



The COMMONS

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Dear Friends,

Over the last few months, I have met with several churches who were looking for pastors. Some of these churches are growing, and having a difficult time finding pastoral candidates that can help guide their growing congregations. Other churches have been without a pastor for some time. When I met with the chair of one search committee, he asked, “Do you think something is wrong with us? Why won’t anyone be our pastor?”



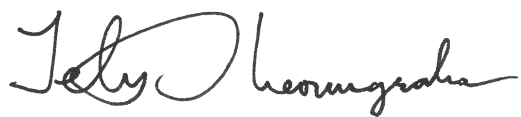
Friends, we are entering a season of transition. A few decades ago, when 90% of adults in the United States self-identified as Christians, church attendance perhaps was taken for granted. Likewise, seminaries across the country enjoyed a period of stellar growth from the late 80s through the early 2000s, as people responded to the call of ministry.

Today, the latest data suggests that up to 30% of U.S. adults identify as having no faith affiliation whatsoever. Researchers project that if the current trends continue, in another few decades, less than half of U.S. adults will be Christians.

This means that, more than ever, we must be singularly focused on raising up the next generation of pastors and leaders. We do this not to reverse a trend, but because we believe that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is good news to a broken and hurting world. We believe that by following Jesus and the message and teaching of Scripture, life on earth will flourish with healing, reconciliation, justice, peace, and hope—for us, our families, and our communities.

This is why your gifts matter. They are not simply gifts to Western Theological Seminary, but for the Church to advance the good news of the Gospel. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for your partnership in our mission to form, by God’s grace, women and men for faithful Christian ministry and participation in the Triune God’s ongoing redemptive work in the world. But most importantly, thank you for your partnership in the Gospel (Phil. 1:5).

Gratefully,



FELIX THEONGRAHA, PH.D.

President

147TH COMMENCEMENT AT WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



"I wish you all, above everything else, in all your ministerial endeavors to come, the most profound share of the peace that only God can give. That you, too, may be shining examples of this mystery of prayer and joy in your work and vocation."

**- REV. PROFESSOR SARAH COAKLEY
COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER**





Western Theological Seminary celebrated the 2023 graduates at commencement on Saturday, April 29. This marked the 147th commencement ceremony, which was held at Dimment Memorial Chapel on the campus of Hope College.

The class of 2023 was awarded 13 Doctor of Ministry degrees, 11 Master of Divinity degrees, 17 Master of Arts degrees, 5 Master of Theology degrees, and 21 Graduate certificates. Graduates in the class of 2023 represented countries from around the world: Myanmar, India, Columbia, Brazil, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Uganda, and the United States.

Rev. Professor Sarah Coakley was chosen as the commencement speaker for the 147th commencement ceremony. Sarah Coakley has had an international career as a systematic theologian and philosopher of religion, retiring recently from the Norris-Hulse Professorship of Divinity at Cambridge University.

Dr. Coakley was ordained as an Anglican/Episcopal priest in 2001 and has served in several parishes in the USA and the United Kingdom. Her chief concern in the pastoral context has always been to assist the church in integrating its calls to prayer, theological understanding, and social transformation. She is currently completing her second volume of systematics on sin and racism.

Ananta Dahal, D.Min., and Jiju Samuel, D.Min.



Maddie Vonk, M.Div., with Grace Thompson, current M.Div./MSW student





Graduates of the class of 2023



Emily Anderson, M.Div., receives her degree



Kyle Lake, M.A., receives his degree



DISABILITY AND MINISTRY: IMAGINING MORE FAITHFUL AND INCLUSIVE CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRIES

This Doctor of Ministry cohort creates the space and time necessary for leaders to develop the concepts and seek the habits, skills, and practices needed for leading a church of people with all kinds of abilities. The primary focus of this program was to develop a better understanding of disability in the U.S., advance a contextualized practical theology of disability, and work out both implications for Christian ministry. Led by Dr. Benjamin T. Conner, this cohort launched in August 2020.

IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT: LEADING GLOBAL CHRISTIAN RENEWAL MOVEMENTS

Led by Dr. Alvin Padilla and Dr. Hector Ortiz, this cohort launched in September 2020 to focus on the nature and dynamics of ministry in Christian renewal movements. The aim was to help pastors, denominational, and community leaders grow in their skills in serving renewal churches and the increasingly multi-cultural communities where renewal movements are flourishing.



PASTORAL LEADERSHIP IN LATIN AMERICAN CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Led by Dr. Alvin Padilla, this Doctor of Ministry cohort partnered with The Church of God of Prophecy to focus on practical ministry in the Latin American context. The cohort launched in 2019 and met in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, where students received instruction in Spanish from WTS faculty and adjuncts.

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI 2023

REV. DR. MILLY MATURU EREMA

By Lois Tverberg
Speaker, author, and friend of Dr. Erema

Rev. Dr. Milly Maturu Erema '01 was one of the first students from Uganda to study at Western Theological Seminary. After she received her Th.M. from WTS in 2001, she was ordained as an Anglican priest. With her husband Sam Erema, who is also a priest, she co-led St. Paul's Anglican Church in Okuvu, Uganda, for several years. She then earned a Ph.D. in 2018 through Asbury Seminary and became one of two women in Uganda to be ordained and to hold a Ph.D.



For almost twenty years, Dr. Erema has been a lecturer and professor at Uganda Christian University, teaching Hebrew, Greek, Church History, Theology, Youth Ministry, and numerous classes on the Old and New Testaments. She has had an enormous influence on Uganda's future pastors by lecturing and overseeing their graduate work. She guides and grades their thesis research and evaluates their pastoral skills in their field placements.

Dr. Erema has also been active in addressing women's

issues. She has spoken at clergy conferences on the struggles of women in ministry in Uganda. In 2023, she will publish her first book, *Tears on the Altar: The Challenge of Clergywomen's Ministry in Biblical Perspective*, which discusses the many biblical texts that support women in ministry.

OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

Dr. Erema's career has been marked by significant barriers and challenges. In her early years, Dr. Erema's home in northern Uganda was devastated by two horrific wars that ravaged her family. As a teenager, she lived as a war refugee for almost two years.

During Idi Amin's reign in the late 1970s, she was just thirteen when her father died, and her mother suddenly needed to raise nine children on her own. Soon afterward, they lost their home, forcing them to travel on foot to Sudan, where many succumbed to disease and death.

Dr. Erema's parents had been teachers, and she was always at the top of her class. Rebels forced schools to close when she was only in eighth grade, so she spent years away from school. While raising her six children and working to support her family, she studied independently to finish high school and pass the national exams.

EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY AT WTS

During her time at WTS, Dr. Erema studied in the Th.M. program under the supervision of Dr. Tom Boogaart, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament. Dr. Boogaart recalled his amazement at Dr. Erema's intimate understanding of the ancient world when she took his Old Testament course, attributing her





Dr. Erema with students from Kingsway Christian High School

connection to her heritage as one of the Lugbara people, who, until 50 years ago, lived much as Ancient Near Eastern peoples did.

