Our New Day
Many changes at the seminary

Last December, friends and supporters joined the WTS community to celebrate the completion of the Our New Day campaign and its transformation of the campus. “Our New Day” has come to describe more than just beautiful new facilities, however. Western Theological Seminary is living into a new day with a new president, a new academic dean (see pg. 8), a changed administrative structure, different ways of learning, and a dramatic shift in enrollment.

Dr. Felix Theonugraha began work on July 1 and was officially inaugurated as the 12th president of WTS on October 30. He is proving to be a winsome, energetic leader with forward vision, a great desire to listen to the church, and ever-present attention to detail. He has made several trips to various areas of the country, getting to know pastors, alumni/ae, and supporters as he hears their concerns. Many more trips are planned, as well as “breakfast with the president” meetings for local pastors.

In an effort to streamline decision making and evaluate the administrative structure of the seminary, Dr. Theonugraha suspended the previous Administrative Cabinet and instated a new Leadership Team with admissions and advancement represented.

To increase communication within departments, the president initiated regular Town Hall meetings for faculty and staff together. In addition, Dr. Theonugraha conducted five Strategic Plan Listening Sessions with faculty and staff to hear concerns and generate creative ideas for the future.

Our new day is also reflected in the bigger changes of how students learn best. The seminary has moved away from a traditional library model to a “learning center” with collaborative spaces for learning, less stacks of books, and many digital resources. The Jack and Mary DeWitt Learning Center has quickly become a new hub of activity among students, in addition to appealing to a wider network of pastors using the facilities.

Enrollment has shifted with less full-time M.Div. students and more students who are part-time, learning from a distance, learning in a different language, and seeking non-traditional ministry roles.

As our new president said recently, “I am aware of the challenges that surround us—challenges facing all theological education institutions. However, I am truly joyful, hopeful, and prayerful about the future of WTS. This is indeed ‘Our New Day.’ May the favor of the Lord rest on us as we begin this time together.”

In October, President Theonugraha met with church planters Jose Hernandez and Rudy Rubio in southern California, accompanied by Dr. Timothy Brown.
The Inauguration of
Dr. Felix Theonugraha
12th President of
Western Theological Seminary
October 30, 2019

Among the 14 delegates present were Dr. Cor Kors, Executive Director of MFCA for the RCA, and Dr. Leanne Van Dyk, President of Columbia Theological Seminary.

A WTS drama team accompanied the reading of Ephesians 4:1-6 by Kris DePree, Search Committee Co-Chair.

Noah McLaren ’16, Miranda Craig, and Jenna Brandsen ’15 were among eight students and alumni sharing their musical gifts during the service.

Greetings from:

Matthew Scogin, President of Hope College
Nancy DeBoer, Mayor of Holland, Michigan
Rev. Eddy Alemán, General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America
Excerpts from the presidential address, “Live Lives Worthy of the Calling”

...As we stand poised to enter the third decade of the 21st century, what does it mean for Western Theological Seminary to live lives worthy of the calling that we have received? After all, we find ourselves at a time of great transition in theological education, in our country, and in our world.

...First, let us continue to be an institution that exhibits a winsome, irenic, and generous Christianity. Let it flow from our actions, our words, and our very being.

...Second, let us continue to be an institution resolutely committed to the good news of salvation in Christ, as well as the ethics of the Kingdom of God for our daily lives.

...I pray that our graduates may be happy recipients and messengers of a historic Christian faith passed down from generation to generation, holding firm to the inspired and infallible Word of God, while recognizing full well that we see through the glass darkly and therefore maintain a posture of epistemic humility in our daily engagement.

...Finally, let us continue to be an institution that participates responsibly with the movement of God’s Spirit around the world.

...Let us continue to be a seminary standing boldly on Christ alone, trusting Scripture alone, proclaiming a salvation that is through faith alone and by grace alone, and living according to the ethics of the Kingdom of God, an ethic that points this world toward its Creator and reminds the people of this world that they are loved, deeply loved, so loved that our God would sacrifice his one and Only Son so that we may be reconciled with God.

Join us as we boldly and courageously live lives that are worthy of our calling, out of obedience and faithfulness to God, for the sake of His Church and for the sake of His Creation. Amen.

Charges given by:

Dr. Han-luen Kantzer Komline, member of the WTS faculty
Carol Van Andel, WTS Trustee, Search Committee Co-Chair
Dr. David Dockery, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Dr. Tite Tiénou, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Dr. Timothy Brown, President Emeritus and member of the WTS faculty
In 2017 Western began accepting applications for the Girod Fellowship, a full-tuition scholarship for students with outstanding research and writing skills who display eagerness for deep theological learning and have a heart for the church’s ministry. Girod Fellows also serve as research assistants to the seminary’s holder of the Gordon H. Girod Research Chair of Reformed Theology, Dr. J. Todd Billings. Now with three full-time Girod Fellows, the program is drawing academically-outstanding students to Western and forming thoughtful, theologically-minded leaders for the church.

James Schetelich became the first Girod Fellow during the 2018-2019 school year, and two more fellows followed this year—Anna Erickson and Jacob (Jake) Chipka. The fellowships have helped to widen Western’s drawing power. Jake learned of the Girod Fellowship from WTS Admissions Director Jill English during her visit to Whitworth University in Spokane, WA, where he was serving as an athletics chaplain. James and Anna heard about WTS through professor recommendations at Wheaton College. Anna was attracted to Western because of its Reformed background and evangelical direction, as well as its ecumenical spirit.

