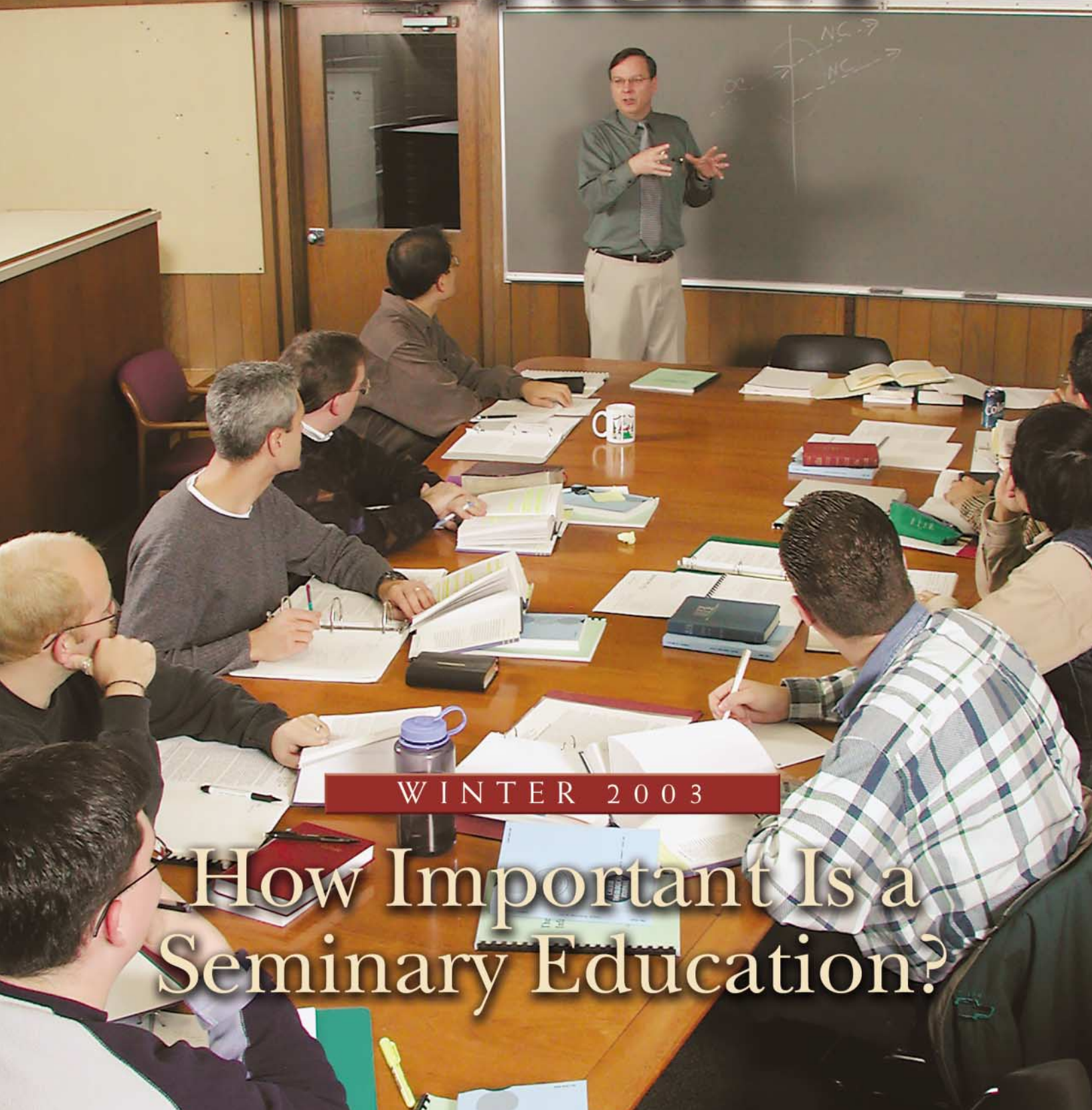


CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

FORUM



WINTER 2003

How Important Is a Seminary Education?

FORUM

Providing Theological Leadership
for the Church

Volume 10, Number 1
Winter 2003

REFLECTIONS

3

Is Seminary Education
for Pastors Still Necessary?
by Duane Kelderman

5

Warning! Seminary May Be
Hazardous to Your Spiritual Health
by John Bolt

7

Interview on
Continuing Theological Education
with editor Eugene Schemper

9

Seminary Education
for Hispanic Pastors
by Eugene Schemper

DEPARTMENTS

Discipling	10
Preaching	11
Continuing Education	12
News	14

Cover: Professor Lyle Bierma leads his
class in "The Doctrine of Infant Baptism."
Photo by Paul Stoub

Scripture texts are from the *New International Version*.

The *Calvin Theological Seminary Forum* is published
in Winter, Spring and Fall editions.
Calvin Theological Seminary, 3233 Burton St. SE,
Grand Rapids, MI 49546.
www.calvinseminary.edu

Editorial Committee: Eugene Schemper, Editor;
Mariano Avila, John Bolt, Duane Kelderman
Editorial Consultant: Kathy Smith
Designer: Paul Stoub, Stoub Graphics
© 2002 Calvin Theological Seminary

Publication Mail Agreement No. 40063614
Canada address: Calvin Theological Seminary, 3475
Mainway, LCD STN 1, Burlington ON L7M 1A9

from the president

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

When my colleague Duane Kelderman was a boy, he thought people went to seminary to learn how to pronounce such biblical names as Ahithophel and Mephibosheth. He pictured rooms full of seminarians leaning into their name drill, and flushing with self-importance in their mastery of it. How wonderful to make believers swoon in their seats as you pronounce "Zelophehad" with the art of a virtuoso.

Not long ago I attended New Presidents' School in Santa Fe. (You attend in December, and if you flunk you have to go back for summer school.) The other baby presidents and I sat for nearly a week as one expert after another spoke to us of advancement, development, budgets, and seminary publications. But the President of the Association of Theological Schools, Daniel Aleshire, had a more basic word for us. On opening night he said that the most important work of a seminary president was to justify his school's existence to doubters.

Duane's idea sprang to mind, and I thought briefly of offering it to the group.

