Holland outside of Europe. But something woke me at two in the morning and said, “You need to apply.” So I did!

During my first Skype interview, I saw all smiling faces—Han-luen Kanzter-Komline, Todd Billings, David Komline, and Alvin Padilla. I was struck by how we began: we prayed. Then they asked me to describe my faith journey, how I came to God in Christ. No one in academia had ever inquired about the most important question of my life. The answer defines who I am as a person. We then talked about Calvin, pietism, and its influence on the Reformed tradition at WTS. The search committee was genuinely interested in my scholarship and me…and I started seeing similarities.

When I visited, an African-American woman met me at the airport in a Cadillac (you know how to treat folks!). Her husband is a WTS graduate. She said, “We need you in this community!” She told me she grew up in Holland and hoped I would stay. She said she would pray for me. (My first Hollander!)

The second person I met was Dr. Alvin Padilla. We went out for a meal, talked, and prayed. The next day I met with the full faculty—and we prayed.

My last meeting was with President Brown, and as we sat down in his office, we began with prayer. President Brown brought out the Institutes and we talked about John Calvin. We agreed that Calvin was a biblical theologian and not a systematic theologian and gave each other high fives when we realized we shared a minority opinion. Then I went to his marker-board table to to illustrate my point that seminaries needed to expand their missions in order to inject trained ministers into the influential institutions of this country, and we started marking all over it. Before I left—oh, you know what this man does—he prayed for me, and I don’t think I have ever heard a more sincere and fervent prayer just for me.

So when you ask me why I came here, I came here because I believe that this community is concerned about seeing the similarities. What is the similarity? That we are all one in Christ.

If I can be in a community that sees me for that very important similarity—the only one that actually matters—that’s where I want to be. That’s why I chose Western—better yet, that’s why we chose each other. Amen!

Want to learn more about Gordon Govens? Go to: westernsem.edu/faculty/gordon-a-govens/
Mark Poppen has been appointed director of the Doctor of Ministry program. After leading the Admissions team for 16 years and growing enrollment significantly, he will transition to senior admissions advisor, focusing his attention on working with individuals sorting out a call to ministry. As director of the D.Min. program, Mark will work with the dean and faculty to revamp the degree and create more options for groups of students to work in areas of ministry interest. Mark received his D.Min. degree from Western in 2008 and has extensive knowledge of the program.

In September, Jill English was appointed as Western’s new director of admissions. Jill has served as associate director of admissions since 2013 and originally came to Western 12 years ago as the department’s administrative assistant. She earned a Master of Arts degree from WTS in 2015 and has undergraduate education in marketing and finance. When this news was announced on Facebook, the post about Jill hit an all-time WTS record with 8,308 people reached, 368 likes, and 83 comments. Jill is loved by many students, past and present!

President Timothy Brown has appointed Jeff Munroe to the newly created position of executive vice president. He will work closely with the president and board of trustees on the strategic direction of the seminary, preside over operations, lead all departments that generate revenue, serve as chief of staff, work closely with V.P. of Finance Norm Donkersloot on the annual budget, and oversee opportunities for strategic partnerships and relationships. Jeff brings to this work years of faithful and effective leadership in Young Life, leadership in the local church, and a deep commitment to the mission and witness of Western Theological Seminary.

On November 17, former Board of Trustees member Doug Honholt will complete 16 months as Western’s interim director of development. As he re-enters retirement, Andy Bast will step up to take the reins of the department. Andy joined WTS in 2013 as associate director of development and has fostered relationships with supporters and churches in West Michigan, the East Coast, and Florida. He has helped to launch new donor outreach events and most recently has been developing mutually beneficial strategic partnerships with organizations.

Do you believe that God wants you to be financially prosperous (Joshua 1:8)? Do you think that Christians must “forgive and forget” (Jeremiah 31:34)?

Robert Van Voorst announces the launch of Commonly Misunderstood Verses of the Bible: What They Really Mean. This book covers 24 well-known verses in the Bible, explaining how they are misunderstood, what their meaning is, and what this meaning says to us today. Each chapter has questions for reflection and discussion.