Another big draw is the opportunity to work alongside Professor Todd Billings.

“Dr. Billings is so brilliant and has shaped the church in really formative ways, yet he writes and speaks with such humility,” Jake says. “He’s so cognizant and comfortable with the idea that he doesn’t have all the answers. I think for Dr. Billings, study is a form of worship, being drawn into the mystery of God.”

One way Dr. Billings models this humility is by encouraging the Fellows to give feedback on his writing. For the last several months, they have been busy reading chapters for his newest book, tentatively titled The End of the Christian Life.

Dr. Billings writes as a member of the cancer community, as well as one who has studied Christian death and dying extensively after he received a $25,000 grant from the Louisville Institute to research “Congregational Life and the Dying: Renewing Resurrection Hope in a Medical Age.”

The End of the Christian Life, set to release in the fall of 2020, will explore the idea that a daily embrace of mortality is an important part of discipleship. It will examine cultural factors that prevent this exercise as well as personal stories from members of the cancer community, sociological research, and theological insight.

“I don’t want feedback that’s just compliant,” Dr. Billings says. Rather, he encourages the Girod Fellows to be brutally honest—something they get more comfortable with as they get to know him.

“80% of the time their feedback leads to some type of revision,” he explains. “One time I started a chapter completely over, and I think it ended up better.”

Dr. Billings encourages the Girod Fellows to research areas of their own interest, as well, and take ownership of the events that the Girod Chair hosts. Some of the 2019-2020 events include weekly Pastor-Theologian Lunches, a colloquy and public panel on the theology of marriage and singleness, and a lecture in February on “An Augustinian Theology of Mass
Incarceration.” His assistant, WTS alumna Katlyn DeVries ’19, plays a large role in organizing these events and mentoring the Fellows as well.

Since the Girod Fellows are all in-residence M.Div. students, they have also become active leaders on campus through participating in chapel, serving as representatives on student council, and living in the Friendship House alongside young adults with cognitive disabilities.

A large focus of the fellowship and the work of Dr. Billings in general is doing theological research and study on behalf of the wider church. James says this is done not in a remote “high-tower” but more cooperatively, in order to be theologically rich and applicable to the church’s needs.

“Remember that you are small,” Anna recalls Dr. Billings telling her. In other words, remember that Jesus is already at work in the church, and that studying these topics is merely entering into the work He’s already doing.

Jake, Anna, and James have research interests of their own that they hope to examine through the Fellowship as they prepare for ministry. Jake is passionate about those on the margins of the church, especially those experiencing mental illness. He is currently working with Dr. Billings on a project that examines illness, healing, and the Gospel, comparing how the medical world approaches these topics. His background in studying medicine as an undergrad is well-suited to this work.

Anna is currently working with Academic Dean Kristen Johnson on a research project around discipleship and the Great Commission. She would like to delve deeper into American Evangelicalism and is also interested in reading Karl Barth and learning more about the Reformed tradition.

James is enthralled by John’s gospel in the New Testament and would love to dive deep into it—something he often talks about with Dr. Billings while taking him to medical appointments for cancer treatments. James plans to apply for Ph.D. programs and is interested in becoming a pastor-theologian.

Several summers ago, Dr. Billings held listening sessions with local pastors about the scope of the Girod Research Chair, gauging what they were most interested in—was it the events? Opportunities for congregational learning? He found that pastors were most excited about the Girod Fellows—a program for forming thoughtful, theologically-minded leaders for the church who can engage in difficult topics with humility and depth.

That’s what the church needs, and we trust that’s what the Girod Fellowship is accomplishing.

The Gordon H. Girod Research Chair of Reformed Theology

“To be Reformed is to hold within one’s heart a deep conviction concerning the most basic truths set forth in the Word of God.”[1] That was the sentiment of Gordon H. Girod, for whom the Chair is named. Girod was a passionate preacher and pastor who cared deeply about Reformed theology.

In 2013, Girod’s daughter Carol and her husband, David Van Andel, gave a generous gift that would ensure the continuation of the seminary’s focus on training pastors committed to deep theological engagement in the Reformed tradition.

The person chosen to fill this esteemed Chair was Dr. J. Todd Billings, a professor who cares deeply about encouraging pastors to see ministry as a creative theological space.

This combination of care for the church and deep theological thinking exemplifies the focus of the Girod Research Chair today.

Current Girod Initiatives:

- The Girod Fellows Scholarship
- PTL! Pastor Theologian Lunches for students
- Girod Grants and Colloquy Groups for pastors
- Events featuring scholars and speakers

Upcoming Girod Events:

- February 10, 1:30pm – Dr. Joseph Small, author of Flawed Church, Faithful God: A Reformed Ecclesiology for the Real World
- February 27, 7pm – Dr. Greg Lee, Wheaton College, public lecture on “An Augustinian Theology of Mass Incarceration”

New art expresses the heart and soul of the seminary

Western Theological Seminary has a long tradition of putting beliefs and convictions into visible objects or form. This shows up in the shape of the atrium, the redesigned chapel, the circular architectural elements appearing throughout the seminary’s interior, and now, in five new pieces of art in the Jack and Mary DeWitt Learning Center.