I've lately been pondering Dr. Aleshire's claim. Isn't it remarkable? Do attorneys or engineers have to justify their education? If a dentist drills our molar, don't we assume he's been to school and not just to a conference? Does the President of Vanderbilt Medical School go around Tennessee explaining why it's so important that physicians learn blood and bones?

And yet, people do wonder about theological education for ministry. Exactly what do students learn in seminary? Is it really important for people who are "stewards of the mysteries of God" to learn Bible, theology, history, and missions? Is there really a specific body of knowledge, array of skills, and bowl of virtues that a minister must possess, and is a theological school the best place to acquire these things?

In this issue of *Forum*, we address questions in this neighborhood. Professor Kelderman brings to them twenty-four years of experience in urban and suburban ministry. Professor Bolt explains how theological study and personal spiritual devotion are two sides of the same coin. Editor Eugene Schemper's illuminating conversation with three pastors shows how theological reflection is a pastor's calling for a lifetime, and not just in seminary years.

The good news is that while theological education is as rigorous as med school, it is also a field of delights. What a joy to immerse oneself in the holy Scripture, in concentrated thought about Jesus Christ and his spectacular work, and in the disciplines of ministry to God's people! Almost every student at CTS has a "God story" (as many now call it), a testimony of God's leading them to come to seminary and go into ministry. Faculty and staff members have similar stories. Together we are charged each day with the great adventure of pursuing the things of faith in a community of faith that gathers around Jesus Christ, the center of all.

I hope this issue of *Forum* will help you understand a little more the "what and why" of theological education. God bless you in your reading and thinking.

Grace and peace,

Neal Plantinga

REFLECTIONS

Is Seminary Education for Pastors Still Necessary?

In years past virtually all members of the Christian Reformed Church have believed that pastors should be seminary trained. It would have been nearly unthinkable for a congregation to call a preaching pastor who did not have a seminary education. While seminary education is still the norm and deeply valued in the CRC as a whole, more and more pastors are ordained in the CRC today without seminary education. Clearly, many of these pastors serve the church effectively in ministries blessed by God. So is seminary education for pastors still necessary?

Most would agree that *theological* education is necessary for any Christian pastor. Of course Christian pastors must know the Scriptures and the basic doctrines of the church. Pastors must know certain ministry skills to be competent in their ministry. But *seminary* education that includes heavy doses of biblical languages, church history, theology and philosophy, preceded by a broad liberal arts college education that includes history and English and philosophy and art—isn't this all a bit much in a day when there are so many ways to learn practical ministry skills?

These are questions being asked in many churches and denominations today. Indeed many mega-churches today have

instituted their own leadership training programs, their own versions of a seminary. Even the CRC has many different leadership development programs, some of which are used as steppingstones to ordained ministry.

At the outset, it's helpful to observe that the question of whether broader academic preparation is valuable or necessary applies to many fields. I am reminded of many dormitory conversations I had in my freshman year of college. One of my suite-



by Duane Kelderman,
Vice President for
Administration and
Professor of Preaching

mates was a pre-architecture major. That year he labored his way through calculus. The person straight across the hall was pre-med. He struggled through organic chemistry. Another person was pre-law, and he struggled through a course in Western Civilization. All three of these students were convinced that these courses were a waste of time. What architect ever uses calculus?

What doctor ever reenacts a chemistry lab? What lawyer ever pulls out an ancient history book?

But it's clear that these courses and the broad education they represent are vitally important. If an architect is designing your twelve-story office building on the edge of some mucky soil, you hope he did well in physics and math. When your doctor has done every test in the book and still can't figure out why you have unbearable headaches, you hope she understands all the subtleties of biology and chemistry. When you have been defrauded of property that was rightfully yours, you want an attorney who thoroughly knows the law and how to clearly and logically argue a case.

*If an architect is designing
your twelve-story office
building on the edge of some
mucky soil, you hope he did
well in physics and math.*

Seminary Education

If this is true of your architect, doctor and attorney, how much more so is it true of people whose central task is to know and teach God's Word and to give leadership to the church? The Bible is a hard book to understand. Interpreting the Bible and applying it correctly is no easy task, especially today when there are so many different winds of doctrine and ideology blowing about. Two thousand years of church history make it clear that when pastors don't know or understand the Bible and the church's clear teachings about the Bible, the church gets in all kinds of trouble. To put it more positively, church leaders must be biblically grounded, theologically informed, and culturally engaging. And that requires persons with minds and hearts deeply grounded in God's Word and in Christian theology.

A very simple example may help make the point. Every pastor has faced the situation of the grieving parishioner who comes to the pastor's study and asks, "Pastor, can John, my late husband, hear me now?" What's a pastor to say to a question like this? Such a question summons up *pastoral* skills. This parishioner probably is not even wanting a theological answer to the question. This person probably only wants her pastor to quietly acknowledge how deeply she misses John and how comforting it is to talk out loud to him. But such a question also calls for biblical knowledge. It's important to know what the Bible does and does not say about the present state of the believing dead. (The Bible says very little.) Given how little the Bible says, it's important for pastors to know how the church has thought about "the intermediate state" (the state of the believing dead before Christ's return). Pastoral effectiveness in this situation requires a broad range of competencies—interpersonal, pastoral, biblical, theological, and historical.

Recently someone challenged me to be as specific as I could about how my broad theological education was vital to my work as a preaching pastor. I appreciated the challenge. It only took me a few minutes to come up with examples of concepts or issues that, in my judgment as a pastor of 24 years, have two things in common: (1) they are important for effective ministry, especially the ministry of preaching and teaching, and (2) they require broader, formal academic training in the underlying disciplines to fully appreciate.

Here's my list of ten such concepts:

- the difference between relativism and pluralism;
- a Christian understanding of death;
- the interrelationship of style, form and content in a sermon;
- the *Real Presence* of Christ in the sacraments;
- different approaches to apologetics—defending the faith to non-believers;
- common grace and its implications for how we work with non-believers;
- the role of literary genre in interpreting Scripture;
- *image of God* and its implications for understanding the human person;



- enculturation—how the Christian church is and isn't shaped by culture;
- the relationship between love and justice and its implications for benevolence.

