In February, I informed the Board of Trustees that after much prayer and deliberation, Nancy and I have decided that my time as president is coming to an end. This coming school year of 2018-19 will be my last year as president.

There are many things that I want to get done. This won’t be a victory lap! This will be a very intentionally focused period.

First, I want to bring to completion our new building, fully funding the project. When we asked the Board for permission to start this project, I said to them, “I promise I will stay as president until that building is up, the flags are flying, and every debt is paid.” I’m happy to say we are really close.

I want to continue to support the work of Dean Alvin Padilla and the rest of the faculty as they make enormous strides in our Hispanic Ministries Program. Every population census you can possibly read will tell you that by 2050, the largest cross-section of our population will be Hispanic. It was such a gift to us when Alvin Padilla agreed to come and be our academic dean, and I’m so grateful for that.

I now have permission to say that Eddy Alemán has been nominated to be the new General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America. Eddy is Latino, a graduate of WTS, and also a member of our Board of Trustees. What great energy and synergy we have to do the work that is coming!

I also want to both bless and help the faculty as we move toward important hires over the next year. Several faculty members have left or will be leaving, and we need new people to join our team. I am eager to keep this stunning record of great young scholars who are Reformed, evangelical and ecumenical.

I will work very hard in the next year continuing to make this a place that helps men and women flourish in ministry. All the hard-fought efforts over the years that have opened the doors to women in ministry have recently met with resistance. We’re not going to allow that. We’re going to keep working hard until we enter in to that vision of the prophet Joel: *On that day I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.*

Last but not least, I want to ensure in the midst of our ever-expanding diversity that we have a clearly gracious, generously articulated Reformed Identity. I’m going to ask the Board of Trustees to call forth a task force to help us articulate what we mean when we say Reformed identity, so we can be expansive and welcoming but also clear about who we are and what we intend to do. This is no time to be ashamed of our Reformed identity, but to embrace it and move into the future.

I intend in the name of Jesus to give my best to all of these things, and I will, I promise you, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord our labor is not in vain. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.
The word cohort can mean both a group of people banded together or each individual in that group. What could be better than having supportive companions cheering you on in an educational journey you are taking together?

As Western Theological Seminary seeks ways to reach more men and women with quality theological education, we are implementing cohort models of learning in the Doctor of Ministry and Hispanic Ministry Programs.

These programs are the result of work initiated by Academic Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs Alvin Padilla. Dr. Padilla is using the cohort approach to reach students who want theological training but haven’t had access to it in the past. This is also the first time WTS is educating students who speak little or no English.

Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.)

This year, Dr. Padilla and his long-time friend, Dr. Mário da Silva, made a 5-year dream come true. WTS has partnered with Dr. da Silva’s school, Filadelfia University (or UniFil) in Londrina, Brazil, to provide a Doctor of Ministry program for a group of 19 students.

Dr. da Silva and Dr. Padilla were colleagues at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and had been working for years on a way to get doctoral level theological education to Brazil. When Dr. Padilla moved to Western, the plans finally took shape.

“We have a partnership in the real sense of the word,” says Dr. da Silva. “I’m very happy to find this atmosphere of openness at Western.”

The UniFil group uses a new model of cohort-based learning for their D.Min. program. The 3-year cohort is organized around a single theme and facilitated by Dr. da Silva. Plans are being made for WTS faculty members to teach this cohort in future sessions.

Students identify a barrier in their ministry and read broadly in the area of the theme of their cohort. The UniFil cohort is studying spiritual formation and church planting. Students will research their particular barrier using the facilities at Filadelfia University and address the barrier within the context of spiritual formation and church planting.

The cohort is made up of key leaders in the country of Brazil, most of them pastors of churches with 1,000+ members. One student leads a church of 30,000.

Among the group there are professors at the university, scholars with Ph.D.s, and even a student who is the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Angola (an African nation that is a former Portuguese colony, like Brazil). Some students are Reformed, others are Pentecostal, and some are non-denominational.

As cohort members discuss the barriers within their own ministries, they learn from each other and serve as “research assistants” when they come across something helpful for a fellow student. The model works well cross-culturally where a strong group dynamic is valued, as in Brazil.

When Doctor of Ministry Director Mark Poppen visited the cohort in Brazil last November, he was greeted by a familiar face—Master of Theology graduate Enio Pinto ’04. Enio acted as Mark’s translator for the week and shared with the group what it was like to be a student at WTS.
Despite these students not being geographically linked to WTS, they feel a strong bond and pride in being part of the Western community.

In 2019 the UniFil cohort will travel to Holland for an on-campus intensive at WTS.

**Graduate Certificate in Urban Pastoral Ministry (GCUPM)**

The Graduate Certificate in Urban Pastoral Ministry launched three cohorts this year under the leadership of Hispanic Ministries Program Director Joseph Ocasio. The program now has its highest enrollment—71 students.