Several months ago, WTS commissioned local artist Joel Schoon-Tanis to create four paintings around the theme “The Heart of Western Theological Seminary.” On October 23, Joel revealed and explained his paintings entitled, “Spiritual Development,” “Ministry,” “The Church,” and “Worship.” They can be seen on the east and west walls of the main level of the learning center.

Art expresses who we are and who we aspire to be. One can say that form also forms. The form of our buildings, art, and programs not only expresses our beliefs and convictions—it forms our students, staff and faculty. So, too, do the books we read.

In that light, this year the faculty assembled a collection of personally recommended books, which are named “A Great Cloud of Witnesses” and are accessible on the second floor of the learning center.

These works of rigorous theology, spiritual piety, biography, history, philosophy, and literature have formed this faculty and community. The books are honest “witnesses” to God’s truth and, like art, they are witnesses of what Western has been, who we are, and who we aspire to be.

2011 M.Div. graduate Nathaniel Bull was commissioned to paint “The Great Cloud,” which was delivered in July and hangs next to the faculty’s recommended books collection.

We welcome you to visit the learning center and enjoy these works with us.
Julie Myers was the first WTS student to graduate with a Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry (GCDM) alongside her Master of Divinity in 2017.

Three years earlier, she had been reluctant to begin seminary, turning in her application one day before the due date. At that time, she had just begun working at Benjamin’s Hope (a living community for adults with disabilities), but her church recognized her gifts of ministry and encouraged her to attend seminary.

At WTS she took as many Disability and Ministry courses as she could simply because they interested her. She was later surprised to realize she had enough credits to earn the GCDM. After graduation she was ordained and worked at Mars Hill Church in Grandville, MI as their special needs coordinator before eventually returning to work part-time at Benjamin’s Hope and at Western’s Friendship House while she completes a Master of Theology (Th.M.) degree.

The Ralph and Cheryl Schregardus Friendship House is the seminary housing where students live in apartment pods with young adults with cognitive disabilities (Friends) and learn from each other. As resident advisor, Julie does administrative work, schedules house events, attends meetings, and makes herself available for the Friends.

She moved into the Friendship House this past March, along with her two teenage children—the first family to live in the house since its formation in 2007.

“I love living in the Friendship House with my kids!” she says. “I am in the final stages of a divorce, and although it has been difficult, God has blessed us abundantly over and over again.”

Living among those with different challenges and gifts has been eye-opening and enriching for her children.

“They are learning to practice hospitality—and in a healthy way,” she says, keeping an open-door policy to the residents while learning how to set boundaries for self-care.

In 2016 Julie was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease called Sarcoidosis. “Essentially, it can attack any organ in your body and cause it to work against itself,” she explains. Previously in remission, the disease flared up at the end of the summer, right as classes were set to begin.

“The timing could not have been worse,” she says. “I don’t remember much about the first days in the hospital except for what the ER doctor said: ‘Ma’am, your calcium levels are higher than I have ever seen in my career... your blood is beginning to crystalize, and your kidneys and liver are beginning to shut down. We are trying the best we can to stabilize you.’ I heard what he was saying, and I knew it was serious, but I couldn’t focus on much. All I felt was an incredible sense of peace from God. He was there beside me, holding me, keeping me alive. I wasn’t afraid.”

Eventually she recovered enough to return home, but she has to take high doses of steroids and other medicine to keep the disease in check. The side effects are significant, but this is the only treatment for Sarcoidosis, as there is no cure.

Julie was worried about keeping up with schoolwork, but WTS staff and faculty have been very supportive. Her own work around disability and ministry reminds her to be kind to herself, listen to what her body needs, and set realistic expectations. She realizes she is now living into what she has studied so long.

For her Th.M. project, Julie is examining how people with cognitive disabilities experience and process grief and trauma. She is hopeful that her Th.M. coursework will give her the research and writing experience she’ll need to join Dr. Ben Conner’s Doctor of Ministry Disability and Ministry cohort next June.

Julie would like to continue living and working in the Friendship House until she completes both the Th.M. and D.Min. degrees. She wants to write about disability and ministry and hopes to teach in an undergraduate or seminary setting some day.

In regard to her own chronic illness, “I feel confident that God’s got this,” she says. “He is the Great Physician and healer. I will be forever grateful for the place I am in now, even though it may seem like my life is in turmoil (which it is!). This has brought my children closer to the Lord, and we are thankful for all of our blessings.”

First GCDM graduate gains personal understanding of disability

Julie spends some time with former Friends and Friendship House Director Carlos Thompson (right)
Professor of Practical Theology Ben Conner was nominated for this year’s Disability Network Lakeshore’s Ability Award. The award was created in 2011 to honor and recognize people in the West Michigan Lakeshore community who have a passion to advocate for people with disabilities and are making progress in the advancement of creating inclusive communities. Read about the nominees at: abilityaward.net/#nominees

On October 29, Dr. Conner was named the director of the new Center for Disability and Ministry at WTS. The center supports ministry leaders of all abilities in nurturing and supporting the gifts and contributions of persons with disabilities through formational opportunities such as theological education, consultation, forums, and publications. Presently, the center oversees the Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry and the upcoming Doctor of Ministry cohort, “Disability and Ministry: Imagining More Faithful and Inclusive Congregational Ministries” (launches May 2020). Watch for additional announcements about the center in future publications.