I was able, rather quickly, to identify these ten concepts or issues as ones where being theologically trained is vital for my week to week work as a Christian pastor and preacher. I could learn specific skills and competencies for ministry, but without the deep theological training that informs those skills, I would be missing important capacities for effective ministry.

Interestingly, in the case of over half of these subjects listed above, I learned about them *after I left seminary* and was in the parish, which is the argument for life-long learning. Certainly, seminary training is only the beginning of what must be a course of life-long learning. But I needed the classical theological education as the basis in order to learn these things and integrate them into my theology and ministry.

We are grateful that theological education is such a high value in the denomination at large. In a recent denominational survey, CRC members were asked to rank various competencies in their pastors in order of importance. The two highest ranked qualities in pastors were: (1) a careful student of Scripture who reads widely and thinks clearly; and (2) a dynamic preacher who delivers biblical, relevant sermons. (Closely behind were pastoral skills: (3) a caring pastor who responds quickly to the needs of members; and (4) a personable individual who mixes easily with church members.)

One of the most exciting parts of teaching at Calvin Theological Seminary is leading students to these rich intersections of theology and life, deep biblical reflection and practical ministry. We are grateful to the church for its support of this vital enterprise.


*Certainly, seminary
training is only the
beginning of what must be a
course of life-long learning.
But I needed the classical
theological education as the
basis in order to learn these
things and integrate them into
my theology and ministry.*


"Warning! Seminary May be Hazardous to Your Spiritual Health"

This allusion to the U.S. Surgeon General's warning on cigarette packages is more than an effort in eye-catching journalism. The warning has legs and walks among us at Calvin Theological Seminary. Every year I am privileged to teach the course "Introduction to Theology (Prolegomena)" to the new class of incoming students. I always begin the course with a discussion about the relation between theology and spirituality and ask students if anyone has warned them that seminary might contribute to diminishing faith and fervor for the Lord. The response may surprise some. A significant majority report that yes, they have received some such warning.

How can this be? Is not a theological seminary a place to reflect deeply on the things of God? Should this then not be an opportunity for profound spiritual growth? If seminary quenches the fire of devotion isn't something seriously wrong? How do we respond to a perception—perhaps more prominent than we care to admit—that studying for gospel ministry at a seminary may be a spiritual downer?

The Head and the Heart

Sometimes the concern about the spiritual atmosphere of the seminary is rooted in a false distinction between the head and the heart. More than one hundred years ago, Benjamin Warfield, in an essay entitled "The Religious Life of the Theological Student," alluded to two extremes among students: those with warm hearts and empty heads, and those who are dedicated to study without their hearts being moved by the great things of God. Warfield refused to choose one over the other, insisting that ministers must be both

"learned" and "godly." "In your case," he told his students (at that time, all men), "there can be no 'either—or' here—either a student or a man of God. You must be both."

As an antidote to intellectual laziness and/or spiritual lethargy Warfield makes two suggestions that are worth repeating. First, he insists that rigorous intellectual work is necessary for competent ministry and must itself be regarded as a spiritual discipline. In Warfield's words: "Now, as students of theology your vocation is to study theology; and to study it diligently. . . ." Whatever a student may think of theology—love it or hate it—"you must faithfully give yourselves to your studies, if you wish to be religious men. No religious character can be built up on the foundation of neglected duty." Furthermore, the subject matter of theology—God himself!—lends itself to devotion. Make your study a "religious exercise" Warfield suggests. "Put your heart into your studies; do not merely occupy your mind with them, but put your heart into them. They bring you into the

*By John Bolt,
Professor of
Systematic Theology*



very presence of God." Second, Warfield recommends a rich life of worship, both personal and communal. Theological studies done worshipfully are no substitute for worship itself. Indeed, one of our high values at CTS is that all members of the seminary community—professors, staff and students—be vitally connected to local congregations.

Time for God

Perhaps the most tangible action of CTS in the past year that addresses this concern for spiritual vitality is the adoption of a course workload policy. For some time a repeated refrain among students has been, "We are too busy. The workload is so overwhelming that we don't have time for God." Indeed, students today have many competing commitments. Years ago virtually all students entering seminary were young single men who had few commitments outside of their busy academic lives. Today, we have many married students, including some with children. There are a number of second career students who find that some academic work, such as learning the biblical languages, takes them longer than it might have if they were younger. With high levels of field education required of all M. Div. students, there are a number who take concurrent internships, working significant hours in a church while also studying.

Of course, the need to balance the many demands of modern life is hardly unique to seminary students. The case is sometimes made that in this respect seminary is

*It is possible to be so busy
toiling in the Lord's vineyard
that we have no time for God.*

an excellent preparation for the busyness of life in the ministry. But it is possible to be so busy toiling in the Lord's vineyard that we have no time for God. Churches can spoil Sabbath rest by scheduling meetings between worship services and seminars can assign so much work that theology is not an avenue to adore God but an obstacle to communion with Him. Recognizing this, the seminary faculty, under the skillful leadership of Vice-President for Academic Affairs Henry De Moor, adopted new and specific workload guidelines for all courses. Students have reported a noticeable difference in the overall workload. Yours truly was one faculty member who had to make a few adjustments. I'm happy to report that the leaner course is an improvement and required no academic sacrifice.

Character and Personal Formation

The most important way that CTS seeks to ensure that students' experience will be spiritually enriching is by continually keeping in view *all three* of these vital aspects of pastoral formation: *character, knowledge and skills*. Many people are surprised to learn how much emphasis the seminary places upon not just knowledge and skills but character formation.

In our "Readiness for Ministry" program, recently expanded from a one-year to a two-year program, small groups of students (5-6) meet weekly with a faculty mentor for Scripture reflection and prayer, particularly focusing on matters of calling, gifts for ministry, spiritual and psychological preparedness, as well as ongoing per-

Many people are surprised to learn how much emphasis the seminary places upon not just knowledge and skills but character formation.

sonal assessment of qualifications for ministry. Individually and in small groups, students assess themselves and each other for such character qualities as commitment, discipline and self-control, affirmation of others, honesty, service without regard for gain, leadership ability, wisdom, and emotional health. The last one includes as substantiating behaviors: show signs of growth and development; know when to apologize without being told; can laugh with those who laugh and cry with those who cry. Merely discussing these qualifications is, of course, not enough—they must be modeled and lived by faculty and students.