The first cohort began in Delaware in June of 2017 and is made up of students from the Church of God in Prophecy. The second cohort launched last fall in Southern California and consists of RCA students. The third cohort, which met in Holland, MI for the first time in January, is comprised of students from five local churches, representing RCA, Church of God, and Wesleyan denominations.

What these groups have in common is a desire for bilingual theological education. Some students are English-dominant and others are Spanish-dominant, so courses are designed in both languages. The students may choose to read and submit assignments in Spanish or English.

“As part of the courses, I’d like them to work on their non-dominant language,” says Ocasio. “Hispanic pastors need to be proficient in both languages. That is our goal.”

Students participate in a distance-learning format, meeting face-to-face a few times a year.

They take one class per semester, three semesters per year. The program consists of seven general courses and one elective reflecting the interests of the cohort.

“The benefit of a cohort is that each group starts and finishes together,” Ocasio explains. “It creates community and builds relationships. That in turn helps improve peer learning, and that support structure will help them persist.”

Some students are challenged by the technology and distance learning format, and it is not easy for them to find time to learn in the midst of busy schedules. However, the Delaware cohort has been through two classes already, and students are helping and encouraging each other to continue.

“I am hearing incredible stories of how these classes are impacting their ministries and theological understanding,” Ocasio shares. “These students have been growing, and they’re very thankful.”

Many students who are Spanish-dominant have had limited opportunities to study theology in the past. One such student in the Holland cohort shared this:

> My family and I arrived in Holland seven months ago at The House of My Father church, led by Pastor José Durán and Pastor Gonzalo Venegas. The first weeks [in Holland], my husband and I drove by Western Theological Seminary and I said out loud: “Lord, let us study there, I would like to study there.” To which my husband corresponded with “Yes, Lord.”

> In my heart I knew I would continue my studies here in the United States, but I confess that I never thought it would be so soon. My first goal was and is to master the language, and only then, I thought it would be possible to opt for these studies.

> So, you can imagine my surprise and excitement when one morning my husband gave me the news that he had made the request to study at Western and we were accepted. This experience is an opportunity from God for my life.

The faculty and staff of Western Theological Seminary are pleased with the progress of our new cohort-based education model. We are honored to provide these opportunities for men and women who otherwise would not have had access to quality theological education. We look forward to continued growth as students encourage each other onward as cohorts in learning.

*by Megan Rice*
Healed and Healing

Senior M.Div. student Ruth Estell may be what’s called an “old soul,” but don’t be fooled by her mild manner.

Born to RCA missionary parents and raised in Taiwan, Ruth came to the States to earn her undergrad and graduate degrees from Wheaton College, and then returned to China to teach English.

After ten years, she heard about an opportunity to work and live in a home for children and adults with disabilities in Taiwan. She jumped at the chance to do more ministry and Bible teaching.

In Taiwan, Ruth volunteered to teach an English Bible study in a men’s maximum security prison—with no guards in the room.

“At first I wasn’t so sure,” she admits, “but I ended up loving it. The men were very respectful and appreciated that I was willing to come there.”

She saw God at work, even witnessing some men get baptized and grow in their faith.

Ruth planned to take over for the director of the group home in Taiwan, but after a year and a half, the woman grew inexplicably hostile toward her.

Ruth started to believe the negative things her teammate was saying about her, and for the first time in her life, she doubted if God really loved her. She found herself in a downward spiral emotionally, spiritually, and physically. After praying about what to do, she knew she had to leave the mission field.

She returned to the U.S. to live with her mother, who had retired to Zeeland, MI. Their family had spent many summers on furlough in the RCA mission houses in Holland, so Ruth knew a lot of people in the West Michigan area.

“When I came back, I thought I was done serving God forever,” Ruth admits. “I would have been content to do whatever just to pay the bills.”

However, many people who knew her story were praying for her, and many reached out with love and support. Some shared their own stories of being hurt by brothers and sisters in the church.

A lot of healing took place, and Ruth realized that she still had a deep desire to serve God in her work. As she began to feel a call to chaplaincy, she knew she would need a Master of Divinity, and that led her to Western Theological Seminary.

Two and a half years later, Ruth is on track to graduate this May. She hopes to work as a chaplain in a retirement home or hospital.

“I am a third culture kid,” she says, “and Chinese culture respects the elderly, so perhaps that infiltrated my heart. I love the elderly.”

Two of Ruth’s internships have been at retirement homes, but she also completed a year of church ministry and one summer term of Clinical Pastoral Education at Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services, where she worked with children and adolescents and at a women’s addiction recovery residential house.
“My abilities and confidence have grown,” she shares. “Children and adolescents are very honest. I have dealt with a lot of anger but also some very honest questions. You don’t always have the answers, but you can be there and listen to them.”