“Sometimes, you encounter a person and a life so astonishing that you are moved to a deep respect and appreciation for the individual as well as a deep gratitude and praise to our faithful God. Dr. Erema is one such individual. WTS is privileged to have been a part of her educational journey. We are so pleased to honor her as the Distinguished Alumni of the Year.”

- DR. FELIX THEONUGRAHA
PRESIDENT

KINGSWAY CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL

When Dr. Erema arrived in Michigan in 2000, another war had broken out in northern Uganda. Her mother and brothers’ families were sent to an internal settlement camp for their safety. She was studying at WTS when she learned that rebels had overwhelmed the camp’s guards and killed many inhabitants, including four of her brothers. This meant that she would be responsible for educating her brothers’ 22 orphaned children.

Because of the need to educate her nieces and nephews, the Eremas established Kingsway Christian High School in 2008 with the help of several churches in Holland, Michigan. Additionally, the money that Dr. Erema saved from doing work-study

at WTS paid for the land where Kingsway was built! Since 2008, the school has rescued hundreds of other youth who endured the horrors of war. Kingsway has paved the way for many young people to get a strong, faith-based education and find employment. It continues to redeem lives today.

FROM TRAGEDY TO BLESSING

Dr. Erema has also helped heal northern Uganda by working with a charitable organization to bring Ugandan doctors to host temporary medical camps in her area. After all the wars, no medical facilities remained in her hometown. In response, she and other pastors ministered to the crowds and shared Christ’s love. The grateful townspeople gave her land to establish a permanent medical clinic there, a project she continues to oversee.

Over the years, Dr. Erema’s unstoppable faith in Christ has turned her family’s tragedies into blessings for thousands of northern Ugandans. Western Theological Seminary is delighted to be able to honor her through this award. †



To learn more about Dr. Erema’s work at Kingsway Christian High School, visit KingswayUganda.com.



PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

By Dr. Felix Theonugraha
President

We live in a rapidly changing society. Notably, the religious landscape of the United States is undergoing a transformation unlike anything we have experienced in the history of this country. Studies have shown that the number of Christians is declining, while the number of people who consider themselves unaffiliated with any religion continues to rise.

Western Theological Seminary is also navigating this rapid transformation. WTS was established in 1866 when seven of the first eight Hope College graduates petitioned the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America for permission to continue their ministerial preparation in Holland, Michigan, instead of traveling back to the East Coast. The General Synod agreed and established the seminary to meet the needs of the mid-western churches. Now, 157 years later, the mission and purpose have remained unchanged: to form women and men for faithful Christian ministry and participation in the Triune God's ongoing redemptive work in the world.

In other words, we exist for the sake of the Church.

At the same time, the denominational and educational landscape we find ourselves in today is drastically different from 1866. According to the Association of Theological

Schools, by 2030, the most common seminary student will be attending a school that does not belong to or receive support from the same denomination as their parents, and will most likely end up serving at a church that belongs to a movement, network, or denomination that did not exist 30 years ago.

A SHIFT IN THEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE

Western Theological Seminary is already experiencing this profound shift. A mere 25 years ago, the dominant majority of our students came from the Reformed Church in America (RCA), and almost all of our faculty members were ordained in the RCA. Today, only about 25% of our students come from the RCA, while only about 50% of our faculty is ordained in the RCA.

In light of this shift, WTS requested and received permission from the General Synod to become an officially related seminary of the RCA (just like Hope College, Northwestern College, and Central College) instead of a seminary owned and owned operated by the RCA. This new status will make a tangible difference in our ability to recruit students from beyond the RCA and establish partnerships with churches outside the denomination. We are already seeing the fruits of this shift, as denominations such as the Disciples of Christ



and churches from the Presbyterian Church USA have begun sending students to WTS and establishing new scholarships with the seminary.

But what does this mean for you, our churches, loyal supporters, and partners? In short, you will find more of what you have always loved and appreciated about Western Theological Seminary.

You will continue to find a school that is absolutely and unashamedly committed to the historic Christian faith, the authority of scripture, and the flourishing of the Church. You will find faculty members dedicated to our students' holistic formation.

You will find a seminary that continues to be distinctively Reformed, drawing upon the richness of Reformed theology and the depth of the Reformed tradition to inform our theological reflections and preparation for ministry. You will find a seminary that remains unmoved in our commitment to equip women and men for all levels of ministry. You will find a seminary that is responsive to the critical needs of the day by developing new programs in Mental Health Counseling and Disability and Ministry so that our students can be equipped to face the urgent challenges of our society. You will find a seminary that continues to grow in our Spanish language programs and engagement with Christians from the majority world, where the Church is bursting at the

“You will continue to find a school that is absolutely and unashamedly committed to the historic Christian faith, the authority of scripture, and the flourishing of the Church.”

seams and growing in leaps and bounds. In other words, you will find a seminary that will continue to graduate pastors to serve and lead the Church with you.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

We are indeed living in a time of rapid, challenging shifts.

Yet, I am filled with hopeful excitement for the critical

role that Western Theological Seminary has played and will continue to play in forming and equipping students who will faithfully lead the Church, proclaim the good news of the Gospel, and embody the love of Jesus Christ in a broken and hurting world that desperately needs Jesus, the hope of the world. By God's grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we will meet the challenges of today and the problems of

tomorrow for the flourishing of the Church. †

Dr. Felix Theonugraha is an ordained minister in the Reformed Church in America. A pastor's son who first felt a call to ministry at age nine, Dr. Theonugraha was born in Indonesia to Chinese Christian parents. When he was 12, his father accepted a call to pastor a Mandarin-speaking congregation in the San Francisco Bay area, which led their family to immigrate to the United States.

Dr. Theonugraha majored in Psychology and English at the University of California, Berkeley, and then attended seminary at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He completed his Ph.D. at Trinity in Educational Studies. Dr. Theonugraha and his wife, Dr. Esther Theonugraha, have two children and reside in Zeeland, MI.

DISCOVERING THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH

The following excerpt was taken from a chapel sermon written by Tanner Huizenga, a current in-residence M.Div. student, during the spring 2023 semester.

My hope for the church has recently been encouraged by crying in a storage room. Before I explain, I want to give us some context for Paul's letters to Timothy. Paul is Timothy's mentor, and in his letter, he instructs Timothy to help the Church in Ephesus find its way back to following Christ's ways.

The church in Ephesus had mixed the ancient Greek and contemporary Roman cultural beliefs in their worship, preaching, and life. They reached the point where they, as a church, created something entirely different from the message of Jesus.

With that in mind, let me read the encouragement that Paul gives Timothy as he embarks on his journey to nudge the church of Ephesus back toward Christ.

"When I left for Macedonia, I urged you to stay there in Ephesus and stop those whose teaching is contrary to the truth. Don't let them waste their time in endless discussion of myths and spiritual pedigrees. These things only lead to meaningless speculations, which don't help people live a life of faith in God. The purpose of my instruction is that all believers would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and genuine faith. But some people have missed this whole point. They have turned away from these things and spend their time in meaningless discussions. They want to

be known as teachers of the law of Moses, but they don't know what they are talking about, even though they speak so confidently." 1 Timothy 1:3-7

...filled with love from a pure heart and genuine faith. My heart yearns for that. I imagine that your heart yearns for that as well.