It is vitally important that the church understand that when CTS is preparing church leaders, it is equally concerned with the development of all three of these vital aspects of pastoral formation: character, knowledge and skills.

One of the greatest misconceptions about CTS is that academic competence is given more weight than personal character in the evaluation of candidates for ministry. The sober truth is that in those unfortunate instances when we as a faculty do not recommend someone for candidacy, the problem is rarely academic but almost always a matter of unresolved personal character issues. It is vitally important that the church understand that when CTS is preparing church leaders, it is equally concerned with the development of *all three* of these vital aspects of pastoral formation: *character, knowledge and skills*.

What then about the warning in the title of this article? If Calvin Theological Seminary succeeds in producing church leaders with the character, knowledge and skills that the CRC has judged to be basic standards for ministry, perhaps the warning should go something like this: "Warning—like the gospel ministry itself, the seminary is not a place to enter casually. You are entering into a time of study, reflection and discipleship that will change you and prepare you for a journey in which there are spiritual risks. The things of God can become commonplace and taken for granted; the responsibilities of study and ministry may at times seem overwhelming. But, the joy and reward of gospel ministry is also unbelievable. It is an awesome calling! Enter seminary and ministry with fear and trembling but never forget that though we are but jars of clay, we do carry a great treasure. Christ is Lord of the church and his Holy Spirit will bless our labor."

Interview on Continuing Theological Education

Experienced pastors look back and realize that when they left the seminary their education for ministry was just beginning. The day-to-day practices of preaching, teaching, pastoral care and church leadership continue to raise significant theological and practical issues. Calvin Theological Seminary is committed to an ongoing dialogue with church leaders about their continuing education needs. To that end, Forum Editor Lugene Schemper recently spoke with three pastors—Carl Kromminga, Jr, pastor of New City Church, a multicultural urban church in Long Beach, California; Julius Medenblik, pastor of New Life CRC, a suburban Chicago church plant in New Lenox, Illinois; and Cecil Van Niejenhuis, pastor of First CRC, an historic established church in Edmonton, Alberta; and with the seminary's Director of Continuing Education, Kathy Smith.

LS: *When you look back over your years as pastors, what kinds of continuing education events have been most beneficial?*

JM: I have benefited from large group experiences in conferences at Saddleback, Willow Creek and other churches on evangelism, leadership and small groups. I have also learned a lot from small group experiences where pastors of similar backgrounds or churches can come together and open up their lives and ministries to one another in a supportive, encouraging and challenging environment.



Julius Medenblik

CK: For me, some of the most important events have been conferences where I've been able to spend a day listening to good teaching, or hearing about how others have done a particular kind of ministry.

CVN: A lot of my continuing education has been informal. I've benefited immensely from ministerial meetings with colleagues where we've discussed theological issues and ethical dilem-

mas, shared sermon work, debated leadership styles and strategies and simply enjoyed the fellowship of sharing and prayer. That doesn't eliminate the need for formal continuing education. I've learned quite a bit from workshops designed to help preachers explore exegetical themes and discuss homiletical strategies and skills, from sessions that analyzed trends and themes in contemporary culture, and from retreat settings where pastors and spouses explored the dynamics and pressures peculiar to ministry.

LS: *Some of the best theological thinking occurs in the context of the practice of ministry. What major theological issues have you had to deal with in your work as pastors?*

CK: I find it very challenging to explain the importance and significance of infant baptism to people today. Another important issue is the meaning of biblical prophecy and especially

the prophecies of the end times. So many people have an interest in dispensational interpretations of the book of Revelation. It would be good to be able to sit down and talk about how to preach on this book in an engaging way from a Reformed perspective.

CVN: Some of the major theological issues I have had to deal with include: the nature of prayer—its power and its purpose, the work of the Holy Spirit and the questions and challenges raised by charismatic believers, the exclusive claims of the Christian gospel, the role of hermeneutics in reading and interpreting Scripture, the nature and authority of Scripture, the mystery of grace, the nature of the sacraments, the dimensions and dynamics of the coming kingdom of Jesus, Trinitarian balance, etc., etc... That's been one of the amazing things about the ministry—it engages you in so many ways and at so many levels with issues and practices which have significant theological roots.



Carl Kromminga, Jr.

Ecclesiology is an area we need to explore more fully in a time when the shape of church life is changing so rapidly. How do we present the gospel in a contemporary fashion while maintaining roots and grounding in wholesome tradition? The needs-based, consumer-driven culture of the western world makes huge demands on the church, and when our eyes are aimed at numbers, questions of ecclesiology often become subordinate. Another important theological issue that I think we need to reflect upon is the impact that illusion and the virtual reality of television and film have on our experience of what is reality. Just which world and whose world are we living in? Another issue is the impact of topical preaching over the long haul, and the need for grounding our preaching in the story of Scripture itself. There is a huge temptation for us to be agenda-driven, rather than story-driven. Also, how does a theology of suffering relate to discipleship? How does our spirituality relate to everyday life in God's creation? It seems to me that there is an increasing inclination to define spiritual matters as interior concerns only. The list goes on and on.

JM: Some additional topics I've had to think hard about are the relationship between God's sovereignty and our responsibility, and the place of children at the Lord's Supper. Also matters about spiritual growth: How do people grow? What are some "touchstones" on the path of discipleship? And, of course, the issue of women in office: how can we transcend our divisions about this in the local church context?

LS: Kathy, you recently began your posi-



Cecil Van Neijenhuis

tion as Director of Continuing Education. Is this the beginning of a new phase in CTS' role in the church?

KS: CTS has always offered continuing education opportunities, but we realize a greater need for them now, as well as a heightened interest in them.

Pastors and church leaders face so many different, changing situations today, and the expectations of pastors are so high. Life long learning isn't just a luxury for pastors today; it's essential for survival in ministry. We hope that pastors and church leaders will find intellectual stimulation, enhancement of ministry skills, and spiritual renewal through our continuing education programs. And we trust that as we listen to and learn from them, we will gain insights that will enrich the education we offer.