Brenda Dieffenbach has joined the development staff as an associate director. Brenda's commitment to Western and the RCA is long-standing. She and her husband, Tim, an RCA pastor at Thornapple Community Church, have supported the work of the seminary for years. She has participated in Ridder Church Renewal, the Global Learner Initiative, and Restorative Circles training. After 30 years as a teacher, Brenda is eager to hit the ground running in a new career raising friends and funds for WTS.

Katlyn DeVries has joined the seminary staff in the role of writing assistant. Katlyn provides writing support to students through the Writing Studio on an as-requested basis. Katlyn, who is a 2019 WTS graduate and a Northwestern College alumna, is well respected for her ability to write, think theologically, and engage with others in a warm and encouraging manner. Katlyn also works as the Girod Chair assistant for Dr. Todd Billings.

On August 26, Krista Greendyke became the administrative assistant for the Admissions team. Krista brings to Western 24 years of experience in admissions, administration, communications, and data and project management. She worked in admissions at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, IL and most recently directed communications for Christ Memorial Church in Holland. Krista has eagerly jumped into systems and procedures with attention to detail and is proving to be a great asset to Admissions.

Oxford University Press has published Augustine on the Will: A Theological Account by Assistant Professor of Church History and Theology Han-luen Kantzer Komline. She demonstrates that Augustine’s view has four distinct types of human will that correspond to four theological scenarios. Augustine’s innovation was that he distinguished these types with a detail and clarity unprecedented by any thinker before him.

Villanova University has offered Dr. Kantzer Komline the prestigious Patricia H. Imbesi Saint Augustine Fellowship for spring semester. She is the first Protestant to earn this fellowship offered to “an outstanding scholar whose work has a contribution to make to the study of Augustine or of the Augustinian tradition.” Dr. Kantzer Komline has accepted the honor and will spend spring semester in residency at Villanova in Pennsylvania, along with her husband, Assistant Professor of Church History David Komline, who will teach WTS distance learning courses.

Several years ago Executive Vice President Jeff Munroe and former professor Dr. James Cook participated in a tribute to Frederick Buechner at Calvin College. As Buechner walked past them, Dr. Cook leaned over to Jeff and said, “We don’t possess the man, but we have his books!”

Jeff’s new book Reading Buechner (IVP) is a guide to those books for both experienced Buechner fans and new readers. “This really is a WTS book,” Jeff says. “I was exposed to Buechner in classes here, especially by Jim Cook, and I sought the help of several of today’s faculty members as I wrote it. I am very excited it has been published.”

Please join Jeff and the WTS community for a booksigning on December 5 at 10:15 a.m. in the DeWitt Learning Center.

In July, Alvin Padilla and Kristen Deede Johnson embarked on new roles within the senior leadership team of WTS.

Dr. Padilla is now the Vice President of Strategic Initiatives and Director of Advanced Degrees. Since joining WTS in 2016, Dr. Padilla has been a creative and innovative academic administrator, launching the Hispanic Ministry Program and revamping the Doctor of Ministry program. The two programs now account for 28% of the student body.

In his new role, Dr. Padilla is exploring additional strategic partnerships to attract prospective students, while providing leadership to the Master of Theology and Doctor of Ministry programs. Dr. Padilla’s experience in international theological education and his position as a Commissioner for the Association of Theological Schools make him uniquely qualified to develop programs that are responsive to ministry in the 21st century.

Dr. Johnson is now the Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs. Dr. Johnson came to WTS in 2013 to teach theology and Christian formation, and she has proven to be an exemplary scholar and an accomplished theologian, author, and speaker. In 2018, Christianity Today named her one of 10 female theologians poised to impact theological education and the church in the years to come.

In her new role, Dr. Johnson will provide wisdom and leadership to the academic affairs of the seminary, and she will continue to represent Western in significant and impactful ways through her writing and speaking.

“These appointments will strengthen WTS for the season to come as these two talented individuals use their gifts to the fullest to further the mission of Western,” says President Felix Theonugraha.
While this date is popularly known as “Giving Tuesday”, this year Western is GIVING BACK by engaging in community service opportunities to help the following organizations:

- Renew Therapeutic Riding Center
- Community Action House and Community Kitchen
- Good Samaritan Ministries
- Lighthouse Immigration Advocates

Faculty, staff, and students will take an hour or two out of their day to help with packing & loading boxes, kitchen prep-work, meal preparation, providing music, research, and data entry. If you are interested in joining us, please contact Brenda Dieffenbach at 616-392-8555, x155.

**Meet WTS Faculty and Staff:**

- **Sarah Barton:**
  - Jan 11 – “Christian Perspectives on Disability Identity,” The Society for Christian Ethics, Washington, DC (scethics.org)

- **Ben Conner:**
  - Jan 25 – Plenary speaker, Young Life Chicago Leader Summit, Chicago, IL
  - Feb 11-12 – Preach at chapel and give presentation on Disability and Ministry, Northwestern College, Orange City, IA

- **Chuck DeGroat:**
  - Jan 17-19 – Wholeheartedness Retreat, Midland Reformed Church, Midland, MI
  - Apr 24-26 – Hope Presbyterian Men’s Retreat, Montreat, NC

- **David Komline:**
  - Jan 3-6 – Presenting paper at Annual Meeting of the American Society of Church History, NY, NY

- **Han-luen Kantzer Komline:**

- **Suzanne McDonald:**
  - Dec 4 – “Dealing Faithfully with Dementia,” 6:30-8:30pm, Niekerk Christian Reformed Church, Holland, MI
  - Jan 10-17 – Systematic Theology course, Young Life New Staff Training, Orlando, FL
  - Feb 12 – “Creation Care: Why Should Christians Care?” Harderwyk Christian Reformed Church, Holland, MI (4-5pm)