Yet, we live in Ephesus. Our churches today suffer in a similar way to the church in Ephesus. The Ephesian church had lost its focus on the foundation of God's love, and lost itself in the Roman and Greek cultural influences that pushed against the truth of Jesus. Not only did they mix all these different beliefs, they, as a community, spent their time speculating and arguing about what the church's beliefs should be. In one sense, the church should be having healthy discussions about its collective beliefs, but their discussions turned into arguments, which led to the absence of love, genuine faith, and pure hearts.

"So where do we find genuine faith and hope for the church in the context of all this brokenness and hopelessness? Personally, I have found it from being a witness to students' hearts."

So where do we find genuine faith and hope for the church in the context of all this brokenness and hopelessness?

Personally, I have found it from being a witness to students' hearts. As a youth pastor, I've heard my students ask big questions that reflect their even bigger hearts. These students have shown me that before we can ever hope to be a community that points others to Jesus or a saving witness to the world around us, we must first posture ourselves to be fully present to the people around us.

In the summer of 2022, we took our middle school youth group on a mission trip to Charleston, West Virginia. Each night, we set aside 'group time' before bed, which was a time for our youth group to discuss the day. Our students picked the storage room in the basement as our group time meeting space. This storage room was accompanied by stained cement floors, several old plastic Christmas trees, a nasty yet comfortable leather couch, and chairs made for toddlers. But the students didn't mind; that was our spot.

One night during group time, Andrew, one of our students, shared a story about another student he had met that day named Armani. Armani met Andrew while serving at a shelter for women struggling with addiction. Andrew began to share that this child was at the shelter because his parents were absent from his life through the struggle of drug abuse. In that absence, his grandfather, who worked at the shelter, stepped in to raise him.

Armani's story struck a deep chord with Andrew because he, too, had lost both of his parents and was being raised by a grandparent. As Andrew finished his story, he said something that will always stick with me: "Armani was so happy, even despite all that had happened to him." As he said this, I began to think that Andrew, in a way, got a chance to care for his younger self—to look his own story in the eyes and see all that likely confused and hurt him when he was Armani's age—and see his younger self smile back at him.

If you knew Andrew, you'd know that nothing in the world would break his spirit for life. Through his story, he set the tone

"Just like those youth group students have modeled so well, the call and responsibility for each of us is to posture ourselves as learners and listeners of the teacher Jesus."

for that room to be a space where other students could freely share. More students began recognizing that the pain and struggle they felt so alone in was a shared struggle of hurt and loss. As students shared how God had been reconciling the painful parts of their lives, they collectively laid hands on each person and surrounded them in prayer. Hands-on prayer turned into a giant group hug after each student shared. After we had prayed for everyone, a student said

something that I will always remember: "I forgot who I was hugging!"



Through all the hugs and prayers, each student was held by God in a way that will forever change the way I see the church. What kind of community becomes so present to the trials and tribulations of their peers that they simply forget who they are hugging, comforting, or extending compassion to? I saw so many students learn about God's

love with a posture of listening to the pain of others to reach a more compassionate understanding of one another. That's genuine faith, that's a pure heart, that's God's love.

Just like those youth group students have modeled so well, the call and responsibility for each of us is to posture ourselves as learners and listeners of the teacher Jesus. Sit at the feet of Jesus and be a lifelong learner of his heart. When we do that, we offer ourselves to become a more compassionate community because we have trained our ears to hear his pain stories. We become a compassionate community filled with love from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and genuine faith. †


CHURCHES IN MISSION BEGINS NEW COHORT JOURNEY


By Hannah Stevens
Director for Churches in Mission

On March 18, 2023, Churches in Mission kicked off its 12-month cohort journey with ten congregations from across the country. Each congregation gathered a team of at least five members to engage in an ethnography-inspired listening and discernment process. Their goal was to collect the stories and perspectives of people in their congregations and those who live and work in the church's neighborhood.

In March, each team identified the boundaries of their church's neighborhood to focus their exploration. The teams will talk to people who live and work in their neighborhood and look at various demographics, such as transportation, school access, and local business. During their time together in March, they also practiced listening skills and conducted their first interviews. Each congregational team began the work with a desire to see how God is moving in their congregations and neighborhoods. They desire to grow in their ability to be good neighbors and are eager to develop new partnerships.

The congregations participating in the Churches in Mission cohort are curious about the people who live and work in their church's neighborhood. Through this process, they will meet new people and ask to hear their stories. They will receive coaching throughout their discoveries and discern how to respond. Because every church and neighborhood is unique, we anticipate that each church's response will also be unique. Some churches are in residential areas, while others are in business districts. A few of these congregations are made up primarily of commuters, while others live in the local neighborhood.

Faithfully engaging local mission will look different in each context. These teams are on a journey to listen to, be grateful for, and serve well the unique neighborhood in which they dwell. 

 Sign up to receive our monthly newsletter by visiting wtsem.info/cimnewsletter.

Learn more about Churches in Mission at WTS by visiting wtsem.info/ciminfo.

Churches In Mission will offer coaching cohorts for first-call pastors and transitioning pastors beginning in fall 2023. If you or someone you know may be interested, contact Hannah Stevens at hannah.stevens@westernsem.edu.

Abundant Life Reformed Church in Wyckoff, NJ



Central Park Reformed Church in Holland, MI



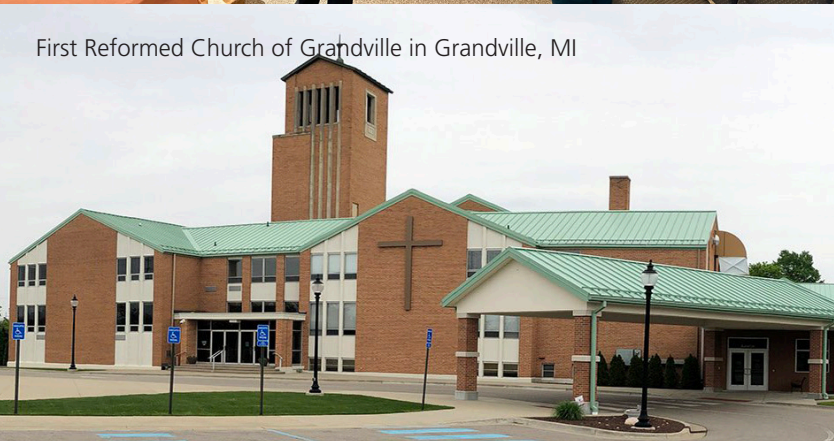
Connection Church in Roswell, GA



Cornerstone Community Church in Chowchilla, CA



First Reformed Church of Grandville in Grandville, MI



Gilbert Presbyterian Church in Gilbert, AZ



Maple Avenue Church in Holland, MI



Mercy Road Church in Redford, MI



Morning Star Church in Las Cruces, NM



Timnath Presbyterian Church in Timnath, CO



INTRODUCING DR. ELIZABETH PENNOCK

**Associate Professor of Counseling and Director of the
Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program**

Dr. Elizabeth Pennock joined the faculty in June to serve as Associate Professor of Counseling and Director of the Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program, which will begin receiving applications summer of 2023.