LS: *How could Calvin Theological Seminary's continuing education programs help the seminary and pastors work together to think through some of these issues?*

JM: Pastors and churches are asking: How do we deal with the price and process of change in the local church? How should we develop lay leaders in the local church? How do we order church life in an increasingly diverse, post-modern culture? How can the church develop as a multi-generational body when the generational divide seems to be growing? How can we minister effectively to divorced persons and their families? How will "Church" be different in the 21st Century? All of

these questions raise important theological questions and need ongoing reflection by the church, its theologians in the seminary, and its "resident theologians," who are pastors of churches.

CVN: It's often very difficult for those outside of Western Michigan to come to CTS for sessions, even when they're in the summer. It would be wonderful if CTS could sponsor theological reflection types of events, where we might sit down with colleagues and a mentor from the seminary to sift through what we are faced with in ministry. Focused teaching events, such as specific seminars in any or all of the areas we've mentioned would be great. Or...

What if CTS made use of alumni in specific locales and with specific expertise to host and/or lead local events with input from the seminary?

What if the seminary had a few preacher/pastor mentors who would travel around and provide workshops, discussion opportunities, and serve as liaisons between the preachers in the parish and the seminary?

What if seminary professors made regular circuit stops, offering some of their current work or projects as a part of continuing education efforts?

What if the field education training took a slightly different twist, with specific connections being made between seminarians and mentors who (via email at least) would serve as coaches in specific areas of expertise?

What if every two years there were more major events in various places around the denomination with several courses and opportunities offered, such as a two-week training retreat that might draw



Kathy Smith

a significant crowd?

What if, as part of ongoing education, we included courses in cultural analysis? Watching films together, listening to music, reading some novels?

KS: These are exactly the kinds of ideas we are eager to hear about. The semi-

nary has begun to offer more training resources for pastors and church leaders, and hopes to expand its efforts. Programs like this will mean added costs, but we are committed to them and we especially want to do more events outside of Michigan. By cooperating with other denominational agen-

cies we hope to really make a difference in strengthening and supporting pastors and congregations. We are very excited about participating in the denomination's "Sustaining Pastoral Excellence" program that is being set up with new funds from a Lilly Endowment grant.

Theological Education for Hispanic Pastors

"I have my heart in this kind of ministry," says Mariano Avila, Professor of New Testament. "The Christian Reformed Church is opening up and trying to be more cross-cultural." Calvin Theological Seminary has scheduled the winter quarter for Professor Avila in a way that he can devote this time to the seminary's efforts in distance education and in continuing education for Hispanic pastors and other church leaders. This training is done in Spanish.

Part of his work is developing the Master of Arts Program in Missions and New Church Development, and in that program he is currently teaching a distance education course on the Epistle to the Romans. "I'm teaching Romans from a missiological perspective. As part of the distance education program I'll also be traveling to Florida and New Jersey to meet with students in the course. But I'll combine that with sessions for leaders of Hispanic churches. For instance, we'll have some teaching sessions for them from Romans on the topic of Reformed evangelism."

Professor Avila is also working with Christian Reformed Home Missions in West Michigan in the *Adelante* program, a training program for evangelists, also in Spanish. This program has a course-based curriculum in biblical studies, theology, church history, and practical theology and meets regularly on Saturdays. "Here in Grand Rapids we have about

twenty students currently enrolled. Other Calvin Seminary professors, like Arie Leder in Old Testament, will eventually be involved in teaching," says Professor Avila. Home Missions also runs the program in other areas under the leadership of Gary Teja.

As a native of Mexico, Professor Avila brings to his teaching a first-hand awareness of the situation and needs of Hispanic pastors. He says, "As I teach, it's important to be aware of the cultural background of Hispanics, many of whom come from places where there are severe economic crises or political dictatorships. In the United States they find themselves in an environment in which they have many limitations and few opportunities, and where they have to struggle very hard to survive and provide for their families. As I teach I try to point out how Scriptures speak to these situations. This kind of contextualization of the Gospel is very important."

Professor Avila says that one of the major factors in the growth of the Protestant church in small towns and villages in Mexico, which usually are very closed to other faiths, has been the evangelization of those who come to the United States and then return to Mexico. "When they go back to their country with the faith they have come to know, they evangelize their own people. Training leaders for this kind of evangelism is a wonderful opportunity for the CRC."



"When they go back to their country with the faith they have come to know, they evangelize their own people. Training leaders for this kind of evangelism is a wonderful opportunity for the CRC."

— Mariano Avila

Catechesis: On Old Method for a New Age

Marie was 23 years old when I met her. Sitting next to her fiancé, a young man raised in the Christian Reformed Church, she was curious about what she called the “strange stuff” that he believed. She had been raised in a Unitarian home and her mother had raised the children alone after their alcoholic father left the house. Her mother didn’t want to force her into any particular form of religion; Marie would have the freedom to choose for herself when she was older.

Now she was older, preparing to marry a CRC son of the church, but she didn’t know anything about the Bible. She hardly knew anything about Jesus. But, she asked, “would I meet with them to talk about what the church believes?” What started out as a series of weekly meetings stretched over a year. Some would call what happened “evangelism” or “discipleship.” I call it “catechesis.” This may not be the association you first make with the term “catechism,” but the Heidelberg Catechism quickly became our guide through the Scriptures. We would read sections of it weekly, discuss and often argue about it, always careful to get into the Bible itself to discern the truth of what we were reading.

Why would I use such an old document, and such an old method of teaching, for a person who represented what some call “new age?” I can name several reasons. First, the Heidelberg Catechism provides us with a common language of faith. Reasonable people cannot talk together meaningfully unless they agree on the definition of basic words. If you want to talk about your new computer, you had better know what bauds, modems, and gigabytes are all about. Similarly, in order to understand the Christian faith, one needs to know what words like “incarnation,” “atonement,” and “predestination” actually mean.

Marie stumbled on the word “evil,” especially when I implied that she and I are by nature evil. The catechism served as a wonderful lens through which she began to understand what the Bible really teaches about us and our sinful nature.

Second, the Heidelberg Catechism is apologetic in tone. It explains the faith to those who are questioning, doubting, or ignorant of Christianity. To think that a catechism is used only for the purpose of instructing small children of believing parents in doctrinal truths is to misunderstand its function. The catechism becomes the voice of the church—a voice which speaks a word about the Word to a world so desperately seeking the truth.

