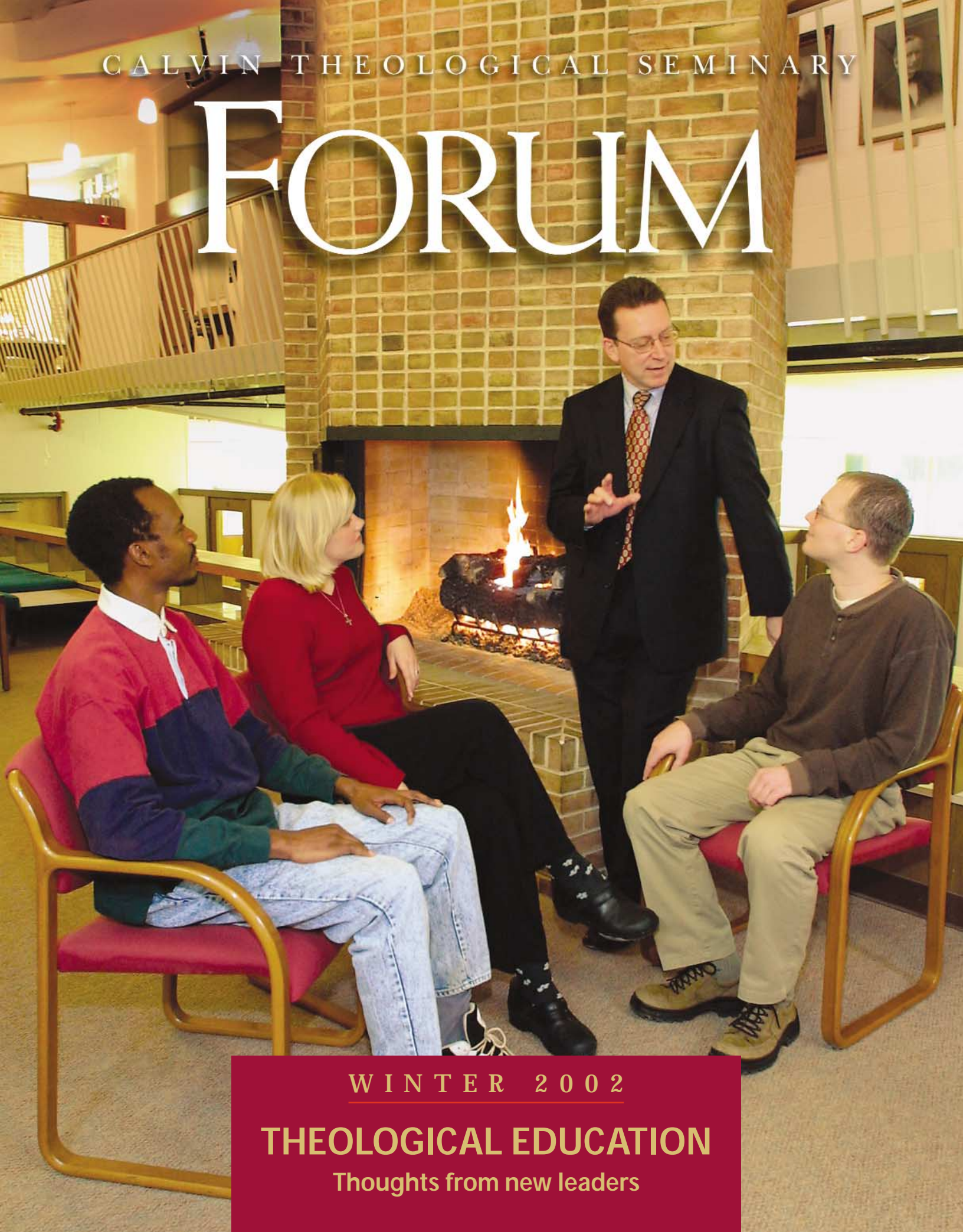


CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

FORUM



W I N T E R 2 0 0 2

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Thoughts from new leaders

FORUM

Providing Theological Leadership
for the Church

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from the president

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.

Dear Church Leader,

As I write to you today, I have just come from one of the most significant and wrenching parts of ministry—bringing a message from Scripture at the funeral of a young person. Mike VanderWal was a Calvin College student and an alumnus of the Seminary's Facing Your Future program, and he was full of faith, hope, and love. But Mike died from a massive cardiovascular failure while ice skating with friends on Friday night, January 11, an event that plunged our whole College and Seminary communities into grief. Love and sorrow mingled and flowed at the funeral in ways I'll never forget, forming acoustics for the gospel: "I am going to get a room ready for you . . . so that where I live you may live also."