This year, Ruth is interning at Holland Hospital, where God is growing a love for the stranger in her. Many times she can only have one or two conversations with patients before they leave the hospital.

Ruth is part of a group of musicians that WTS professor Dr. Carol Bechtel is teaching to play the harp. At the hospital, Ruth plays the harp therapeutically—a ministry that can touch some patients and families in a special way.

“One lady I visited was very formal when I went in as the chaplain. I could tell she highly respected the clergy,” recalls Ruth. “She thanked me for coming and asked me to pray but didn’t have much to say. Later I came in just to play the harp, and soon she started sharing about her diagnosis, how she was feeling, her family…

More pastoral care was done when I wasn’t there as the ‘official’ chaplain.”

Other times, patients are unresponsive or restless, and the harp music puts a calm over the room and the family. Sometimes the music frees people to have a good cry.

“I can’t answer ‘Why would God let this happen?’ or ‘Why don’t I feel God’s presence?’ but I can acknowledge feelings and encourage people to reach out to God,” Ruth says. “Sometimes I run out of words, and then the music lets them rest in that.”

If people come from a Christian background, hymns remind them of times God spoke into their lives. Recently a dying patient began singing along to the hymns Ruth was playing on her harp, creating a beautiful moment that touched the family deeply. Later they asked her to play at his funeral.

“Being able to play the harp for people is a “tool in my tool box,” Ruth says. “It’s just another way to care for people.”

Ruth is also grateful for Dr. Suzanne McDonald’s classes on “Aging and Dementia” and eschatology. These classes have helped her to establish a theological foundation and to understand how to care for people at the end of life.

“What I like about Western is that it’s not all about heady, intellectual knowledge,” she shares. “The professors realize they’re preparing us for serving actual people. It has kept me humble.”

Thinking ahead to graduation, Ruth says, “I think chaplaincy will be a good fit for the passions and gifts God has given me. Retirement home, hospital, hospice… I’m open to wherever God might lead.”

by Megan Rice
In 2015, Western began to investigate how other schools were engaging their alumni. We studied online resources and talked to alumni relations staff at several colleges and seminaries. We noted that schools were dedicating increasing amounts of resources to maintaining and strengthening relationships with their graduates. At that time, we had no regular communication exclusively devoted to our alumni. Also, the role of our long time Alumni Council had diminished to being primarily responsible for nominations for our Distinguished Alum Award.

In 2016, we simultaneously disbanded the Alumni Council and launched the Alumni Advisory Board. In 2017 we began WTS Alumni News, a 3x per year email blast.

The purpose of the new Alumni Advisory Board is threefold:

1. We seek their advice on how we can better train students to lead the church. As the world changes, we want to glean from their learnings in the field. We will keep them informed of progress at the seminary.

2. We hope to strengthen our relationships with our current alumni and provide ongoing opportunities for learning and engagement with the seminary.

3. We seek to be partners in advocacy. Western is funded by individuals who have been positively impacted by their pastor or their church. When a pastor speaks highly of Western, it gives us the opportunity to begin relationships with people who will support Western for many years to come.

The advisory board meets three times a year—twice online and once on campus. Our on-campus gathering last November included meetings with the Formation for Ministry, Admissions, and Advancement teams. Members attended chapel and community time, had lunch with President Tim Brown, and toured the construction site. They also spent time with faculty members to share how their own seminary experience prepared them for ministry and ways in which it did not.

The Alumni Advisory Board is integral in helping us shape the future of relationships with the 1,700+ graduates of Western. This year we will add more diverse voices to the table, giving us an even better picture of how we can move forward in forging connections.

WTS Alumni News connects our graduates with what is happening at the seminary. It includes links to videos and events, gives program updates, announces new faculty publications, shares job opportunities, and gives an easy way to submit news and address changes. Not on our list? Send your contact info to advancement@westernsem.edu.

It is our hope that these two initiatives will renew our connections with alumni and give us a vehicle for feedback to improve the work we do in service to the church.

Sign up for WTS Alumni News!
email: advancement@westernsem.edu
News

For the last twelve years, Fritz Kruthof ’64 has been the calling pastor for Bethany Reformed in Kalamazoo, MI and has served as an RCA retiree chaplain calling on 75 retired pastors or spouses in Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, Holland and the greater Detroit area. He also still does a fair amount of preaching.