Third, the Heidelberg Catechism is a rallying point for believers. In his book *The Rumor of Angels* Peter Berger points out that Christians are actually a cognitive minority. We need to recognize that North America is not a Christian culture. Whether in Canada or the United States, Christians are a cognitive minority—people who think differently than the rest of society. Christians use their creeds and confessions as the rallying point around which they celebrate the truth and distinguish themselves from popular culture.

By Robert C. DeVries,
Professor of Church
Education



Paul writes to the Ephesians that “God has made known to us the mystery of his will” (1:9). If you are in Christ, then you know the truth and the truth will set you free (John 8:32).

Finally, the Heidelberg Catechism touches the heart. In his new commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, Professor Emeritus Fred

Klooster uses the image of a “song” for the writing style of the authors. While the familiar first question and answer certainly demonstrate this song, this personal heart-faith is evident throughout the document. For example, “I call Jesus Lord because—not with gold or silver, but with his precious blood—he has set us free from sin and from the tyranny of the devil, and has bought us, body and soul, to be his very own” (Q&A 34).

Do not confuse the Heidelberg Catechism with the predominant stereotype of “teaching catechism.” The catechism is a document of faith, a song of beauty, and an excellent tool for explaining the faith to inquirers. *How* the document is used is a different issue. Teaching methodology varies from situation to situation. A Marie inquiring about the faith can use the catechism as a roadmap into the Christian faith. A young daughter of the church can use the catechism not only to deepen the richness of her understanding but also to stir the affections of the heart for Christ. An elderly grandfather can cling with assurance to the constant refrain of the Heidelberg song—we belong to our faithful Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The catechism has served churches in the Reformed tradition for centuries. Let’s keep the song alive!

*The catechism is a document
of faith, a song of beauty, and
an excellent tool for
explaining the faith to
inquirers.*

Sermons on the Web

Within the past year I've read newspaper accounts of two Protestant pastors who were suspended from their pulpits for preaching sermons downloaded from the Internet. The website www.desperatepreacher.com names the problem. Faced with the difficult, time-consuming weekly task of moving God's people with a fresh word from the Lord, some preachers succumb to the temptation to use second-hand sermons.

Borrowing the sermons of others is nothing new. Back in 1735 when Philadelphia Presbyterian pastor Rev. Samuel Hemphill was accused of pulpit plagiarism, Ben Franklin came to his defense: "I rather approved his giving us good sermons composed by others, than bad ones of his own manufacture." What is new is the fingertip accessibility of hundreds of printed, audio, and even video sermons via the Internet.

I'm sure we agree that preaching a sermon composed by another preacher without giving credit is plagiarism, a form of theft. Aside from that, a pastor desperately borrowing a canned sermon often finds that he is serving up the homiletical equivalent of canned spaghetti: the ingredients may all be there, but the product is bland, lacking the crisp, direct flavors and textures of real home-cooking. A good sermon arises from a pastor who lives with a Scripture text throughout the week, studies it, meditates on it, and works hard to find the right words, illustrations, and analogies which communicate and resonate with the members of a particular congregation.

If that's the case, do sermons on the web have any value for the preacher? I'd like to suggest three possible uses:

1) For preaching development:

Painters, carpenters, plumbers and potters all learn by looking at the work of others, and so do preachers. When we hear or read a sermon, we think about how it was

constructed, how the text has been exegeted, and how the preacher moves from Scripture to the present. If we're at all observant, we learn something for our own preaching. All preachers should listen to or read sermons of others periodically for their own self-development. This is especially true for those who preach twice on Sunday and seldom get the opportunity to listen to a variety of good preachers.

If, for example, preachers find themselves regularly having trouble bringing sermons to a crisp, clear, compelling conclusion, they might look at how other pastors conclude their sermons. The same can be said for help with sermon introductions, or with the proper use of sermon illustrations or stories within sermons. One possibility is to follow the sermons of one good preacher for several months, analyzing them for style and content.

2) For actual preaching:

I say this with caution, and note that it should not be a regular occurrence. But sometimes when the press of pastoral emergencies has been overwhelming, and with the permission of the church elders, it

*By Eugene Schemper,
Theological Librarian*



might be appropriate to preach a sermon written by an outstanding preacher. Doing so requires a careful study of the sermon, and adaptations and modifications which make the sermon fit one's own preaching style and audience. It also requires a thorough familiarity with the sermon. Credit should be given to the sermon's author, with a statement such as "This morning's sermon is an adaptation of Rev. Smith's sermon, '(sermon title)'. I freely acknowledge my debt to Rev. Smith."

3) For spiritual nourishment:

As a pastor who preached twice on Sunday for many years, I benefited greatly by reading the sermons of great preachers. I have been moved, challenged, and comforted through hearing the gospel proclaimed by others. This is an important part of the spiritual hygiene of pastors. Sermons on the web are one resource that makes it possible for pastors to be on the receiving end of good sermons.

Websites containing sermons fall into two major categories: 1) websites containing large collections of sermons, drawn from a variety of different sources; and 2) websites which organize the sermons of a particular pastor or church congregation. There are many sermons of questionable quality on the web, and one should use them with great discretion. As a guide to good sermons on the web, we've prepared a website at the Ministry Resource Center of the Hekman Library of Calvin College (www.calvin.edu/library/mrc).

Sermons on the web are no substitute for the hard work that goes into imaginative, sound biblical preaching, but when used properly they can be an aid to the preacher's development and spiritual growth.

Sermons on the web are no substitute for the hard work that goes into imaginative, sound biblical preaching, but when used properly they can be an aid to the preacher's development and spiritual growth.

Book of the Quarter Author Visits CTS

“Christian practices for opening the gift of time resist the inhumane rhythms that shape so much of contemporary life,” writes Dorothy Bass in her book *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*. Dr. Bass reflected on her life and her faith journey in several gatherings at CTS on November 7, 2002. This was the first time a Book of the Quarter author was invited to spend a day at the seminary. Bass led discussions on her book with students, staff and faculty in the morning, had lunch with area pastors and church leaders who had been discussing the book in seminary-sponsored ecumenical reading groups, talked over dinner with faculty members, and gave a public lecture and discussion time in the evening. She gave us some fresh perspectives on observing Sabbath as a Christian who had not been raised in a Sabbath-keeping tradition. We were challenged to receive the day *every day*, as we offer our attention to the gracious presence and activity of God.