- **Jeff Munroe:**
  - Jan 5 – Preaching, Standale Reformed Church, Standale, MI
  - Jan 12 & 19 – “Reading Buechner,” Adult Ed., Faith Reformed Church, Zeeland, MI
  - Jan 26 – “Reading Buechner,” Adult Ed., Second Christian Reformed Church, Grand Haven, MI
  - Feb 9 & 16 – “Reading Buechner,” Adult Ed., Central Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI
  - Mar 1 – “Reading Buechner,” Adult Ed., Ferrysburg Community Christian Reformed Church, Spring Lake, MI

- **Sue Rozeboom:**
  - Jan 30 – Panelist, “A Sacramental Vision for Public Worship,” Calvin Symposium on Worship, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI

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**Save the dates:**

- **“A Reformed Ecclesiology for the Real World”**
  - February 10, 1:30pm, lecture with Dr. Joseph Small, theologian and retired director of the PCUSA Office of Theology and Worship

- **“An Augustinian Theology of Mass Incarceration”**
  - February 27, 7:00pm, lecture with Dr. Greg Lee, Associate Professor of Theology and Urban Studies at Wheaton College

**Annual Osterhaven Lectures**

- March 16-17, times TBA with Dr. Emerson Powery, Professor of Biblical Studies, Messiah College

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**#GIVINGBACK**

**DECEMBER 3**

When the seminary cleared out much of the building to prepare for construction and renovation two years ago, many donated artifacts were happily re-discovered. Some can be seen in the special collections room of the new Cook Library. Others, such as the Tanis Curio Collection (donated by the children of missionary Edward H. Tanis) were sent to the RCA Archives. Archivist Matthew Gasero added them to the newly created RCA Digital Museum, which can be enjoyed at rcamuseum.omeka.net/

The seminary is honoring the memory of Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink, former president and professor of systematic theology, by naming the large conference room on the second floor of the DeWitt Learning Center after him. Etta Hesselink accepted the honor on October 29. Etta has graciously donated Dr. Hesselink’s academic regalia to be on display in the room. In addition, she has given the library a treasure trove of 800 Japanese volumes, including many first collected when the Hesselinks were missionaries in Japan. She has also donated a statue from India and a set of Calvin’s Institutes from the 1500s that will be housed in the rare books room.

Please visit the Jack and Mary DeWitt Learning Center to see these wonderful new additions!

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Remembering Dr. Stanley Rock

One of the accepted truths in academia is that long after the memories of a professor’s words are gone, students still remember the shaping influence of the professor’s personality. I certainly remember the powerful influence of Stan Rock’s personality, but unlike my other teachers, I vividly remember specific things Stan Rock said almost 40 years ago, as well.

I remember Stan teaching the ironic relationship between authenticity and acceptance. Because we want to be accepted so badly, we actually filter our authentic selves and present a self we believe is more acceptable. Yet, ironically, when we sense people aren’t authentic, we don’t accept them. The key to acceptance is authenticity, even though that’s the last thing we feel we should be. Stan encouraged us to be honest, authentic people and pastors.

Stan taught me about asyndetic listening, which is hardly listening at all. When someone says, “I lost my job today” and your response is “I lost my job two years ago,” or “My father is sick” and you say, “My mother has cancer,” that’s asyndetic listening. You are just using the conversation as a springboard to talk about yourself. Stan taught us to actually listen and enter the speaker’s reality.

I also remember Stan saying that almost every communication problem is the result of unstated expectations and unchecked assumptions. We expect things of each other without saying them, and we assign meaning to behavior without first seeking to understand it. Similarly, Stan explained that communication missteps happen when we fail to recognize the difference between our intent and impact. So often, the actual impact of what we say or do is not what we intended. Seeking to understand our impact is the path to better relationships.

Stan spent the last 34 years of his life with Parkinson’s Disease. He spoke of “hallowing our diminishments,” a concept full of wisdom and spiritual insight. What does it mean to fully give to God the inevitable losses that happen as we age? Stan not only talked about these things, he lived them. There is much to learn from the way he hallowed his long journey with Parkinson’s.

Then there’s this story about Stan from Tim Brown. When Tim came in to work the day his father was diagnosed with terminal cancer, Stan asked Tim how he was doing and got a perfunctory “I’m fine.” Stan said, “You don’t look fine.” Tim quickly admitted he wasn’t and then tearfully poured his heart out.

That’s the Stan Rock I will always remember. He was an extremely accomplished person, yet I will always think of Stan as someone who cared deeply about those around him and as a great teacher whose insights were so profound that I’m still learning from him today.
News

This year Charles Stickley ’64 celebrated 55 years as an ordained minister with the Reformed Church in America. He began his ministry at East Lawn Reformed Church in Muskegon, MI and then served 33 years at the Hurley Reformed Church in Hurley, NY, retiring in 2006. He continues to host a weekly radio program, which he began in 1975 in Hurley. Charles has served on many civic and religious committees and boards throughout Ulster County, NY as well as several committees in the greater RCA, including president of the Classis of Mid-Hudson, Particular Synod of New York, chairman of the Church Planning and Development of the general program counsel, and many local projects.