After graduating from WTS, Andrea Baare ’88 (ThM) earned an MA in Intercultural Studies from Fuller Theological Seminary and a DMin from Asbury Theological Seminary. As a theologian and business professional living in Bonn, Germany, she focuses on building bridges between the church and the workplace. Deutsche Telekom, one of Europe’s largest Information and Communications Technology (ICT) providers, has several employee networks. Andrea co-coordinates Christians@Telekom while working in research and education. She guides colleagues in integrating their faith meaningfully in the workplace. Christians@Telekom networks with the German Christian Police Force and other faith@work groups such as military chaplains and Christian businesspeople. Andrea attends the American Protestant Church, an international church in Bonn, works with the local Evangelical Methodists and Anglican Church, and represents her church in the Working Committee of Christian Churches.

Tinyiko Sam Maluleke ’89 (ThM), a distinguished South African theologian who teaches at the University of Pretoria, is writing a book on Nelson Mandela and South African theologian who teaches at the University of Pretoria, is writing a book on Nelson Mandela.

Kayla Fik ’14 is working at the seminary January-September as library services assistant. The Beardslee Library staff is preparing for a system migration in July 2018, as well as the move to the new building in late summer 2018. Kayla’s experience working in the library during her years as a student has allowed her to hit the ground running and be of great help.

On January 1, Amy McCabe ’14 joined Center Grove Church of Greenwood, IN as the pastor of discipleship. She was installed on January 14 and will be working alongside another WTS grad, lead pastor Art DeBruyn ’06. Amy also continues her work with VisioPeace (professional training and coaching), which she co-founded.

David Penning ’15 and M.Div. student Elisha Penning announce the birth of Asher Johnathan on January 22, 2018. He was 9 lbs 6 oz and measured 20 ¾ inches.

Brad and Emily Holehan ’16 announce the birth of Hannah Shalom on January 7, 2018, weighing 7 lbs 15 oz and measuring 21 inches. “She’s wonderful; we are absolutely in love.”

After a year of service as the worship and discipleship pastor at Graafschap Christian Reformed Church in Holland, MI, Noah McLaren ’16 was ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Reformed Church in America on January 14, 2018.

On January 28, Julie Myers ’17 was ordained at The Church of Benjamin’s Hope, Holland, MI. WTS Professor Suzanne McDonald participated in the ceremony. Julie is the special needs coordinator at Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, MI.

Last November Chelsea Reynhout ’17 moved to Newaygo, MI to become the pastor of Family of God Community Church. She was ordained on February 25 at Zion Reformed Church in Grandville, MI.

Using the tag line “Baking a Difference,” Brion Brooks ’07 oversaw the opening last year of The Village Bakery, a non-profit bakery giving men and women with developmental disabilities work at competitive wages in the town of Oregon, IL. The bakery also provides more than a dozen internships for special education students. Brion is the executive director of the Village of Progress, Inc., which provides social and work opportunities to adults with developmental disabilities in Ogle County, IL.

Alumni/ae Day: May 7, 2018

Contact: Tamara Buikema at 616-392-8555, x109 or tamara@westernsem.edu

noon Luncheons for 40th, 50th & 60th reunions (Classes of ’58, ’68 and ’78) Luncheons are $10/person. An invitation packet will arrive in April.

1:30pm Presentation by Commencement Speaker Dr. John Swinton, Centre for Spirituality, Health and Disability at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland

5:00pm Alumni/ae Banquet in the Western Theological Seminary Commons honoring Distinguished Alum David Bast ’76. Dinner is $20/person.

7:30pm Class of 2018 Commencement held in Dimnent Chapel, Hope College No tickets are needed to attend; doors open at 6:45pm. See the Friends of the Friendship House “graduate” too!

On to glory...

Gerard DeLoof ’52
b. 12/6/1921 Kalamazoo, MI
d. 9/19/2017 Sioux Falls, SD
Hope ’49; WTS ’52
(1952-56) Casnovia, MI
(1956-61) Bethany, St. Petersburg, FL
(1961-68) Southbridge, Kalamazoo, MI
(1968-79) Chancellor, SD
(1979-86) Bethel, Ellsworth, MN
(1988-93) Board of Pensions
(1992-99) First, Monroe, SD

Julius Brandt ’57
b. 6/30/1922 Holland, MI
d. 8/4/2017 Lynden, WA
Hope ’54, WTS ’57
(1957-61) Immanuel, Belmont, IA
(1961-77) Faith, Lynden, WA
(1977-87) missionary, Arabia
(served as pastor of The National Evangelical Church of Kuwait)

John Brouwer ’62
b. 9/7/1934 Inwood, IA
d. 4/3/2017 St. Paul, MN
Hope ’59, WTS ’62
(1962-69) Logan, Dell Rapids, SD
(1969-77) Grace, Corsica, SD
(1977-87) First, Randolph, WI
1987 dist. United Methodist Church (served churches in Wisconsin)