“Dr. Pennock brings the sought-after combination of a skilled counselor, competent teacher, and gifted administrator needed for this role,” said Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Kristen Deede Johnson. “We are tremendously grateful that God opened the way for her to join us to provide leadership alongside current faculty member Dr. Chuck DeGroat.

“Dr. Pennock will be a gift to our entire faculty and seminary as well as to the wider church and community, especially in light of today’s mental health crisis.”

**- DR. KRISTEN DEEDE JOHNSON
DEAN AND VICE PRESIDENT OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS**

Dr. Pennock’s areas of expertise include trauma and trauma-informed care, counselor education and supervision, and spirituality and counseling. The dissertation she completed for her Ph.D. in Counselor Education was titled *Trauma-Informed Clergy: An Investigation of Factors Predicting the Trauma-Related Attitudes and Beliefs of Christian Clergy in Florida* (University of Central Florida).



She has specialized training in trauma therapy that informs her research, teaching, and counseling practice.

Dr. Pennock spent seven years doing mission work and church planting in Eastern Europe before pursuing her career in counseling. After completing her master’s in counseling, alongside running a private practice, she spent six years as a missionary member care provider with a large, interdenominational mission agency. In this role, she provided counseling and crisis care to global missionaries, including assessing readiness for ministry of applicants, and training staff members in spiritual and emotional formation and cultural adjustment.



CACREP ACCREDITATION

Recently, Dr. Pennock was involved in helping with the successful initial CACREP (Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs) accreditation efforts for Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida. Western Theological Seminary will be seeking CACREP accreditation for its program.

“The qualifications required to lead a program that receives CACREP accreditation are extensive,” said Dr. Chuck DeGroat, Professor of Pastoral Care and Christian Spirituality. “Dr. Pennock is uniquely qualified and comes to this role deeply committed to Christ and the church. WTS is truly fortunate.”

“Given the severity and complexity of mental health challenges in our communities, churches, and country, we cannot afford to offer anything less than the highest quality counseling program to our students, which is why we sought Dr. Pennock to lead the program.”

- DR. FELIX THEONU GRAHA
PRESIDENT

RESPONDING TO THE NEED

52.9 MILLION

Adults suffered from a mental illness in 2020. This number represents 21% of all U.S. adults

24.3 MILLION

Adults received mental health services in 2020

14.8 MILLION

Adults had at least one major depressive episode in 2020

*The data presented here is from the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).



“CACREP accreditation is the gold standard for counseling programs,” shared President Dr. Felix Theonugraha. “Already, seven states require students to graduate from a CACREP-accredited school to qualify for licensure. An additional 21 states have legislation in the works requiring counselors to graduate from a CACREP-accredited school to be eligible for licensure. I predict that Michigan will require CACREP accreditation in just a few years.”

While launching a program that seeks to be accredited by CACREP requires a deep foundation, WTS still feels the urgent need to offer courses that will help pastors and lay leaders respond to the mental health challenges that they are encountering.

LAUNCHING THE PROGRAM

Applications for the Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program are expected to be available in late summer of 2023, with for-credit counseling courses that will serve both as continuing education as well as an on-ramp for those who desire to enroll in the counseling program. Additionally, the inaugural class of the Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program will be joining the WTS community fall of 2024.

Prospective students, current pastors, and ministry leaders will also have the opportunity to take two courses during the 2023-2024 academic year at a discounted rate. These bundled courses are designed to equip current leaders to engage in trauma-informed ministry in light of the contemporary mental health crisis.

“In Matthew 5, Jesus begins with an invitation to brokenness and mourning. I’m convinced we need programs that offer a Christian worldview, framing trauma, abuse, and addiction within a Christian context. We are in a season where people are facing doubts and existential questions. Pastors and therapists can help navigate these cultural waters by anchoring them in God and God’s story.”

- DR. CHUCK DEGROAT
PROFESSOR OF PASTORAL CARE



BUILD YOUR TRAUMA-INFORMED PASTORAL CARE SKILLSETS

ROOTED IN MISSION

Western Theological Seminary's MA in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program is rooted in the foundational realities that we are created in and for relationship, as image-bearers of the Trinitarian God and ambassadors of God's shalom in a broken world. We equip women and men to be wise, competent, and hopeful practitioners, attuned to their own selves and stories and anchored in God's story of redemption and restoration. Our relationally-oriented and trauma-informed program offers the most contemporary, research-based training while, at the same time, remaining deeply rooted in a longstanding Christian soul care tradition. Students are equipped to serve in a variety of counseling settings with a diverse array of clients of varying backgrounds or faiths. Students are invited into a rich cohort experience at Western Theological Seminary within a community that pauses daily for prayer and worship and celebrates Communion every Friday. ✝

WTS is excited to offer a two-course bundle for prospective students, current pastors, and ministry leaders to strengthen their pastoral care capacities and build a trauma-informed ministry. Applications for the two-course bundle are now open.

Both courses are designed to be impactful and accessible, offered online and at a discounted rate.

2-COURSE BUNDLE DETAILS

Fall 2023: Trauma-Informed Care in Ministry with Dr. Elizabeth Pennock

Spring 2024: Christian Interior Life with Dr. Chuck DeGroat

➔ Submit your application before August 1 by visiting wtsem.info/counselingbundle.



DON'T DISABLE YOUR YOUTH MINISTRY

Photo by Caleb Randall of Randall Productions

By Dr. Benjamin T. Conner
Professor of Practical Theology and Director of the
Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry

While issues of class, race, ethnicity, and economic marginalization are beginning to be addressed by theologies of youth ministry, youth ministers have largely been led by de-contextualized, universalizing, ableist, white, male-dominated, middle-class theology. Consequently, it is not surprising that the lived experience of marginalization related to disability rarely enters the theological imagination of the youth minister.

What makes the absence of disability concerns in youth ministry so odd is the prevalence of disability among young people in the United States. People with disabilities can be considered the largest minority group and, if abstracted as a group, includes a collection of people who can be found in every class, race, ethnicity, and economic circumstance. The fact that eighteen to twenty percent of the population has a disability and thirteen percent of U.S. children and youth in public schools receive special education¹ suggests that a disability touches nearly every young person in the U.S.

The most common way that theologians and youth ministers have engaged people with disabilities has been by addressing the disability as a perceived

individual deficiency and including the disabled person in an existing program. In youth ministry, people with disabilities have been made targets of mission and evangelism rather than considered co-participants in the *Missio Dei*. Or, they have been managed as objects in the form of “inclusion” rather than being understood as members of the body of Christ who fundamentally belong and whose contributions are essential for the flourishing of community. Consequently, youth ministers and the theologians who support them have unwittingly perpetuated the ableist biases that are inherent in our youth ministry architecture (which includes theological frameworks and programming). Their theology is never challenged; their programs are never reimagined from the perspective of disability.