You understand. Tragedies are unique, but every church has its share of them, and leaders must bring to them a steady and loving presence that reminds people of Jesus. One of our goals at the Sem is to prepare leaders to do this well. So right now I'm working with our Student Senate to set up a workshop that will be called something like "Christian Funerals: What's the Message?" Perhaps VP Duane Kelderman, and I, and a veteran local pastor will host the workshop. In any case, our goal is to equip future church leaders to help the grieving with a high degree of pastoral intelligence. Here (and elsewhere in ministry) students need clear theological understanding, solid pastoral skills, and above all, some of the courage and comfort of the Good Shepherd. At the Sem, we are sobered by the church's mandate to educate its leaders for ministry, and we want you to know that we are working at it with full mind and heart.

To join hands with you in these efforts, we have changed the *Forum*. As you can tell, the Calvin Theological Seminary *Forum* has a new look! We have expanded the paper to include not only articles that offer thoughtful support in various areas of ministry, but also news items about the Seminary and its alumni. Our idea is to let you know three times per year what's up at CTS, welcome your response, learn from it, and thus form a fresh partnership as we together minister the gospel to the world. I hope you like the new way we are reaching out. And I hope that this day, as you bring life to others, our Lord will bring it to you.

Grace and peace.

Faithfully yours,

Neal

REFLECTIONS ON THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Now More Than Ever

In peacetime, wrote C. S. Lewis, only wise people know that we live at the edge of a precipice. In wartime, everybody knows.

We know that we have no earthly security, and that we are sojourners to the City of God. We know that terrorists are like addictions: they are lethal and they are patient. We know that people can act very wickedly and that their wickedness then inspires others to act with great bursts of kindness. After September 11, blood banks overflowed. Midwest fire departments sent new trucks to Manhattan. Ordinary people shipped so much dog food for the canine rescue corps that tons of it piled up in New York's warehouses.

Our only hope is in God, and God inspires people to reach out to others. Citizens of the United States were heartened in the days and weeks of this past autumn by outpourings of sorrow from all over the world—from Germans massed in front of the Brandenburg Gate to schoolchildren in Korea praying in front of the U.S. Embassy. The compassion of strangers said to American citizens, "You matter so much to us that your suffering makes us suffer." And we were reminded that the sorrow of others can bring us life. That's

by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.



because compassion is one of the many splendors of love.

In the *New York Times* for September 16, in the middle of all the stories of sorrow and fear, there were stories of love. One of them gave the transcripts of phone calls from people trapped in a doomed airliner or trade tower. The calls are extraordinary, and a number of them have a common thread:

Stuart T. Meltzer to his wife: "Honey, something terrible is happening. I don't think I'm going to make it. I love you. Take care of the children."

Kenneth Van Auken to his wife Lorie: "I love you. I don't know if I'm going to get out. But I love you very much."

Brian Sweeney to his wife Julie: "Hey, Jules, it's Brian. I'm on a plane and it's hijacked and it doesn't look good. I just wanted to let you know that I love you and no matter what, I'll see you again."

You're going to die and you call out to those who are in your heart. Do you ask for revenge? Do you say you're scared? No. Love gets the last word. "Hey Jules, it's Brian. I just wanted to let you know that I love you."

Love is strong as death, says the Wisdom Teacher. Even stronger, says the gospel. In trouble we look to the cross whence comes our help not because the cross of Jesus Christ explains evil, but because it tells us God so loved the world. In trouble we look to the empty tomb, not just because we'd like to live longer than three-score-and-ten, but because the resurrection of Jesus Christ tells us we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Love brings life. Maybe now more than ever.

A Christian seminary prepares students from all over the world to fan out to minister the love of Jesus Christ. The world needs ministers of the gospel, ▶

Now More
Than Ever

no matter what form that ministry takes. Ministers of the *gospel*—that is, ministers of the love of God in Jesus Christ. We want to educate students in Bible, history, theology, and practice, but not just to load them up with knowledge and skills. We want to prepare them to minister the gospel of Christ, and to do it winningly in contexts that change every day. Think how our new context has brought out the need for ministers who have thought deeply about evil, about corruption, and about corruption that can happen right inside religion. We need ministers now who can tell the difference between justice and revenge, who know something about tragic choices in a troubled world. If you ask a minister of the gospel whether the biblical idea of forgiveness applies at all to the relation of nations to terrorist groups, I'd hope that the minister had been educated to think about such things. Now more than ever.

But being educated for ministry means so much more than learning to think well inside a Christian worldview, or being able to teach a class, counsel a troubled soul, evangelize a village, plant a church, preach a sermon. Ministers of all kinds have to embody the gospel in their own persons. They have to incarnate grace and truth in some way like our Lord. We want students who believe from their hairline to their toenails that they themselves have been so fiercely loved by God that this overshadows everything else about them—their race, their gender, their politics, their appearance. They have been loved so much that their own lives now show some of the fruit of the Spirit, including love, joy, patience, and kindness.