Franklin Spooolstra ’66
b. 8/2/1932 Chicago, IL
d. 8/21/2017 Rockford, MI
Hope ’63; WTS ’66, Governors SU ’76 (MA), USarasota ’77 (EdD)
(1966-69) First, Three Oaks, MI
(1969-73) Calvin, Cutlerville, MI
(1977-81) Mt. Greenwood, Chicago, IL
(1977-81) Riverside Park, Hammond, IN
(1981-86) sp.min., psychology practice
(1989-91) prog.dir., Salvation Army
(1989-90 and 92-98) St. Stephens ELCA, Rockford, MI
(1990-92) Hope Comm., Rockford, MI
(1991-94) cl.dir., Tri County Hospital, Edmore, MI
(1994-98) dir, Forest View Psychiatric Hospital

Roger Mulder ’68
b. 4/15/1942 Holland, MI
d. 12/20/2017 Grand Rapids, MI
Hope ’64; WTS ’68
(1968-76) Paradise Comm., Modesto, CA
(1976-81) Fruitport, MI
16 years at Camp Geneva, Holland, MI

James Stralow ’68
b. 7/7/1943 Morrison, IL
d. 9/21/2017 Freeport, IL
Central ’65; WTS ’68
(1968-75) Ravenna, MI
(1976-82) Rehoboth, McBain, MI
(1982-2009) Forreston, IL
Volunteer chaplain, Freeport Mem. Hospital
“Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young,” Paul writes in 1 Timothy. Thankfully, for the ministry team at North Holland Reformed Church, their youth is counted as a strength, not a weakness.

North Holland is one of the oldest churches in the West Michigan area, planted in 1852 by Dutch homesteaders. However, its pastoral staff is one of the youngest, consisting of three recent WTS graduates all under the age of 30.

North Holland has a long history of hiring first-call pastors, with one-third of their lead pastors coming fresh out of seminary. Their first pastor was Rev. E. C. Oggel, a student from New Brunswick Theological Seminary.

Steven DeVries ’14 completed his seminary internship with North Holland right around the time their pastor was preparing to accept another call. Part of what Steven liked about the church was their desire to raise up young men and women to be leaders in ministry.

“As an intern he was never dismissed from consistory meetings so they could talk about “the real stuff.” The entire life of the church was very accessible to him.

Now in his fourth year as lead pastor, Steven and his team are thriving with a congregation that is heavily invested, flexible, and willing to grow.

When Jed Grooters ’17 was hired as the worship director in 2015, he wanted to introduce more contemporary worship to transition to a “blended” style. For most of its existence, the church had sung hymns with an organ or piano exclusively. The long history of the church combined with his youth compelled him to be humble and do a lot of listening.

““I’ve taken plenty of risks, pushing them in a new direction, and they’ve taken it all in stride,” he says.

Associate Pastor Audrey Edewaard ’16 says that the people at North Holland are always willing to try something at least once.

“We have a congregation that is very willing to extend trust,” she explains, “and that means a lot, because we’re young ministers. So, we kind of know what we’re doing, and we also kind of have no idea.”

North Holland uses a ministry team model in which congregants come together to make decisions alongside the pastors. This allows the congregation to take ownership in children’s ministry, adult discipleship, etc., and it also takes pressure off the staff.

The church has families that have attended for six generations as well as families who have recently moved into the area. Both groups are represented on consistory and ministry teams, so there is no sense of an “old guard.”

The church had deep “blue-collar roots” for generations, but now there is more socioeconomic diversity.

“One year on the executive team there was a truck driver and plumber alongside a lawyer and college professor,” Pastor Steven says. “Church members love to help each other out and if you need something done, there’s probably someone who does it here.”

The oldest member of the church is 98, but there are also a lot of young families.

Steven calls the older congregants the “senior saints,” and he loves visiting and connecting with them.

“We have a lot of older people who break stereotypes,” he laughs. “I wear blue jeans all week and visit people in their 80’s and 90’s, yet I’ve never heard a comment about how I’m dressed. They care more about presence than presentation.”

When he was hired, it meant a lot to him that many older congregants voiced their strong support and trust in his
leadership. “They didn’t just dismiss me as a kid pastor.”

“I’ve noticed a generosity toward us in our age,” agrees Nathan Longfield, WTS intern for North Holland. He sees the congregation willing to guide, “but not in a demeaning way.”

“In a lot of places, people say ‘Our church is dying, we can’t keep the young people,’” notes Pastor Steven, “but I think that’s because they don’t trust young people as competent leaders.” At North Holland, he has never been second-guessed or diminished because of his age.

Pastor Audrey agrees. During her first month, she visited a congregant who had open heart surgery. To this day when he introduces her, he says, “This is my pastor, Audrey, and she was there when I had open heart surgery.” That affirmation is very encouraging to her.