At the end of 2017, Steve VanderMolen will retire as director of Journey, the continuing education arm of WTS. Steve began working at Western in 2012 with time shared between the Advancement department and Ridder Church Renewal. In 2014 he became the director of Journey. Steve plans to spend his retirement putting his years of experience as a pastor and leader to good use for the church.

Two new members have joined the WTS Board of Trustees:

- Dr. Percy V. Gilbert of Poughquag, NY is Vice President of Systems Product Engineering and Memory Development for IBM. He is involved in campus ministries, teaches Sunday School, and is part of the Dominican Republic Mission Outreach.
- Dr. Fred L. Johnson, Ill ’16 is Associate Professor of History at Hope College. He is involved in a variety of community organizations having to do with diversity, disability, professional development, lifelong learning, and theater.

Faculty Speaking at Churches:

Timothy Brown (all preaching engagements):
- November 12 – Fifth Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI
- November 19 – Tulare Community Church, Tulare, CA
- December 3 – First Reformed Church, South Holland, IL
- December 12 – Royal Park Place Retirement Ctr, Zeeland, MI

Ben Conner:
- November 19 – Preaching and Adult Ed., Standale Reformed Church, Standale, MI

Kristen Johnson: (all adult education):
- November 26 – Third Reformed Church, Holland, MI
- December 10 – “Jesus and Justice: Exploring our Calling from Genesis to Revelation,” Second Christian Reformed Church, Grand Haven, MI

Robert Van Voorst (all adult education):
- December 10 – “Angels in the Bible,” Third Reformed Church, Holland, MI
- February 18 & 25, March 5 & 11 – “Commonly Misunderstood Verses of the Bible: What They Really Mean,” Central Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI
- March 18 & 25 – “Commonly Misunderstood Verses of the Bible: What They Really Mean,” Ferrysburg Community Church, Ferrysburg, MI

Travis West:
- January 28 – “Psalm 117 and the End of ‘Us and Them’ ” Adult Ed., Hope Church, Holland, MI
- February 4 – Preaching, Sunrise Ministries, Hudsonville, MI

Suzanne McDonald (all adult education):
- February 11 & 18 – “Dealing Faithfully with Dementia,” Hope Church, Holland, MI
- February 25 & March 11 – Creation Care series, Woodlawn Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI
- March 18 & 25 – “Dealing Faithfully with Dementia,” First Reformed Church, Grandville, MI
- April 22 – “Re-presenting Election,” Second Christian Reformed Church, Grand Haven, MI
Professor of Old Testament Carol Bechtel and her husband, Thomas Mullens, learned about Europe’s immigration crisis first-hand during a two-week trip to Italy this past August. The study tour was sponsored by the American Waldensian Society and Mediterranean Hope.

Carol and Tom spent several days on the island of Lampedusa (between Sicily and Tunisia), speaking with people involved in refugee work there. They also visited Casa della Cultura in Scicli, Sicily—a mission of the Waldensian/Methodist church which seeks to support unaccompanied minors and women with infants.

While in Italy, Dr. Bechtel represented the Reformed Church in America as an ecumenical delegate to the Waldensian/Methodist Synod in Torre Pellice on August 20-23. Some highlights of the Synod included the ordinations of several new pastors and discussions of the church’s pioneering work with immigrants through Being Church Together and Humanitarian Corridors.

Carol first visited the Waldensian church in 2008 when she was president of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. Not long after that she joined the Board of the American Waldensian Society out of her respect for who the Waldensians are as Christians and the ways they have followed Christ in mission for so long.

“There is much to be learned from the Waldensians,” says Dr. Bechtel, “and I am eager to find ways for Reformed Christians to join hands across the ocean in witness, work, and friendship.”

During the 7th annual Leonard F. Stoutemire Lecture in Multicultural Ministry, Rev. Dr. Soong-Chan Rah of North Park Theological Seminary and author of Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times, spoke about the American church’s need for lament in order to move forward from a history of racial injustice.

Dr. Rah suggested that American Christianity’s narrative of triumphalism and exceptionalism has cultivated subtle forms of white supremacy that prevent it from addressing the suffering of minorities, immigrants, and refugees.

He connected these issues to the absence of lament: “The unwillingness to confess brokenness before God and the desire to jump so quickly to triumph and victory.”