I dream of a seminary in which we practice these virtues on each other. After all, these are the virtues of Christ, the true vine. When we are attached to him through faith, then his goodness runs through us like sap, causing new life to burst out all over us.

We want to educate students in Bible, history, theology, and practice, but not just to load them up with knowledge and skills. We want to prepare them to minister the gospel of Christ, and to do it winningly in contexts that change every day.

What if the love of Christ were to run more and more through Calvin Theological Seminary?

What if professors encouraged students at the same time that they corrected them?

What if North American students learned the names of international students and weren't afraid to keep trying till they really had them? What if they asked international students lots of questions about their country and culture, hoping to learn something from them about the international contexts in which the gospel must take root?

What if the seminary leadership saw the world big, but also attended to the small acts of courtesy and hospitality to

We want students who believe from their hairline to their toenails that they themselves have been so fiercely loved by God that this overshadows everything else about them—their race, their gender, their politics, their appearance.

students, faculty, and staff?

What if CTS joined hands with those who do ground-level ministry every day, and each looked for ways to minister to the other, together seeking to serve Christ in a troubled world?

What if in worship, in classrooms, in hallways, in residences, we moved through each day in deliberate consciousness of the fact that all we do is before the face of God—every encouragement, but also every gossip; every testimony of faith, but also every lie; every determined attempt to read the Bible deeply, but also every superficial reading?

What if, in five years, the students who left Calvin Seminary would spend the rest of their lives in gratitude not only for the intellectual challenges they received and met, but also for the spiritual nurture they received? What if they knew that in seminary some of the grace and truth of Christ himself had come to them?

I believe that this is our calling at CTS in the years to come. We do classical theological education very well. But we will need to do it in a nurturing matrix, and we'll need to do it in a world that changes as suddenly as ours did on September 11, 2001. We'll need to do it in a world in which every cultural practice, every ancient hatred, all kinds of religious understandings and misunderstandings loop around the world and come right back at us. Nobody can now be theologically educated for contemporary Christian ministry except with a global view.

But first things first. First we need God's love to flow through our building, our hearts, our practices and attitudes. We'll need to yearn for God's love, to move toward it, to bathe in it. Love is strong as death, says the Wisdom Teacher. Stronger, says the gospel. We may organize good theological education in any good way, but at the center must always be the radiant, life-giving love of God that brings every dead one of us to life.

That's the gospel. Now more than ever.

Reflections of a Pastor to Prospective Pastors

1 Timothy 1:15-17

The meditation below was delivered in Calvin Theological Seminary chapel on January 18, 2002, by Rev. Duane K. Kelderman, the new Vice-President for Administration and Assistant Professor of Preaching.

The title of my meditation this morning is “Reflections of a Pastor to Prospective Pastors.” The backdrop of my meditation is an ache in my heart, an ache for the congregational ministry that I left behind when I came to seminary last year. I knew when I came here that I would miss being a local church pastor. After all, I loved almost every part of the ministry. And many of my colleagues on the faculty here warned me before I said yes to this appointment that I would have this ache in my heart. Please understand, I am not questioning God’s call to me to this position, and I could hardly be more excited about the future of Calvin Theological Seminary and the privilege God has given me to be a small part of it. But I did not realize until I left Neland Church how deeply my identity had become a pastoral identity, and how difficult it would be to leave congregational ministry behind.

But enough about me. What I want to do in this meditation this morning is turn my ache into a source of encouragement and anticipation and hopefulness and joy for each one of you students who are looking forward to pastoral ministry of one type or another. I know that you students gathered here this morning represent many different ministry tracks, not just Word and Sacrament, and you will go into many different ministry settings, not just congregational, and not just in North America. But I think my observations this morning about the richness and privilege of pastoral ministry cut across most of these lines.

I would like to mention several things that you students have to look forward to.

When you are a pastor, it’s actually part

by Rev. Duane K. Kelderman



of your *job* to think, to reflect, to pray, to read, to listen. It’s actually part of your job to interpret life for people, to probe the deep mysteries of faith for yourself and for others, to study God’s Word, to ask hard questions, to give voice to people’s deepest fears and longings, to be a *poet*, as Walter Brueggemann has put it, who expresses old truths in new ways and from fresh angles so that they break through resistant hearts and hardened communities. And as Paul points out today, your own relationship to God and your own spiritual journey, flawed as it is, is the critical touchstone for all of this interpretive activity.

One of the most obvious ways, though by no means the only way, all of this interpretive activity comes to expression is in worship. Leading a community in prayer and song and word and sacrament is one of the highest privileges a person can have. Every Sunday people stream across the

parking lot and through the doors of the church to meet God. Every Sunday pastors and worship planners give critical shape to worship—this mysterious confluence of text and liturgy and song and preacher and congregation and world. And out of this confluence comes an engagement of God and his people that is at once predictable and miraculous. As a pastor you get to be a part of this creative work of the Holy Spirit every week.