**Teamwork**

Going to seminary together has its benefits for the North Holland team. Steven graduated a few years ahead of Audrey and Jed, but they had many shared classes and experiences.

Audrey says there is less anxiety around having difficult conversations and thinking critically, because they have a shared foundation and language.

Nathan feels that the staff understands the pressures of seminary, since it wasn’t too long ago they were in his shoes. “There’s a sense of growing together,” he says. “Learning as the intern feels less one-directional. They’re teaching me things, but we’re also working as a team.”

“From the beginning, working with Steven has been phenomenal,” says Jed. “His natural and disciplined pastoral gifts are incredible, especially for a person with his years of experience. He’s a genuine and caring person who is also remarkably stable.”

“Audrey is a blast,” he adds. “Her energy, talent, sincerity and humility are all so rare, and I can’t speak highly enough of her as a ministry partner.”

**Capital Campaign Brings Changes**

In 2016, North Holland launched a capital campaign to raise 2.5 million dollars for an extension and remodel of their building. “Reach Out” is the result of a longtime dream for a fellowship hall and gym and to make their building ADA accessible. The church wants to have space to better serve their community and have meals and events together.

For a church of 300 people, 2.5 million was a big goal, but they had a 95% YES vote on the project.

Pastor Steven had never done any fundraising before, but during the campaign, the seminary sent him to the Executive Certificate in Religious Fundraising (ECRF) training through the generosity of a Lilly Endowment, Inc. grant.

“As a young leader still unsure about a lot of things, ECRF built my confidence up,” he shares.

Near the beginning of the campaign, he had a meeting scheduled with a couple whose support he knew the project would need in order to succeed. The day of the meeting, Steven was visiting another congregant at Holland Hospital when his car battery died.

When he called the potential donors to explain what was happening, they drove from the north side of Holland to pick him up for the meeting. After they discussed the project, the couple declared, “We should go jump your car!” and even helped him file down the battery terminals to get his car started.

“Of all the fear around making a presentation, at the end of the day you’re asking people to support something they love,” Steven realized. The couple’s generous spirit impacted him greatly.

Pastor Audrey hopes the project will help them reach out to their immediate community, specifically to the elementary school across the street.

Jed says that the building project is a testament to the kind of people who make up North Holland. He likes to think of their 165-year-old church as a new church plant trying to reach their community in different ways.

“This congregation is generous,” he says, “These people have lots of history and patterns, but they’re adaptable and willing to take risks. They will take their money and time and invest it. They’re willing to take young people like us and give us opportunities before we’re ‘polished.’ It’s rare; you don’t just find this anywhere.”

The Sunday service time at North Holland is 9:30 a.m. The church is located at 12050 New Holland Street, Holland, MI.

*by Megan Rice*
Gordon H. Girod Research Professor of Reformed Theology J. Todd Billings is pleased to announce the publication of Remembrance, Communion, and Hope: Rediscovering the Gospel at the Lord’s Table.

His book grew out of a desire for the Lord’s Supper to move congregations into a deeper embrace of the gospel. It is the result of a 10-year journey learning from pastors and scholars, congregations and laypeople, students and mentors. This nuanced and highly practical resource is for congregations eager to meet God anew at the Table.

Todd dedicated Remembrance, Communion, and Hope to his colleague and mentor, President Timothy Brown. Tim knew nothing of it until (with the help of some key people) Todd surprised him in February as he walked into a room at a local restaurant. Tim’s family, long-time prayer partners, friends, and WTS community members were there to celebrate as Todd read the paragraph of appreciation to Tim that he had written in the book.

Opportunities to meet faculty:

Carol Bechtel
• March 11, 18, & 25 – Class on Lent and Handel’s Messiah, Thornapple Community Church, Grand Rapids, MI
• May 12 – “Stories of Being First” event, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, New Brunswick, NJ
• June 2 – 125th Anniversary Celebration, American Waldensian Society, Valdese, NC

Tom Boogaart (preaching):
• June 10 – Epworth Assembly (Methodist), Ludington, MI

Timothy Brown (preaching):
• March 18 – First Reformed Church, Oak Harbor, WA
• April 29 – Twin Falls Reformed Church, Twin Falls, ID
• May 20 – Freedom Village, Holland, MI

Jim Brownson:
• March 11, 18, 25 – class on interpretation of Scripture using the video by Todd Billings, Hope Church, Holland, MI

Ben Conner:
• April 22 – Spring Speaker Series, Jill’s House, Vienna, VA
• June 10-14 – Summer Institute on Theology and Disability, Durham, NC

Chuck DeGroat:
• March 15-16 – Series of talks to different groups, Trinity Christian College, Palos Hills, IL
• March 22-23 – Pastors Retreat, AG Collaborative, W. Mich.