Dr. Rah told the story of Rev. Tom Skinner, a prominent African American evangelist in the 1960s whose testimony included a radical conversion from a gang-leader in Harlem to follower of Jesus. Rev. Skinner was often invited to share his story at historically white evangelical universities like Wheaton and Moody. However, when Mr. Skinner began broaching the topic of racial injustice in America, he was disinvited from speaking.

Dr. Rah called this view of minorities in American society the “pet or threat” view. While at first Mr. Skinner’s testimony had lined up with the values of triumphalism and people were happy to listen, his calls for justice made people uncomfortable and turned him into a threat. Dr. Rah connected this concept to what is happening to African American athletes in America being degraded for protesting racial injustice.

The full lecture is available at: www.westernsem.edu/2017-stoutemire-lecture

The Leonard F. Stoutemire Lectures in Multicultural Ministry are named in honor of the late Reverend Leonard Foster Stoutemire, pioneer African American clergyman and church planter to Holland, Michigan. Although originally he wanted to enlist into missionary service in Africa, in 1944 Stoutemire migrated to Holland, MI to plant the city’s first intentionally multi-racial congregation, the All Nations Full Gospel Church of Holland.

The lectures equip seminarians, faculty, staff, alumn/ae, and local congregations with resources for increased intercultural competence for greater effectiveness in Christian ministry.
On to glory...

John “Jack” Buteyn, Jr. ’44
b. 7/18/1944 Harvey, IL
d. 7/20/2017 Dallas, TX
Hope ’66; WTS ’70
(1970-75) Immanuel Corn, Lansing, MI
(1975-78) Abbe, Clymer, NY
(1978-2009) Plano, TX (founding pas)
Minister of Protestant Church of Oman

Harold Englund ’50
b. 12/1/1923 Eureka, CA
d. 6/2/2017, Santa Barbara, CA
UCA’47; WTS ’50, Hope ’60 (DD)
(1950-58) Second, Zeeland, MI
(1958-60) Midland, MI
(1960-62) acting president, WTS
Dismissed to Presbyterian Church 1962

Edward Viening ’56
b. 4/25/1930 Holland, MI
d. 5/13/2017 Jenison, MI
Hope ’53; WTS ’56
(1953-63) Dunningville, MI
Career at Zondervan Publishing

William Bouwer ’59
b. 5/27/1934 Mohawk, NY
d. 2/25/2017 Jackson, MI
Hope ’62; WTS ’65, Dubleuqu’71 (STM)
(1965-69) Lakeiel, Kalamazoo, MI
(1969-77) West Side, Cicero, IL
(1973-89) First, Oostburg, WI
(1989-96) First, Lansing, MI
(1966-99) stated clerk, PSMid-Am

Carl Benes ’65
b. 5/11/1940 Mohawk, NY
d. 2/25/2017 Jackson, MI
Hope ’62; WTS ’65, Dubleuqu’71 (STM)
(1965-69) Ghent & New Concord, NY
(1969-73) ex dir, Counc Ch, Jackson, MI
(1973-78) hospital chaplain, Jackson, MI
(1979-2007) First Congregational Church, Jackson, MI

Jack Cooper ’66
b. 12/10/1929 Grand Rapids, MI
d. 2/23/2017 Grand Rapids, MI
Hope ’63; WTS ’66
(1966-69) First, Amsterdam, NY
(1969-83) Glenmont Community, Glenmont, NY
(1988-94) Fifth, Grand Rapids, MI

Abraham Nkhata ’07 (THM)
b. 9/22/1971 Zambia
d. 9/9/2017 Lusaka, Zambia
Justo Mwale Theological College ’02;
Evangelical Univ ’05; WTS ’07 (M)
Minister, John Knox Presbyterian Church,
Luanshya, Zambia
Interim Minister, St. Peter’s Presbyterian Church,
Ndola, Zambia
Moderator of the Copperbelt Presbyterian

On May 24 I. John Hesselinke ’53 gave the morning lecture on Luther and the Reformation for the Reformed Theological Society in Seoul, Korea. He also participated in a panel on the contemporary significance of the Reformation at the historic Presbyterian Church in Seoul. He then preached on Sunday and led chapel at Anyang University.