Eric (Rick) Boon ’77 writes that “the journey has been a rich one, and I’m thankful for the faithful, steady hand of Jesus through all my days.” Rick has served churches in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Colorado, as well as served as a hospice chaplain. He has nine grandchildren, and six years ago he married Olivia, whom he first met when he served on a seminary summer assignment at the Schofield Army Barracks in Honolulu, Hawaii.

On October 30, Robert Van Voorst ’77 participated in a panel discussion on the Gnostic Gospels at The Annual Interfaith Academic Consortium Conference in Grand Rapids, sponsored by the Kaufman Interfaith Institute. He compared these “Secret Gospels” to the canonical New Testament Gospels, serving as a counterpoint to the main speaker’s remarks.

On August 28, Stephen Kazimba ’03 (ThM) ’07 (DMin) was elected to serve as the ninth Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Uganda and the Bishop of Kampala, posts he will assume on March 1, 2020. Since 2009 he has been serving as the Bishop of the Diocese of Mityana. He has a passion for developing the whole church. His book on the subject, Empowering the Laity, was published by Words of Hope in Grand Rapids, MI in 2015.

After seven years directing the work of Eighth Day Farm in Holland, MI, Jeff Roessing ’07 began a new venture in 2018. He and his wife, Melissa, moved to South Haven, MI and opened Black Sheep Shelter, a wedding/event venue, bed and breakfast, and organic farm. More info at theblacksheepshelter.com

On to glory...

Melvin DeVries ’53
b. 12/30/1924 Holland, NE
d. 7/15/2019 South Holland, IL
Central ’50, WTS ’53
(1953-56) Strasburg, ND
(1956) Missionary Pastor, Bismarck, ND
(1957-60) Bismarck, ND
(1960-74) Trinity, Kent, WA
(1974-85) Valley Community Drive-In Church, San Dimas, CA
(1985-91) Tinley Park, IL
(1991-95) Minister Evangelist, Thorn Creek, South Holland, IL
(1995-97) Riverside Comm., Hammond, IN
(1998-2013) Min Evangelisms/Outreach, First, South Holland, IL
2016 WTS Distinguished Alumnus

Donald Hoffman ’55
b. 2/13/1930 Morrison, IL
d. 6/15/2018 Holland, MI
Hope ’52; WTS ’55, NYTheeSem ’69 (ThM)
(1955-57) asst pas, Home Acres, Grand Rapids, MI
(1957-69) Marble Collegiate, NY, NY
(1969-73) assoc, Central, Grand Rapids, MI
(1973-ret) counselor, Grand Rapids, MI

Robert Spencer ’56
b. 8/2/1931 Rochester, NY
d. 9/15/2019 Tucson, AZ
Hope ’53; WTS ’56, BiblicalTS ’64 (STM)
(1956-62) North, Watervliet, NY
(1963-67) Joy Gould Memorial, Roxbury, NY
(1967-72) Calvary Comm., Venice, FL
(1972-77) Tucson, AZ
(1977-90) Trinity, Rochester, NY

Douglas vanGessel ’56
b. 6/29/1930 Paramount, CA
d. 7/24/2019 Artesia, CA
Hope ’52; WTS ’56;
Northern Baptist Sem ’65 (ThM)
(1956-62) Atwood, Ellsworth, MI
(1962-68) First Chicago, Berwyn, IL
(1968-89) Church on Hill, Norco, CA
(1989-94) contr. & int., Comm., Tulare, CA
Chaplain for Artesia Christian Home

Elmer Vander Ploeg ’59
b. 7/9/1925 Sioux Center, IA
d. 3/5/2011 Lynden, WA
Hope ’56; WTS ’59
(1959-64) Bethany, Belmond, IA
(1964-68) Grace, Corsica, SD
(1968-77) First, Lynden, WA
(1977-85) Wickert, St. Anne, IL
(1985-90) Silver Creek, MN

William deForest ’62
b. 5/5/1937 Albany, NY
d. 8/14/2019 Schenectady, NY
Central ’59, WTS ’62
(1962-69) Pultneyville, NY

Stanley Rock ’66
4/22/1937 Pontiac, MI
d. 8/3/2019 Holland, MI
(see previous page for more details)

Ralph Kickert ’68 (MRE)
b. 9/8/1941 Kalamazoo, MI
d. 6/14/2019 Holland, MI
Calvin Coll ’65; WTS ’68
Service to the Holland community:
First f/t director, Good Samaritan Center
First f/t director, Community Action House
32 years as Chief Probation Officer, Holland District Court

Gerald Mahler ’71
b. 1/15/1940 Farmington, MI
d. 7/19/2019 Middleville, MI
TaylorU ’68; MDiv ’71
(1971-74) assoc, First, Sioux City, IA
(1974-77) Second, Grand Haven, MI
(1977-80) Zion, Grandville, MI
(1980-94) Olivet, Muskegon, MI

Eugene VanZee ’74
b. 10/27/1948 Oskaalosa, IA
d. 7/21/2019 Riverside, CA
Central ’70, WTS ’74
(1974-79) Community, Southgate, MI
(1979-90) Hemet Valley, CA
(1990-2019) Faith Comm., Hemet, CA
Fire Chaplain, Hemet/San Jacinto, CA

On June 23, 2019, Emily Scattered-Downhole ’17 was ordained at Maple Avenue Ministries in Holland, MI, where she is now Director of Ministries.