Kristen Johnson:
• March 9 – Justice, The City, and Our Callings seminar, City Church and Liberti Church, Philadelphia, PA

David Komline:
• May 24-26 – Transatlantic Histories of Schooling and Education—Travelling Knowledge, Concepts, and Materials, conference speaker, Münster, Germany

Han-luen Kontzer Komline:
• March 23-24 – Colloquium on “Creation and the Problem of Evil,” Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL
• April 5-6 – “Marilynne Robinson and Augustinian Thought,” Wheaton College Theology Conference, Wheaton, IL

Suzanne McDonald (all adult education):
• March 18 & 25 – “Dealing Faithfully with Dementia,” First Reformed Church, Grandville, MI
• March 22 – “Dealing Faithfully with Dementia,” Porter Hills Village, Grand Rapids, MI
• March 29 – “Dealing Faithfully with Dementia,” North Hills Christian Reformed Church, Troy, MI
• April 22 – “Re-presenting Election,” Second Christian Reformed Church, Grand Haven, MI

Sue Rozeboom:
• March 13 – panelist, “Recovering Biblical Christianity: Reformed and Roman Catholic Perspectives,” Osterhaven Lecture Series, Western Theological Seminary

Robert VanVoorst:
• March 18 & 25 – “Commonly Misunderstood Verses of the Bible: What They Really Mean,” Ferrysburg Community Church, Ferrysburg, MI

New Full-Tuition Scholarship

In other news relating to the Gordon H. Girod Research Chair of Reformed Theology, a new full-tuition scholarship has been established at the seminary. The Girod Fellowship is a scholarship for the in-residence research assistant to the Gordon H. Girod Research Chair of Reformed Theology, held by Dr. J. Todd Billings.

The fellowship is meant for high achieving M.Div. students with outstanding research and writing skills who have a heart for the church’s ministry in the world. It is renewable for three years and involves a part-time paid position as a research assistant. Already this scholarship has generated many qualified applicants. The first fellowship will be awarded this spring for an in-residence M.Div. student arriving in the fall.

News from WTS

Opportunities to meet faculty:

Carol Bechtel
• March 11, 18, & 25 – Class on Lent and Handel’s Messiah, Thornapple Community Church, Grand Rapids, MI
• May 12 – “Stories of Being First” event, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, New Brunswick, NJ
• June 2 – 125th Anniversary Celebration, American Waldensian Society, Valdese, NC

Tom Boogaart (preaching):
• June 10 – Epworth Assembly (Methodist), Ludington, MI

Timothy Brown (preaching):
• March 18 – First Reformed Church, Oak Harbor, WA
• April 29 – Twin Falls Reformed Church, Twin Falls, ID
• May 20 – Freedom Village, Holland, MI

Jim Brownson:
• March 11, 18, 25 – class on interpretation of Scripture using the video by Todd Billings, Hope Church, Holland, MI

Ben Conner:
• April 22 – Spring Speaker Series, Jill’s House, Vienna, VA
• June 10-14 – Summer Institute on Theology and Disability, Durham, NC

Chuck DeGroat:
• March 15-16 – Series of talks to different groups, Trinity Christian College, Palos Hills, IL
• March 22-23 – Pastors Retreat, AG Collaborative, W. Mich.

Kristen Johnson:
• March 9 – Justice, The City, and Our Callings seminar, City Church and Liberti Church, Philadelphia, PA

David Komline:
• May 24-26 – Transatlantic Histories of Schooling and Education—Travelling Knowledge, Concepts, and Materials, conference speaker, Münster, Germany

Han-luen Kontzer Komline:
• March 23-24 – Colloquium on “Creation and the Problem of Evil,” Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL
• April 5-6 – “Marilynne Robinson and Augustinian Thought,” Wheaton College Theology Conference, Wheaton, IL

Suzanne McDonald (all adult education):
• March 18 & 25 – “Dealing Faithfully with Dementia,” First Reformed Church, Grandville, MI
• March 22 – “Dealing Faithfully with Dementia,” Porter Hills Village, Grand Rapids, MI
• March 29 – “Dealing Faithfully with Dementia,” North Hills Christian Reformed Church, Troy, MI
• April 22 – “Re-presenting Election,” Second Christian Reformed Church, Grand Haven, MI

Sue Rozeboom:
• March 13 – panelist, “Recovering Biblical Christianity: Reformed and Roman Catholic Perspectives,” Osterhaven Lecture Series, Western Theological Seminary

Robert VanVoorst:
• March 18 & 25 – “Commonly Misunderstood Verses of the Bible: What They Really Mean,” Ferrysburg Community Church, Ferrysburg, MI

New Full-Tuition Scholarship

In other news relating to the Gordon H. Girod Research Chair of Reformed Theology, a new full-tuition scholarship has been established at the seminary. The Girod Fellowship is a scholarship for the in-residence research assistant to the Gordon H. Girod Research Chair of Reformed Theology, held by Dr. J. Todd Billings.