Charles Johnson ’57 lives in Williamsport, PA with Donna, his wife of 64 years. Since there is no Reformed church in the area, they attend First United Methodist, where they sing in the choir, lead Bible studies, and participate in the pulpit on Sundays as called upon. Charles also does a considerable amount of pulpit supply for Presbyterian churches in the area.

SoundOffSignal, the company of George Boerigter ’66, is the lead supporter of the new Boerigter Institute at Hope College, which will transform the college’s approach to career preparation. SoundOffSignal has had 25 consecutive years of growth. It now has 250+ associates, and its products are on police vehicles in nearly 30 countries and in every state and major city in the U.S. and Canada.

Lyle Rozeboom ’69 and his wife, Carol, are retired in Rochester, MN. Their four children are scattered from coast to coast, and they have four “fantastic” grandchildren. Lyle is an avid gardener and reports that he is blessed to have his mother alive at 94.

While serving as a parish minister, Allan Janssen ’73 earned his Ph.D. at Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam. In 2012 he was installed as a General Synod Professor. He currently serves as an affiliate associate professor of theological studies at New Brunswick Theological Seminary and has recently published Confessing the Faith Today: A Fresh Look at the Belgic Confession.

Don DeGlopper ’74 retired in 2013 after 39 years in ministry. This year he and Cindy are celebrating 40 years of marriage and are loving retirement as they enjoy their three grown children and one grandson.

Robert Vrooman ’79 retired in March 2017 after serving Theresa Presbyterian Church in Theresa, NY for 20 years.

Afram Blaak ’81 has retired from “active” ministry but is serving on contract with Bethel Reformed in Brantford, Ontario, Canada as they seek someone to become their installed pastor.

James Dykstra ’81 is serving The River Church in Allegan, MI, which is a church restart of the Christian Reformed Church.

David Landegent ’82 has just published an ebook, Colossians: A Commentary. It explores the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Colossians phrase-by-phrase, even examining Greek words and other first century writings, yet it is written in a style that can be understood by any interested person. Landegent has served as pastor in Primghar, IA, Fulton, IL, and Holland, MI and is currently serving in Volga, SD.

Wendell Lee Brennanman ’84 and his wife, Deb, are members of SOWERS (Servants On Wheels Ever Ready), a 30 year organization of mostly retirees who serve for three weeks at a time on SOWER projects throughout the U.S. All members have campers or RVs and travel to project sites to volunteer doing whatever is needed. Wendell and Deb also worked last winter in Yuma, AZ with CASA de la Esperanza (Homes of Hope), building several homes in San Luis, Mexico.

After serving in the RCA for many years, Stephen Van Dop ’85 affiliated with the Association of Vineyard Churches USA in 2000. He is in his 18th year with the senior pastoral staff for Vineyard Columbus in Ohio. He is responsible for church planting and men’s ministry, as well as supervising campus ministers at five campuses. He leads the Staff Life Team (serving 230 employees) and coordinates training for assistant pastors. He teaches a Bible class at his church, preaches regularly, and teaches evangelism and mission courses for the Vineyard Institute and for Ashland Theological Seminary. He is also involved in leadership development and church planting in Zambia, South Africa, and Ghana.

Since graduating, Barbara Swartzel ’89 (prev. VanEssendelft) has served Presbyterian churches in Michigan (White Pigeon, Saginaw, Flint, Troy, and Macomb) as well as Zion United Church of Christ in Mt. Clemens, MI.

After serving as the dean of religion for Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo, Japan, Satou Itoh ’90 (MRE) is on sabbatical at Duke Divinity School this academic year doing research.

Gregory Heille ’91 (DMin)
(1991-94) VanEssendelft Baptist Seminary
(1994-95) Grace Covenant Church, Scotia, NY.
(1995-97) joining the staff of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Bay City, MI as the director of Christian education and youth.

Gretchen Schoon Tanis ’02 is the pastor of an English language congregation in Hannover, Germany. She also teaches youth ministry in an adjunct position at NLA University College in Bergen, Norway.

Apollos Handan ’02 (THM) ’08 (DMin)
is in Nigeria serving as president of Southern Kaduna Baptist Conference, where he provides leadership and spiritual direction to 265 pastors in 398 Baptist churches. He is also the chairman of Northern Baptist Leaders Forum, coordinating Baptist work in the 19 states of Northern Nigeria.