“I believe that the discipline of missiology could help youth ministers to engage disability in terms of gains to theology, mission, community, and ecclesiology rather than in terms of simple inclusion.”

That is to say, through missiological categories, concepts, and practices, disability could be reconceived positively in the church in a way that renews and enriches youth ministry and the church. Beyond the conceptual challenges, the presence of adolescents with disabilities in our youth groups can stimulate us to engage in a

¹ http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp

kind of contextual theologizing that has the potential to change the theological questions we ask together, open up new ways of interacting with each other, and expand our capacity to know and be known as adolescents with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This challenges what practical theologian John Swinton calls our “hopeless dependence” on our intellect. Young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities can help the congregation be more attuned to non-linear, intuitive, non-symbolic, or even non-agential ways of responding to proclamation and evangelism. They remind us that human personhood is a dynamic concept and that the individual call to discipleship requires participating in the ongoing redemptive mission of God in Christ as part of a community—we all have gifts and needs.

“Viewed this way, young people with disabilities are both an essential part of the diversity of the human experience, and their contribution, gifts, perspectives, and weaknesses are necessary if the church is to have a relevant witness.”

Let me be more specific: What intellectual capacities, social skills, or physical abilities are required to bear witness to the Spirit?

The power of our witness does not originate from within ourselves; we are what Lesslie Newbigin describes as a community that serves as sign, instrument, and foretaste of the reign of God. In that community, the Holy Spirit is the guarantor of the pluriformity of Christian witness as the Spirit gifts the community with what it needs for upbuilding of the church and for announcing (in word and deed) the kingdom of God. That is to say, as Pentecostal theologian and disability scholar Amos Yong suggests, the many tongues of Pentecost issue in many forms of testimony—not simply in terms of language, but also in terms of ability. Against an inclusion model where an “us” has to include “them” in the ministry and witness of the church, Yong imagines that, “the outpouring of the



Spirit unleashes many tongues and many senses—many different communicative modalities—to bear witness to and receive the witness of the wondrous works of God. All forms and all types of dis/abilities, then, would be possible conduits for the Spirit’s revelatory work.”²

As I have written elsewhere, the absence of adolescents with disabilities, the loss of their presence, concerns, and perspectives, diminishes the fitness of our witness. No one is so impaired that they can’t bear the witness of the Spirit, and no single person should be disabled from participating in the church’s witness.³ †

Dr. Conner is a Professor of Practical Theology and Director of the Center for Disability and Ministry at Western Theological Seminary, the only program of its kind in the U.S. Before joining the WTS faculty, he ran a ministry to and with adolescents with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

➔ To learn more about Dr. Ben Conner’s upcoming Doctor of Ministry cohort, visit wtsem.info/youth-ministry-cohort.

² Yong, Amos. *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A new vision of the people of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011, 72.

³ Conner, Benjamin T. “Enabling Witness: Disability in Missiological Perspective” *Journal of Disability and Religion* 19.1, 15-29.

WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY FACULTY STAND OUT IN THE ACADEMY

By Katlyn DeVries

Writing Assistant and Girod Program Assistant

In the classroom, whether in person or online, WTS professors are known for their passion in subject material, care in teaching, and high expectations for student engagement and growth. As a former student, I can say with confidence that I looked to my professors as ‘the experts.’ They challenged me and walked alongside me as I grew to understand my calling to be a faithful follower of Jesus and a leader in Christ’s church.

Our faculty aren’t simply respected within our own institution—did you know that WTS faculty are widely recognized as thought leaders in the highest academic circles?

Here are just a few recent publications of authoritative scholarly works featuring our faculty.

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF REFORMED THEOLOGY

Oxford University Press [OUP], 2020

OUP is the largest academic publisher in the world. In addition to stand-alone books, OUP produces a Handbook series, each volume featuring essays written by the top scholars in a particular field. Scholars are commissioned by invitation to share cutting-edge research that will shape the future of academic discussion on the topic. The 2020 publication of *The Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology* features three WTS professors: Dr. Suzanne McDonald for her chapter, “John Owen’s Discourse on the Holy Spirit;” Dr. J. Todd Billings for his chapter, “Redemption Applied: Union with Christ;” and Dr. Sue Rozeboom for her chapter, “Liturgy.”





THE NEW CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

Cambridge University Press, 2022

Like OUP, Cambridge publishes a series of “Companion” guides that bring together the top scholars on a variety of subjects. This most recent survey of Christian Doctrine features three WTS professors (more than almost any other institution): Dr. Kristen Deede Johnson for her chapter, “Public Theology;” Dr. Wesley Hill for his chapter, “Apocalyptic Theology;” and Dr. J. Todd Billings for his chapter, “Reformed Catholicity.”

WTS’s faculty are breaking ground in Reformed theology at the highest levels of scholarly discourse. They’re recognized among academics as thought leaders and are invited (at higher rates than most other institutions) to contribute to the most important works in their fields.

These top-tier scholars aren’t just ‘ivory tower’; they are invested in the local church and in the lives of students who attend Western Theological Seminary. They serve as elders and Sunday school teachers in their churches; they contribute resources to their denominations, such as Dr. Travis West’s co-edited



THE WILEY BLACKWELL COMPANION TO KARL BARTH

Wiley Blackwell, 2020

This two-volume guide to Barth is hailed among scholars as “the most comprehensive scholarly survey of Karl Barth’s theology ever published.” Dr. Han-luen Kantzer Komline was invited to contribute a chapter on “Barth and Augustine.”

She Is Called: Women of the Bible series or Dr. J. Todd Billings’s *Understanding the Bible* course. They mentor and shape future ministry leaders both inside and outside of the classroom.

When I graduated in 2019, I prayed that these ‘expert’ theologians had imparted some of their wisdom to me. Now, from my vantage point in the Cook Library, I get a front-row seat to witness how this top-notch scholarship challenges the next generation of church leaders to think more deeply, write more boldly, and speak the good news of Jesus Christ to the world.

Katlyn DeVries is the Writing Assistant and Girod Program Assistant at Western Theological Seminary. She provides academic support to students, reading and discussing their course papers. Additionally, she supports the work of the Gordon H. Girod Research Professor of Reformed Theology.

ISRAEL STUDY TOUR FALL 2022

By Andy Bast
Director of Development

Sh'ma Yisra'eil Adonai Eloheinu Adonai echad. Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength' and 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

This past September, thirty-six of us from California to Michigan to North Carolina started and ended each day by reciting these words of Jesus from Mark 12. The “Shema” became a grounding prayer for our group as we entered God’s grand story of salvation in the place and with the people that God chose to reveal his redemption purposes for the world. It was a remarkable two weeks.

Western Theological Seminary has a rich history of hosting Israel study trips for friends, supporters, and alumni. Many of you may be familiar with Ray Vander Laan, an influential Bible teacher here in West Michigan, who developed the series “That the World May Know.” He and President Emeritus Timothy Brown led a number of trips over the years. In fact, it was on one of these trips that Eugene Peterson became better acquainted with WTS, and now, years later, we are the home of the Eugene Peterson Center.