The fellowship is meant for high achieving M.Div. students with outstanding research and writing skills who have a heart for the church’s ministry in the world. It is renewable for three years and involves a part-time paid position as a research assistant. Already this scholarship has generated many qualified applicants. The first fellowship will be awarded this spring for an in-residence M.Div. student arriving in the fall.
Disability as an Aspect of Diversity

Among seminaries and divinity schools, Western Theological Seminary is leading the way in disability and ministry. After the completion of our renovation and additions, our facility will be beyond the compliances required in the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act), but we want our culture to be as welcoming and accessible as our buildings.

On November 2, 2017, faculty and staff participated in a half-day workshop under the guidance of Lennard Davis to consider how we might prepare our environment to receive people with disabilities. Dr. Davis, a professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, is an internationally-known expert in disability studies who has written or edited some of the most impactful books in the field.

Later that day, Dr. Davis gave a public lecture to a large audience in Mulder Chapel. Afterward, RCA and CRC Disability Advocates Terry DeYoung and Mark Stephenson facilitated a discussion on how the concepts set forth by Dr. Davis apply to congregational ministry. Search “Davis” at westernsem.edu for both videos.

Congratulations to Miriam Spies, who won a competition for junior scholars to present her paper, “Ministry with Youth with Disabilities: What Can the Church Learn from the Medical Practice?” at Princeton Theological Seminary’s Disability and Youth Ministry Conference February 1-2.

Miriam is a student in our Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry program. (She is pictured at the center with Dr. Ben Conner behind her, along with three other award winners and faculty for the event.)

With the support of the Henry Luce Foundation, WTS has established a Nouwen Fellow program that brings scholars whose research focuses on some aspect of disability studies to join our faculty for a one- or two-year appointment. The Nouwen Fellowship is named after the internationally renowned priest, author, professor and pastor Henri Nouwen. The seminary has identified two strong candidates for two fellowships starting in the fall of 2018. We hope to make introductions in a future issue.

Kyle Wigboldy joined WTS as registrar and financial aid administrator on December 1, 2017. He comes to us from Kuyper College in Grand Rapids, where he was the registrar since 2014. Prior to that, he worked in financial aid at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, IL. Kyle is passionate about Christian education and enjoys working with faculty and staff to support students through their seminary experience.

On February 14, Drew Peirce joined the Development team as associate director. Since earning an M.Div. from WTS in 2002, Drew served Kids Hope USA in multiple roles, most recently as director of development. He enjoys meeting with donors and building relationships with them through ongoing care and communication. He is eager to share the seminary’s compelling mission and vision.

Save the Date!
MONDAY, APRIL 16, 2018

Dr. Kate Bowler

“Prosperity Gospel and the Church Today”

Dr. Bowler is a faculty member at Duke Divinity School and an expert on the prosperity gospel. In 2015, she was diagnosed with stage IV cancer at age 35. The next year, she wrote a New York Times article that went viral, “Death, the Prosperity Gospel, and Me.” Recently she released her memoir: Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I’ve Loved.

While Dr. Bowler does not embrace the prosperity gospel, she describes it fairly and with insight. She embraces the Christian faith, bearing witness to Jesus Christ in this midst of this season.

3:00pm - Kate Bowler and Dennis Voskuil, “The Prosperity Gospel in the American Church Today” Mulder Chapel, WTS

7:00pm - Kate Bowler: “The Prosperity Gospel and the Dying” Dimnent Chapel, Hope College

The evening plenary event probes a key “collision” point where our theology is tested is how we respond to dying—our own dying, and that of loved ones, even as we lift up our loved ones in prayer.

Public welcome!
As we digest the retirement plans of President Brown announced on the front cover of this issue, it won't be long before we start thinking about the word “legacy.” As someone who works closely with Tim, I can tell you legacy isn't his favorite word. He focuses on getting the job done, not on how history will view what he is doing. Yet, I am sure that as people look back on his season as president, one of the first things that will be noted is the massive construction project that is physically transforming the seminary.

That's too bad. While the building is a huge accomplishment, by itself the building has never been the point. Tim Brown's true legacy is found in the stories inside this issue about the young pastors at North Holland Reformed Church and about Ruth Estell. They represent over 1,000 students and alums who have been prepared to lead the church in mission over the decades Tim has served WTS. Tim has modeled a theology deeply rooted in the Word of God that is personal, relational, and devotional. His love of God and the scriptures is contagious, and Western has been shaped deeply by Tim.

There is no doubt that our students deserve excellent facilities, but our churches need excellent pastors, and Tim's heart has always been there. Thanks be to God for Tim Brown!

With gratitude,