On June 25, Stacey Midge ’03 was installed as pastor of Mount Auburn Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, OH.

Vishal Grace Varghese ’03 teaches part time at the School of Social Work, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI. She recently completed a counseling certificate with ALLCEUs to work with families affected by pornography.

Jeff Allen ’05 announces his upcoming book: Small Church on a BIG Mission: Cultivating Missional Disciple-Shippers in Smaller Churches. (pre-release edition available in Kindle on Amazon). His hope is that it will be helpful to pastors along the journey.

Michael Weaver ’09 completed four units of CPE and is serving as a hospital chaplain for both Spectrum Health of Grand Rapids, MI and for Hospice of Michigan (Holland to Muskegon).

On August 28, Megan Hodgin ’10 began serving as the senior pastor of First Reformed Church of Scotia, Scotia, NY.

Ralph Beidler ’11 is nearing his fifth anniversary with Spring Valley Reformed Church, which is a rural family church that has been steadily growing out of the simplicity of their mission: “Love God and Love People.” Ralph gets to play drums with the worship team on occasion and thoroughly


AlumLine
enjoys that. He and his wife, Julie, recently celebrated 33 years of marriage and are enjoying time with their kids and grandkids. They have two sons who are worship directors—Justin at Cultivate Community in Hamilton, MI, and Cameron at Hager Park Reformed in Jenison, MI. Cameron is also studying at WTS to earn his M.Div.

Since graduating, Tammi VanDrunen ’11 and her husband, Philip, have had two children: Isaac William (3/2/13) and Charlotte Mae (12/26/15).

Kay Vinci ’11 is living in Southern California working as the administrative coordinator in the Department of Communication Studies at Biola University.

In July, Annabell Lalla-Ramkela-wan ’12 (ThM) was elected to the Executive Committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), which groups more than 225 churches in over 110 countries. Anna has been the moderator of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad and Tobago since 2015.

Chad Farrand ’14 accepted a call as the associate pastor at South Harbor Church in Byron Center, MI and began serving in September. Previously he was the pastor of discipleship at Fifth Reformed in Grand Rapids.

Sophie Ollier ’14 (ThM) is the pastor in Le Mars and La Sarthe in France, one year after earning another Master of Theology in Paris. She says that the degree she earned at WTS has been very helpful to her ministry.

This past April, Kevin Sanders ’14 began working as the full time pastor of family and community life at Hope Reformed in Kalamazoo, MI, which is an expansion of his former role as part-time youth pastor.

After completing her CPE residency, Paige Douglas ’16 accepted a job at ThedaCare Hospitals in Appleton, WI as a chaplain with their Pastoral Care department.

Congratulations to Erin Zoutendam ’17 (ThM) for winning The Louise and Richard Goodwin Writing Prize for Excellence in Theological Writing, which recognizes upcoming scholars in the theological field. From exceptional entries from 40 schools, the board of Theological Horizons awarded the $2,500 prize to Erin for her essay, “The Body, the Heart, and Desire: Catherine of Siena’s Theology of Tears.” She developed and revised the essay with WTS faculty during her year at Western. Erin is currently at Duke University pursuing her Ph.D.
I am writing the day after our board of trustees were on campus for their fall meeting, and being with them has helped me see our construction project through fresh eyes.

I see our project incrementally; they saw it dramatically.

Semelink Hall is gone, replaced for the moment by a long, deep hole, containing only the beginnings of a foundation. There is a large open space on the south side of our building where classroom 101 and several offices stood. If you are an alumnus of a certain vintage, you’ll remember 101 as the place where most of your classes were held. Now it is becoming part of a grand entryway.

My colleague Tom Boogaart often says, “Form forms,” and what he means is that the space we inhabit shapes our lives. We’re improving the space we inhabit in order to better form our students for ministry. We are taking what we have and making it better, which is really what the Christian concept of stewardship is all about.

This is a year dedicated to renovation and new construction, but in a larger sense every year at Western Theological Seminary is dedicated to renovation and new construction. We follow the one who proclaimed, “Behold, I make all things new.” As you read the stories and look at the pictures in this issue of The Commons, you’ll see evidence of God’s good work of renovation and construction all around.

Enjoy!