After a ten-year hiatus – following the retirement of Timothy Brown, the installation of President Felix Theonugraha, and the COVID-19 pandemic – a group of supporters from California (whose parents had attended a trip with Tim and Ray) asked us to host another trip.

Emilie Wierda ‘18, a WTS graduate and current board member, has a particular heart for Israel, so

we reached out to her and she immediately agreed to help organize a trip. Emilie and her husband, Craig, have led these trips for several years with Rod and Libby Van Solkema. We quickly determined that the Van Solkemas could lead a wonderful trip for our supporters in the same spirit as our previous study tours.

Part of Western’s unique mission is that we don’t just want students to gain knowledge – although that is important! We are interested in a transformation of the heart that moves to the hands. This is why our mission includes raising up students who will “participate in God’s ongoing redemptive work in the world.” We wanted this study trip to reflect this same spirit.

As we set out to explore the Biblical text in its original locations and cultures, we strived to experience the text on foot and in community. Our goal was not only to be informed but to be transformed so that our hearts would be awakened in new, powerful ways to see God’s work in our lives.

Our group of 36 arrived in Tel Aviv on October 29, 2022, and for the next two weeks grew in our knowledge and love of God and knowledge and care for each other. It was an absolute privilege as our whole group opened themselves up to this experience. We laughed a lot, shared real struggle and pain in our

lives, experienced physical setbacks, cheered each other on in tough hikes, ate well, made profound connections with the text and the land, and ultimately grew in our love of God, his word, and our new community. I had hoped that God would use this time to draw each of us to him and to get to know each other better, but God did something more. He formed us into what we began to call ourselves: a Bet'ab. The Bet'ab is the Jewish concept of "Father's House," a deeply formed family that truly cares for each other and pursues God's purposes in the world.

Since our time in Israel, our group has continued to meet once a month via Zoom to recount what we learned and the experiences we had and to pray for each other. ✝

➔ If you are interested in participating in a future Israel Study Tour, please email andy.bast@westernsem.edu.





Cohort member Ruth Langkamp



Rev. Dr. Alexia Salvatierra



Cohort member Nasario Peña

2023 STOUTEMIRE LECTURE IN MULTICULTURAL MINISTRY

In February, WTS welcomed Rev. Dr. Alexia Salvatierra, Academic Dean for Centro Latino and Associate Professor of Mission and Global Transformation at Fuller Seminary, as the speaker for the 2023 Leonard F. Stoutemire Lecture in Multicultural Ministry. Dr. Salvatierra spoke on “Becoming the Body of Christ.”

The Justice and Reconciliation Cohort took part in selecting the speaker, planning, and participating in the event. After the 2023 Stoutemire Lecture, the cohort members reflected on the experience and insight that Dr. Salvatierra shared.

What did you learn from Dr. Salvatierra?

The J&R Cohort: Dr. Salvatierra gave a thoughtful and inspiring outlook on what evangelical faith could look like by integrating the Gospel within our calling to seek justice in the world and heal those hurt by injustice.

She offered a refreshing nuance of community work from an evangelical perspective.

Two things that stuck with me were “To faithfully organize, we have to link private pain with public issues” and “We have to move in the world as if God is real and Jesus has risen.”

She modeled guiding people on what questions they should ask by taking time in her lecture to have small group discussions.

I value that she offered both her experience as a practitioner and as an academic. It was inspiring to meet someone who is out in the field doing the work in a way that invites community engagement.

What did you take away from the lecture that can be implemented into your life, ministry, and calling?


The J&R Cohort: A conviction that you just need to try things sometimes, knowing it's just a try, with some serious reflection and prayer on it. After that, keep trying and making adjustments.

The importance of cultivating intergenerational spiritual stamina for the work of God together.

Her commitment to cooperative work—for example, writing her book, *Buried Seeds: Learning from the Vibrant Resilience of Marginalized Christian Communities*, in partnership with someone else reminds us that we can each bring a unique perspective to the table.

What prophetic word did Dr. Salvatierra bring to our community?

The J&R Cohort: Jesus feeding the 5,000 (Matthew 14). Our work of activism starts by first *seeing*, with compassion coming from a place of *looking*, and then *feeling* the pain of those around us.

In the context of power structures and leadership, Dr. Salvatierra encouraged leadership from underrepresented groups as much as possible, not just equal representation. 

➔ To watch a recording of the 2023 Stoutemire Lecture, visit wtsem.info/stoutemirelive.

THE JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION COHORT

The Justice and Reconciliation Cohort aims to equip students with the tools to participate in the Triune God's work of justice and reconciliation within the church and the world.

By sharing their stories, passions, and wisdom gained from lived experiences, students inform and inspire each other toward new and creative approaches to engaging with diversity, equity, justice, and reconciliation issues.

THE STOUTEMIRE LECTURES

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

The lectures equip seminarians, faculty, staff, alumni, and local congregations with resources for increased intercultural competence for greater effectiveness in Christian ministry.



THE BAST PREACHING FESTIVAL 2023

On Monday, March 27, the Bast Preaching Festival returned to Western Theological Seminary after a three-year hiatus. WTS was excited to welcome Dr. Jared E. Alcántara, Professor of Preaching and holder of the Paul W. Powell Endowed Chair in Preaching at George W. Truett Theological Seminary, as the 2023 featured speaker.

In his plenary lecture titled “Sermons 2040: Preaching in an Intercultural Church with an Intercultural Future,” Dr. Alcántara shared that, much like Luke chapter 3, many pastors and Christian leaders feel like they’re going through a wilderness period.

“What does it sound like to preach sermons that are not only timeless, but timely?”

What does it mean to preach sermons that are not just for every age, but for this age in which we find ourselves?”

- DR. ALCÁNTARA

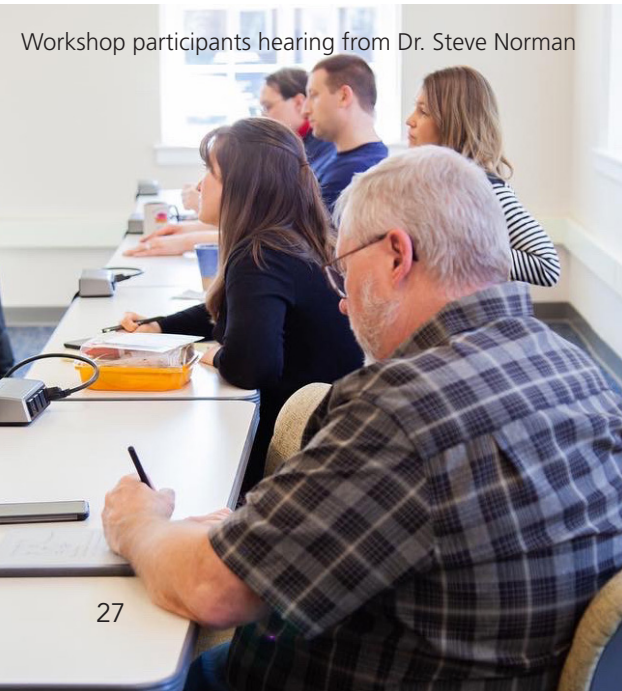
He argued that our preaching should reflect our increasingly intercultural contexts, and shared ways in which we can be prepared to preach sermons in an intercultural church with an intercultural future.