Abby DeZeeuw, ’17 was ordained on October 13 at Monroe Community Church in Grand Rapids, MI. She is working as a chaplain for Spectrum Health Hospice.

Scott Van Ravenswaay ’18 became the pastor of Bethel Reformed Church in Little Rock, IA in the spring of 2019.

Antioch Podcast has welcomed Libby Huizenga ’19 to their team of podcasters producing episodes on the subject of biblical anti-racism. A ministry of Madison Church of Grand Rapids, MI, the podcast can be heard at antiochpodcast.org/
Dear Friends,

I could not be more thankful for the way that you have made last fiscal year a “banner year!” In December of 2018, we announced the successful completion of the Our New Day campaign (totaling over $16M in building gifts and over $10M in endowment gifts). At the same time, we celebrated the opening of the Jack and Mary DeWitt Learning Center and the Dick and Ethie Haworth Leadership Center. On the pages of this issue of The Commons, you will see the impact this has already had on life at Western. We will see future impact for years to come as students, faculty, and staff use these amazing resources to the glory of God.

I’d like to articulate one area of particular need this year…the Seminary Fund. I recently met with a supporter who was considering a gift to WTS. I encouraged him to support the Seminary Fund. He said something like: “Is that operations? Isn’t that lawncare and keeping the lights on?” Well, yes and no. It does cover maintenance, but it does much more. It funds our programs (professor/staff salaries, materials, technology, etc.). Supporters of the seminary cover about one third of these costs each year, allowing us to keep tuition low and help students avoid debt. When he heard that his gift to the Seminary Fund fuels teaching and keeps costs low for students, he was happy to make a special gift!

Your investment in students is being stewarded well and is having a significant impact. I hope that when you give this year, you will think of how your money makes it possible for someone like your pastor or your future pastor to pursue their calling. Leadership matters, and you make it possible for future leaders to prepare for ministry when you give to Western.

Thank you and God bless you,

Andy Bast
Director of Development

Programs Offered:

- Graduate Program for Christian Educators
- Graduate Certificate in Pastoral Ministry
- Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry
- Master of Arts
- Master of Divinity (in-residence and distance learning)
- Dual Track Master of Divinity - Master of Social Work
- Master of Theology
- Doctor of Ministry

students 2018-19

152
Master of Divinity
(54 graduated)

43
Master of Arts
(7 graduated)

4
Master of Theology
(4 graduated)

56
Doctor of Ministry
(6 graduated)

42
Graduate & Certificate Programs
(10 graduated)

12
Non-degree
**Operating Income:**
- Draw on endowment ....... $2,403,404
- Tuition .................................. 2,024,378
- Seminary Fund gifts ........... 1,858,375
- Seminary Fund - estate gifts ... 500,000
- Pledged Income .................. 409,469
- Auxiliary enterprises & other... 136,876

**Total:** ................................ $7,332,502

**Origin of gifts to the Seminary Fund:**
- Individuals ...................... $714,621
- Foundations/Corporations ..... 629,637
- Estate Gifts ......................... 500,000
- RCA Assessments ................. 283,000
- Churches............................ 128,512
- Alumni/ae ........................... 102,605

**Total:** ................................ $2,358,375

**Gifts to all funds:**
- Our New Day campaign........ $3,767,827
- Seminary Fund .................... 2,358,375
- Endowment/Restricted .......... 1,131,334
- Donor-advised student aid ...... 387,021
- Annuity Funds ..................... 35,000

**Total:** ................................ $7,679,557

Any surplus each year is added to reserves.
How you help our students:

Direct Student Support from Donors:
- 21 people contributed directly to the tuition of 20 students through the Donor-Advised Fund, averaging 1,800 per student
- 13 RCA & CRC Classes supported 37 students, averaging $2,155 per student
- 54 churches supported 68 students, averaging $2,768 per student
- 8 organizations (corporations, schools & foundations) gave to 8 students, averaging $2,981 per student

Support through Estate planning:
  Unrestricted:
  - Richard DeVos
  - Carl Dinges
  - Edna Haworth
  - Johnson Trust
  - Henry John Schuller
  - Swager Family Trust
  - Jeanella TenHave
  Toward established or new scholarships:
  - Ronald Kolenbrander
  - Arlene McGrath
  - Betty Miller
  - Robert & Donna VanVoorst

2018-19 Cost of Attendance:
- $458 per credit hour
- Yearly tuition for Master of Divinity:
  - $14,656 In-Residence
  - $8,794 Distance Learning
- Actual cost of educating one In-Residence M.Div. student per year: $32,919
  - Amount covered through the Seminary Fund: 32%
- Average scholarship given:
  - $5,375 In-Residence
  - $1,960 Distance Learning

You are making a difference!

Educational Debt, Class of 2019:
- 54 M.Div. and 7 M.A. graduates
- 61% incurred no seminary debt!
- 44% with no educational debt at all
- Total seminary debt carried: $833,716
- Average seminary debt among 24 borrowers: $34,738

115 students received scholarships!

New scholarships established in 2018-19:
- Steve & Mienieke Thomas Scholarship
- Rev. William & Helene Kolenbrander Endowment for Rural Church Ministry (established through the will of Dr. Ronald Kolenbrander of Orange City, IA and named after his parents)

Scholarships established in Our New Day campaign (funded through estate plans):
- Alan & Marcia Elgersma
- Judith Hazelton
- Jim & Wanda Veld
- John & Helene Zwyghuizen Memorial Fund

Thank you for all you do to make seminary affordable for ministry leaders!
The Class of 2019

Presenting the largest graduating class in the history of Western Theological Seminary!