Bass is the director of the Valparaiso University Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith, and has written several other books on the Christian practices. She was pleased to find that so many people had read and discussed her book at CTS. Rev. Neil Jasperse of West Leonard Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids reflected that “the food, good fellowship with ministry colleagues, and stimulation of thought through the book and discussion was a nice combination. The insight that reached deepest and stayed longest with me was really the book’s most basic point: that each day is to be received as a gift from God and savored in the moment.” As Dorothy put it in the many books she signed, “May God bless your days and your deeds with peace.”



Neal Plantinga moderates a discussion with Dorothy Bass in the student center.



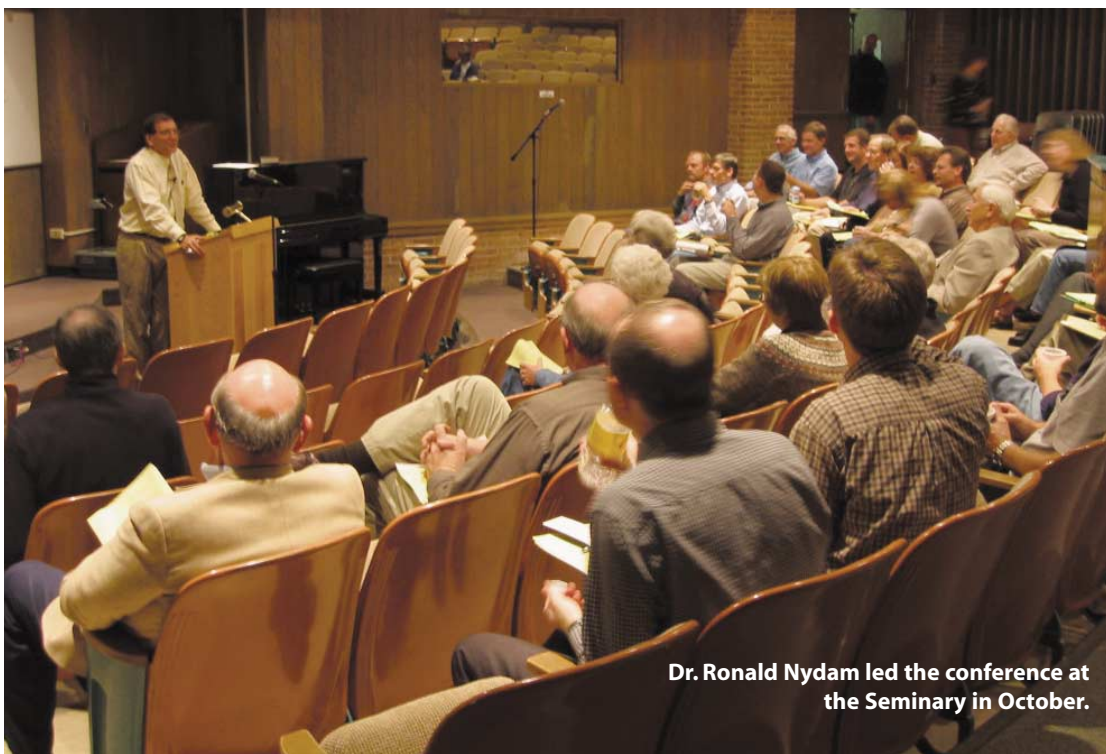
Area pastors and church leaders enjoy lunch with Dr. Bass.



Bass signs her book for seminarian Yundon Jeong.

Marriage and Divorce Conference Equips Church Leaders

The Messiness of Marriage and the Knottiness of Divorce” was the topic of a day-long continuing education conference at CTS in October. Dr. Ronald Nydam, our Professor of Pastoral Care, led the conference which was attended by many students and faculty, as well as pastors and elders from area churches. Conferees learned about the components of a healthy marriage and the factors that contribute to divorce, and were equipped with practical tools for effective marriage and divorce ministry. Participants were challenged to reflect on how



Dr. Ronald Nydam led the conference at the Seminary in October.

a higher theology of marriage helps us shore up and strengthen marriages that are in conflict. An evening session was designed especially for elders to learn how to minister to people in these difficult situations.

The seminar was also held at Redeemer University College in Ancaster,

Ontario in June, at the seminary's second annual "Retreat and Equip" conference in that area organized by adjunct instructor Rev. Andrew Beunk. He reported that "opening up an evening session to elders and other interested members was a great success. Elders especially were made to feel important and cared for and they

need that." Dr. Nydam has already been asked to repeat his lectures in other regions of Canada. Audiotapes and handouts are available through the Seminary IT office (semit@calvin.edu or (616)957-6029) and RealAudio Archives of the lectures are available on the seminary website (www.calvinseminary.edu).

Summer Programming Strengthens Preachers

Can you learn to be a better preacher by reading novels and watching videos? That's the assumption behind plans for some innovative preaching seminars being held in the summers of 2003 and 2004, cosponsored by the Calvin College Seminars in Christian Scholarship and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.

This summer President Plantinga is leading a month-long seminar that will explore some of the sources, methods,

and homiletical impact of "Imaginative Reading for Creative Preaching." He says "preachers need the kind of vicarious experience that arises from immersion in well-chosen literature." Also, a week-long workshop on "Communicating Well for Ministry in a Technological Age," led by Professor Quentin Schultze of Calvin College and Vice President Kelderman, will give special attention to communication and technology in public worship.

In the summer of 2004, well-known preacher Craig Barnes will lead a workshop on preaching, and Professors Randy Bytwerk and Garth Pauley of Calvin College, both experts on speech and rhetoric, will lead a month-long seminar. They will help preachers to learn from videotapes of their own preaching, addressing habits and patterns that develop over time, in addition to study of a diverse range of contemporary preachers and communicators.