Event attendees also had the opportunity to attend two workshops focused on the topic of preaching.

Dr. Alcántara speaking at the afternoon worship service



Workshop participants hearing from Dr. Steve Norman





Dr. Alcántara giving the plenary lecture titled “Sermons 2040: Preaching in an Intercultural Church with an Intercultural Future”

Workshops speakers included Rev. Jennifer Ryden, Senior Chaplain at Hope College Campus Ministries; Dr. Steve Norman, church planter, pastor, and preaching coach; Dr. Ron Rienstra, WTS Professor of Preaching and Worship Arts and Director of Worship Life; and Rev. David M. Bast, former pastor and President of Words of Hope ministries.

MEET DR. JARED E. ALCÁNTARA

Dr. Jared E. Alcántara is Professor of Preaching and holder of the Paul W. Powell Endowed Chair in Preaching at George W. Truett Theological Seminary. He was born and raised in New Jersey and came to faith in Christ at the age of fourteen.

An ordained Baptist minister, he has served as a youth pastor, associate pastor, and teaching pastor in Illinois, Massachusetts, Oregon, and New Jersey.

Before coming to Truett, he served as an associate professor of homiletics at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois (from 2014-2018).

THE BAST PREACHING FESTIVAL

Western Theological Seminary’s Bast Preaching Initiatives emphasize preaching as a vocation worthy of our lives. We believe it is essential for preachers to dwell in the Bible and for the Bible to dwell in us.

The Bast Preaching Festival is an opportunity for pastors, teachers, and communicators to gather and grow through lectures, workshops, and worship. ✝

➞ To watch a recording of this year’s lecture or to watch past festival lectures, visit wtsem.info/bastrecordings.



SEMESTER HIGHLIGHTS

- 1** On Thursday, April 20, Western Theological Seminary welcomed Rev. Dr. Dennis Voskuil as the second annual plenary speaker of the Founders' Day Lecture. Dr. Voskuil, former WTS President and Professor Emeritus of Church History, presented on the early history and formation of the seminary. The lecture was held at Mulder Chapel and was also livestreamed.

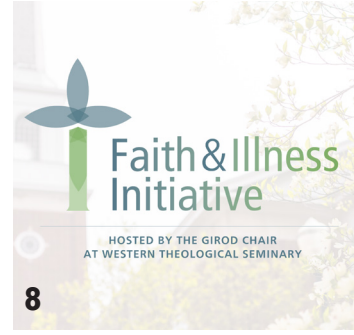
➔ Watch a recording of the lecture at wtsem.info/foundersday2023

- 2** The Spring 2023 Abbey Retreat and Intensives were held on campus in February. During the two-day Abbey Retreat, distance-learning and in-residence students gathered to connect, refresh, and experience God. Students explored the relationship between inner and outer peace through worship, art, song, movement, and spoken word. Following the Abbey Retreat, distance-learning students gathered on campus for the remainder of the week for Spring Intensives.

During the week of the Abbey Retreat and Spring Intensives, the student council team hosted the annual Spring Banquet at Christ Memorial Church in Holland. Many students, staff, and faculty joined together for an evening of community, comedy, and fun.

- 3** The 2023 Day of Giving was held on April 27, 2023. We're tremendously grateful for each person who prayed for our students, spread the word, and gave generously on Day of Giving. This year twice as many people made a first-time gift, and the nearly \$50,000 raised will go to launch new leaders into Gospel-centered ministry. Thank you to each person who contributed to making WTS's Day of Giving a great success!

- 4** The WTS admissions team welcomed several prospective students to campus on Spring Visit Day 2023! Our community enjoyed sharing a glimpse into the life of a student at the seminary. During their campus visit, prospective students were able to experience chapel, visit a class, have lunch with current WTS students, and meet several faculty and staff.



5 On Thursday, April 20, WTS was excited to host donors and friends of the seminary for the 2023 President's Club & Zwemer Society lunch. The luncheon was a joyful time of fellowship and gratitude for those who have supported the seminary for many years. Various students, staff, and friends of the institution offered testimonials and prayers, including past trustee Mary Bauman, recent graduate Brett Busch, and President Dr. Felix Theonugraha.

6 The Eugene Peterson Center for Christian Imagination was excited to welcome Jessie and Leah Roberts (Poor Bishop Hooper) for an evening of song on Thursday, March 2. Participants were led through "The Golgotha Experience" – a musical Lenten journey through the Stations of the Cross utilizing verse, song, and imagery. The event was hosted at Faith Reformed Church in Zeeland, MI.

7 The Eugene Peterson Center for Christian Imagination welcomed Sophronia Scott on Tuesday, April 25 for a reading of her new novel, *Wild, Beautiful, Free* and from her award-winning book, *The Seeker and the Monk: Everyday Conversations with Thomas Merton*. The event was co-sponsored by Big Read Lakeshore.

8 The Faith and Illness Initiative (FII) is a project hosted by the Gordon H. Girod Research Chair in Reformed Theology of Western Theological Seminary to discover a theology of vocation and virtue for Christians living with chronic illness. FII seeks to facilitate an interdisciplinary conversation among pastors, scholars, and medical professionals alongside faithful Christians who live with chronic pain or illness and their caregivers. The goal is to shape the theological imagination of the church on this topic.

This past Spring, FII began recruiting pastors to participate in the 2023 FII Colloquy, which will take place September 18-20, 2023 in Holland, MI.

➔ To learn more about the Faith and Illness Initiative, visit wtsem.info/initiative.

ALUMLINE NEWS

Leon Dykstra '53 was unable to attend his 70th reunion this April but sent greetings to his younger peers. He says at 99 years old, he still remembers that era on campus. His late wife, Ruth, was the office secretary to President J.R. Mulder and served the other professors, including grinding out lesson materials on the mimeograph.

Ronald Smith '62, '63 has retired to Azle, TX after serving at Church of the Valley for six years in Apple Valley, CA. Before that, he served Bethany Reformed Church in Redlands, CA for 25 years in various positions. He and his wife Kathleen are now attending Weatherford Presbyterian Church (PCA).

Melchior VanHatten '62 has been awarded a grant by The Reformed Church Center as a winner of the Alvin J. Poppen-John R. Young Fellow in Reformed Worship for 2022-2023. He has been testing ways to help make the act of confession in worship more personally renewing. This grant will enable him to explore the history and theology of how Reformed people have given meaning to this scriptural concept in their development of worship.

Wendell Karsen '63, '67 and his wife, Renske, were invited to head a delegation to southeast Asia in October 2022 by Knowledge Tree Foundation, which promotes Christian education. Wendell was the keynote speaker at an education conference in Bangkok, Thailand, where the foundation established a K-12 international school to develop a junior college. In addition, Wendell's book, *The Church Under the Cross: Taiwan - the Cross of Fascism*, will be translated and published in Mandarin Chinese by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan. This book, along with his previous publications, are available on Amazon.