Here is where our M.Div. graduates are serving:

- **Ashley Adkins**
  Associate Pastor, St. John’s Methodist Church, Prospect, KY

- **Katie Alley**
  Director of Youth Ministry, Second Reformed Church, Pella, IA

- **Alex Arthurs**
  Pastor, Peapack Reformed Church, Gladstone, NJ

- **Aric Balk**
  Ellen Balk
  Co-Pastors, Parkway Community Church, Hicksville, NY

- **Cameron Beidler**
  Assistant Pastor, Hager Park Reformed Church, Hudsonville, MI

- **Rebecca Boogaart-Cooper**
  Realtor, The MORE Group, Saline, MI

- **Marcia Bosma**
  Pastor of Spiritual Formation and Missions, Faith Reformed Church, Zeeland, MI

- **Joel Boyd**
  Senior Pastor, First Congregational Church of Marshfield, Marshfield, MA

- **Emmett Brown**
  In search process

- **Dan Buck**
  In search process

- **Qiaoqiao Chen**
  Further studies (ThM), Western Theological Seminary, Holland, MI

- **John Cleveringa**
  Pastor of Congregational Life, Haven Christian Reformed Church, Zeeland, MI

- **Rosalyn De Koster**
  Director of Youth Ministry, American Reformed Church, Orange City, IA

- **Tim DeCamp**
  In search process

- **Josh DeHaan**
  Young Life Area Director, Lakeshore Young Life, Grand Haven, MI

- **Katlyn DeVries**
  Writing Assistant, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, MI

- **Todd Eckstein**
  In search process

- **Catherine Evans-Smith**
  Associate Pastor, Tapestry Church, Oakland, CA

- **Anna Gordon**
  Chaplain Resident, Gundersen Health System, LaCrosse, WI

- **Sheri Harris**
  Administrative Assistant, First Presbyterian Church, Holland, MI

- **Joshua Hinken**
  Senior High & Young Adult Pastor, First Evangelical Covenant Church, Grand Rapids, MI

- **Rob Housman**
  Campus Pastor, South Harbor Church, Byron Center, MI

- **Agustin Hubert**
  Pastor, Longview Church, Phoenix, AZ

- **Elizabeth Huizenga**
  Library Services Specialist, Kuyper College, Grand Rapids, MI

- **Mark Immink**
  Youth Pastor, North Point Church, Plainwell, MI

- **Noelle Jacobs**
  Communications Coordinator & CM@GVSU New Student Engagement Pastor, Evergreen Ministries, Hudsonville, MI

- **Renee Jelsma**
  Interim Pastor, Maplewood Reformed Church, Holland, MI

- **Nora Johnson**
  Chaplain Resident, St. Francis Medical Center, Peoria, IL

- **Ben Kampmeier**
  Lead Pastor, Corinth Reformed, Byron Center, MI

- **Jessica LaMer**
  In search process

- **Andrew LaTeer**
  Albany Synod Fellow, Kiskatom Reformed Church, Kiskatom, NY

- **Nathan Longfield**
  In search process

- **Chris Marquez**
  Pastor, Reformed Church of Los Angeles, Lynwood, CA

- **Keith Moody**
  Sexton, Wyckoff Reformed Church, Wyckoff, NJ

- **Christa Mooi**
  Director of Operations, First Reformed Church, Sioux Center, IA

- **Cassie Nelson-Rogalski**
  In search process

- **Matt Nelson-Rogalski**
  Albany Synod Fellow, First Reformed Church of Bethlehem, Albany, NY

- **Hannah Barker Nickolay**
  Stay-at-home Mom, Hudsonville, MI

- **Daniel Stidham**
  Campus Pastor, Calvary Church, Oak Lawn, IL

- **Steven VanWyhe**
  Family Pastor, Carmel Reformed Church, Rock Valley, IA

- **Joshua Westhouse**
  Chaplain Resident, Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services, Grand Rapids, MI

- **Matthew Wohlford**
  Pastor, Nooksack Valley Reformed Church, Nooksack, WA

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**To all those supporting WTS:**

Thank you for forming these future leaders!
Friends, I consider it an incredible privilege to serve as the 12th President of Western Theological Seminary. At a time when the landscape of higher education and theological education seems rocky, Western is poised for a thriving and sustainable future.

Why am I so hopeful? Three reasons. First is our distinguished faculty. Our faculty members are not only top-notch scholars in their fields, but they also combine their heads with their hearts and hands. They are not merely scholars or researchers; they are teachers intensely focused on the formation of the whole person in their engagement with our students. (Read the story about the Girod Fellowship on page 4 for an example of that.)

Second is our campus. Western Theological Seminary enjoys beautiful facilities that allow us to create a worshipful and reflective context for education and formation.

And that leads to the third reason for my hopefulness: you, our friends. We are able to educate students because of the prayers, recommendations, and generous gifts from our alumni/ae, donors, and friends. Please continue to pray for us. Please continue to point others in our direction. Please continue to support us.

We are committed to preparing women and men to serve God’s church in these uncertain times, and we will do so because what is at stake is not simply an institution but a matter of eternal consequence: declaring the love of God to His creation, so that the whole world may come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ and be reconciled to our God.

For Christ alone,