Japanese Missionary Speaks in Chapel

Rev. Kenneth Kudo (l.), the pastor of the “Rumo Novo” Evangelical Church in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and director of the Brazilian mission agency ADVANCE, offered a meditation on Matthew 28:18-20 in chapel on January 8, 2003. He gave an inspiring account of his own journey and strongly encouraged students to consider the missionary calling. Rev. Kudo also taught in two of Professor Pieter Tuit’s classes and met with students at a potluck dinner in the new student center. He is pictured here with his good friend, Professor Carl Bosma (second from right), and with students Simon Ko (c.) and Jeff Bos (r.).

Upcoming Conferences and Lectures at Calvin Theological Seminary

Missions Institute Lectures

“Why Africa May Become the First Islamic Continent”

Wednesday, February 12, 2003, 7:30 p.m.

“Why African Christianity is a Thousand Miles Wide and an Inch Deep”

Thursday, February 13, 2003, 10:00 a.m.

Rev. Paul Mbunga Mpindi,
The Back to God Hour

Mission Emphasis Lectures

Wednesday, March 5, 2003; 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 6, 2003; 10:00 a.m. and
1:00 p.m.

Dr. René Padilla

Publications Secretary of the Latin
American Theological Fraternity and
President of the Kairos Foundation

Expository Preaching Conference

Thursday, March 13, 2003

10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Dr. Richard Pratt,

Reformed Theological Seminary

Lectures on Leadership

Thursday, March 27, 2003

10:00 a.m. “The Heart of the Leader”

1:00 p.m. “The Task of the Leader”

Rev. Henry Wildeboer,

Christian Reformed Home Missions
and Tyndale Seminary

Lecture on “Diffusing Fear of Innovations: Facilitating Change in the Church”

10:00 a.m., Thursday, April 17, 2003

Dr. Edward Seely,

Scholar-in-Residence, Calvin
Theological Seminary and Director of
the Ministry Resource Center,
Hekman Library, Calvin College

Conference on “The Leadership Challenge in the Multigenerational Congregation”

Wednesday, April 23, 2003

9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Rev. Gilbert Rendle,

Director of the Center for Learning
and Vice President of Program, Alban
Institute.

Bible and Ministry Conference

“Preaching the Gospel of Isaiah in the
Twenty-First Century”

Thursday-Saturday, June 5-7, 2003

- Willem A.M. Beuken,
University of Leuven
- Carl Bosma,
Calvin Theological Seminary
- John N. Oswalt,
Wesley Biblical Seminary
- Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.,
Calvin Theological Seminary
- Jack Roeda,
Church of the Servant Christian
Reformed Church

- Christopher R. Seitz,
St. Andrews University
- Eep Talstra,
Free University of Amsterdam
- Annemarieke van der Woude,
University of Nijmegen
- John D. Witvliet,
Calvin Institute of Christian
Worship

Calvin Theological Seminary Missions Institute

“The Theology and Practice of Evangelism
in Today’s World”

Thursday-Friday, October 2-3, 2003

- Ricardo Agreste da Silva,
Brazil
- Cindy Holtrop,
Calvin Institute of Christian
Worship
- Paul Kortenhoven,
Christian Reformed World
Missions, Sierra Leone
- Julius Medenblik,
New Lenox, Illinois
- Ronald Nydam,
Calvin Theological Seminary
- Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.,
Calvin Theological Seminary
- Pieter Tuit,
Calvin Theological Seminary
- Charles Uken,
New Era, Michigan
- Paul Visser,
The Hague, The Netherlands

New Director of Development Joins the CTS Team



Dan Meindertsma

Dan Meindertsma recently joined the staff of Calvin Theological Seminary as the Director of Development. As the grandson of a pastor who graduated from the seminary, Dan has deep roots in the Christian Reformed Church. He was educated in a strong Christian school system, graduated from Calvin College and Western Michigan University, and has been very active as an elder in his church and a Christian school board member. After a fifteen-year career in the high-technology sector throughout the Great Lakes region, Dan felt the Lord's call to accept the appointment to this new position at the seminary. As Dan describes it, "I'm grateful for this opportunity to fol-

low the Lord's calling in my career. The future of our church is so tied to a vital seminary; I can't think of a more exciting endeavor to become a part of."

Dan joins Dick Eppinga and others in our existing development office to extend our development efforts into new arenas. As Director of Development he will work with the seminary administration to develop and implement an expanded development strategy for the seminary. Calvin Theological Seminary is in a great position to equip pastors and other leaders for contemporary ministry with its new facilities, educational programs, and leadership. Your prayers and continued support are very important as we expand our efforts in the area of development.

New Course in Worship Planning

The worship planning group pictured below has been meeting weekly in its second year of planning our chapel services. It consists of several students and faculty advisers Duane Kelderman and Emily Brink. New this year is the option for students to receive course credit for their efforts. Being part of the chapel planning

group is a great way for students to apply theology and integrate their learning, and it prepares them for an important task they will be doing in the churches. It also results in meaningful chapel services for the entire CTS community. Morning prayers are held on Wednesdays and Fridays every week at 10:00 a.m. and a contemplative service in the tradition of

Taizé, called "Still Waters," is held on Thursdays at 4:30 p.m. Chapel services not only feature preachers from the faculty, student body, and area pastors, but also incorporate Scripture, songs, and prayers in creative ways. Occasionally special guests speak, such as John Stott in April 2002 and N. T. Wright in January 2003.



Chapel planning group: (l. to r.) Sheila Ryan, Paul Ryan, Emily Brink, Carrie Titcombe, Ellen Van Tongeren, Dan Vos, Jaci Busch, Heidi De Jonge.



Seminary quartet sings in Christmas chapel service by the student center fireplace, including student Paul Ryan, Professors Lyle Bierma and John Cooper, and Director of Development Dan Meindertsma.

Today's churches are full of questions....

Who should give leadership?
How do we deal with change?

What beliefs are essential?

How can we relate to our community?

The Bible is the starting point for answers to these questions.
It's as relevant as ever for churches today.



Theological education at Calvin Theological Seminary
involves going deep into Scripture —
a vital practice for leaders of contemporary churches.



CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Classical theological education for contemporary ministry in a global context

Calvin Theological Seminary

3233 Burton St. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49546

3475 Mainway, LCD STN 1
Burlington ON L7M 1A9

Non-profit org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Grand Rapids, MI
Permit No. 657