Moses Keng '63 has retired and lives in South Lake, TX after serving two churches. He sends greetings to his classmates who celebrated their 60th reunion in April.

John Kleinheksel '63 and his wife, Sharon, live at The Warm Friend in downtown Holland, MI. They are members of Christ Memorial Church and the Faith in Action growth group. John is active on the Kairos West Michigan Board (justice for Palestinians, security for Israelis). He sings in the Evergreen Chorale and performs piano-based programs in area retirement facilities.

Leon Draayer '72, '89 retired in 2008 after serving five churches in five states for 36 years. Following that, he began working in a funeral home as a service facilitator and retired a second time on May 1, 2022.

Herman VanGalen '73 and his wife, Joyce, are retired and living in Norman, OK. Herman was a second-career seminarian and commemorated his 50th reunion this spring, while also celebrating his 90th birthday on June 20, 2022!

Tony Vis '73 and his wife, Deanna, were unable to join their classmates at the 50th reunion in April but shared they have been retired from full-time pastoral ministry for ten years. Tony continues preaching and teaching while both spend much time following children and grandchildren in their activities. Their nine grandchildren range in age from 11 to 21, from a 4th grader to a sophomore in college.

Mark Volkers '73 reports that he is "still preaching the Good News on 45 Sundays a year!"

Peter Ford '82 and his wife, Patty, transitioned towards retirement in 2022 after 40 years of RCA Global Mission service. Teaching the final courses of their missionary career, including "Christian-Muslim Relations," was especially meaningful. Peter and Patty officially retired in March 2023.

Dr. Peter Dykema '87 will assume a co-director role for Arkansas Governor's School (AGS) at Arkansas Tech University (ATU). He joined the ATU faculty in 2016. He earned an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Arkansas.

Chad Haan '10 was welcomed home by his family on December 21, 2022 from a deployment on the U.S. Naval Hospital Ship COMFORT. They have orders to move in summer 2023 to Joint Base MCGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in New Jersey.

Emmett Brown '19 is the new senior pastor at Trinity Reformed Church in Grand Haven, MI.

Noelle Jacobs '19 was ordained at Grand Valley State University's Campus Ministry.

Joshua Westhouse '19 is now the Behavioral Health Chaplain at Holland Hospital in Holland, MI.

Brianne Christiansen '21 was installed as the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Hamilton, MT, a 90-member congregation in the Bitterroot Mountains. They serve residents of Hamilton and the surrounding small towns.

Melanie Vlietstra Kilgore '22 was installed as an associate pastor at First Reformed Church in Grandville, MI. She is the Pastor of Worship, Discipleship, and Outreach.

Raully Donahue '23 and his wife, Kari, have moved to Whitehall, MI, where he was ordained and installed. He now serves as the senior pastor of Ferry Memorial Reformed Church in Montague, MI.

2023 Alumni Reunions

Among the many commencement activities on Saturday, April 29, alumni and surviving spouses gathered to celebrate their milestone reunions from the classes of 1963, 1973, and 1983. The class of 1973, celebrating their 50th reunion and led by Gerry Dykstra, talked about memories from the world in the early '70s and on the campus of WTS. Still engaged and engaging the world with Jesus, they heard updates from President Dr. Theonugraha and Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Kristen Deede Johnson, and asked relevant questions about the seminary's vision and culture on campus.



ON TO GLORY

Gary VanKoevering '71

b. Sept 16, 1942, Forest Grove, MI
d. Jan 8, 2023, Jenison, MI
Northwestern '68, WTS '71
Service to the following: (1971-76) First Reformed,
Maurice, IA; (1976-83) First Reformed, Fremont, MI;
(1984-ret.) Fair Haven, Jenison, MI

Charles Bigelow '74

b. Feb 23, 1948, Grand Rapids, MI
d. Mar 9, 2023, Dexter, MI
Hope '70, NBTS '70-'72, WTS '74
Service to the following: (1974-00) First Reformed,
Little Falls, NJ; (2000-15) Montville Reformed,
Montville, NJ; (2018-23) St. Andrew's United Church
of Christ, Dexter, MI

Carl Balk '77

b. Jun 20, 1944, Grand Rapids, MI
d. Jan 30, 2023
Calvin '67, WTS '77
Service to the following: (1977-83) Community
Reformed, Zeeland, MI; (1983-92) Corinth Reformed,
Byron Center, MI; (1992-ret.) Rose Park Reformed,
Holland, MI

Rick Oppenhuizen '79

b. Dec 12, 1952, Grand Rapids, MI
d. Jan 6, 2023, Hudsonville, MI
Grand Valley State '75, WTS '79
Service to the following: (1980-85) Church of the Master,
Warren, MI; (1985-98) Bethany Reformed, Kalamazoo, MI;
(1998-17) Grace Reformed, Wyoming, MI; (ret.) Fair Haven,
Hudsonville, MI

Raymond Steigenga '79

b. Jun 30, 1945, Zeeland, MI
d. Jan 27, 2023, Hudsonville, MI
Grand Valley State '76, WTS '79
Service to the following: (1979-83) Fairfield Community,
Fairfield, OH; (1983-88) Newton Zion Reformed, Erie, IL;
(1988-03) Casnovia Reformed, Casnovia, MI; (2005-10)
Northern Heights CRC, Kalamazoo, MI

Dorothy VanHamersveld '86

b. May 14, 1929, Denver, CO
d. Nov. 6, 2022, Grand Rapids, MI
WTS '86
Service to The Committee for Women in the
CRC as Director of Development

Janine Dekker '93

b. Sept 26, 1963, Worthington, MN
d. Aug 7, 2021, Sarnia, Ontario, CAN
Central College '86, WTS '93
Service to the following: (1996-98) Desert Haven Community,
Tempe, AZ as well as churches in OK, MI and Ontario

William Freeman '05

b. Sept 11, 1954, Grand Rapids, MI
d. Oct 30, 2022, Los Angeles, CA
WTS '05
Service to the following: multiple United Church of Christ
congregations in MI and CA

Amy Jo DeKruyter, 52, was welcomed into her eternal home on December 20, 2022 after a year-long journey with multiforme glioblastoma. Amy served Western Theological Seminary as a vital and engaged member of the Board of Trustees from 2010 to 2016. Amy's unforgettable smile, sparkling eyes, listening ear, and warm welcome marked a life of love, service, and deep Christian faith.



Her early interests in other cultures, languages, and people, and her desire to enrich the lives of others can be traced across Amy's life in substitute teaching in Spanish, giving piano lessons, teaching pie-baking classes, leading community Bible study groups, and teaching children's worship at church. She was an extraordinary volunteer.

Amy loved God and her family, and was lovingly devoted to her husband David and her children Ana, Peter, and Jack.

For 25 years, Amy ran, biked, traveled, and shared life with a group of friends that included Norm Donkersloot, longtime WTS Vice President of Finance. When cancer stole her ability to converse, she retained her ability to sing so she clung to the hymns of the church. Norm remembers that when family and friends visited, Amy had them page through her hymnbook and sign their names next to their favorite song. During the last evening of Amy's life, this group gathered with Amy to say goodbye and sing Christmas carols.

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