Everyone has his or her own idea of life’s finest moment. For me, there is no finer moment than the last verse of that final hymn, when the words of the hymn capture everything you’ve tried to say and do in that worship service, plus things you never intended to say or do, and when you can tell by the way people are singing that they have met the living God. For me nothing, nothing is more rewarding than that.

When you are a pastor, you have the rare privilege of walking with people in the most meaningful and deepest moments of their lives. Births and weddings and funerals, and almost every major life event in between, are the occasions for the pastor to be present, representing Christ, giving hope and courage, bearing witness to the kingdom, offering a way of seeing and interpreting life. In 24 years of ministry, I never took for granted the privilege of entering with people into these most sacred moments of life. It is a sacred trust so great that one ought to be terrified at the prospect of representing Christ and the church in such moments. But it is sweet terror. So many times people have said to me, “You don’t know what it meant to us that you sat with us in that waiting room for hours,” to which I usually said something like, “Thank you. ▶

Reflections
of a Pastor

▶ And you don't know what a privilege it is to represent the love and comfort of the Shepherd in times like these."

When you are a pastor, you get to witness God's mighty work in people's lives. I think of Geoffrey, a student who rejected and ran up against the Christian faith all the way through college. We would talk and talk, but the Christian faith just never added up for Geoffrey. It wasn't for him. Today Geoffrey is a world missionary in the Dominican Republic. The details of what happened between then and now are interesting, but they're not important. What's important is that God worked mightily in his life. And as a pastor I had a front row seat.

Or Paula, a young woman whose extended family populates the prison system of Michigan, and who, by any human reckoning, should be just another statistic of this society. But God knew Paula's name, and God had another family for her. She became a Christian, and has been a member of Neland for 12 years. As her pastor I had a front row seat to watch God work mightily in her life.

Finally, when you are a pastor, the pastoral vocation permeates your whole life. There is a wonderful unity to the life of a pastor. In a great article in the journal *Congregations* (Sep/Oct 2001), entitled "The Good Life: Celebrating the Pastoral Vocation," which I highly recommend, the author points out how telling it is that the old English term for person, *parson*, came to be used to describe a pastor, as though the person and the vocation were so completely integrated that they were synonymous.

Now there are certainly hazards in this fusing of personal and pastoral identity. There are many ways in which this can be misunderstood and can go wrong. But rehearsing those is for another day. What I want to highlight today is the richness of a life where, whether you are at church, or a basketball game, or a zoning hearing at city hall, or a jail, or a Christmas party, you are person *and* pastor.

*When you are a pastor,
you have the rare privilege of
walking with people in the
most meaningful and deepest
moments of their lives.*

Pastoral ministry is not a job, it is a way of life. If that sounds like a burden, then maybe you should think twice about going into it. Trust me, it doesn't have to be.

When I accepted this appointment to seminary, several of my minister friends said to me, "Oh, you must be looking forward to being free on Sundays." To be honest with you, I am still lost on Sunday. I'm still trying to figure out who I am on Sunday. The pastoral life is a total life; it's a way of life. If you want to focus on the fact that you only have four weekends off a year, and no religious holidays and not even the national holiday weekends, if this deep coherence of person and pastor sounds like a trap more than a privilege, then think twice about whether you want the pastoral life. But you should be struck, as I am, by the fact that I have never talked to a retired minister who gave his entire life to the pastoral calling and regretted it.

Now I can hear someone saying about now, "Duane, your nostalgia and grief have gotten the best of you. Isn't being a pastor also very painful and hard?" You bet it is. My guess is that, everything I've said notwithstanding, pastoral ministry is the hardest job there is. There is deep vulnerability and loneliness in ministry. Unfortunately the church is made up of people. And yes, people are people. People hurt people, including pastors. But that only makes your pastoral calling the laboratory for, as Paul says, suffering producing endurance, and endurance character, and character hope.

One of the things that has moved me the most in my months at seminary is the sto-

ries that several of you have told me of why you came to seminary. Several of you, and you know who you are this morning, have told me that the thing that first *repelled* you from the idea of becoming a minister, but then, in the end, *drew* you to becoming a minister; seeing your dad suffer as a minister; seeing him be poised and restrained in congregational meetings that were terrible, and then seeing him come home after the meeting and weep with your mom; but then also seeing the Spirit develop in them a godliness, a faith, a commitment, a longsuffering so deep, so rich that you suddenly found yourself saying, "Lord, produce such character in me. Here am I, send me."

No, the pastoral life is not an easy life. And we are rigorous in this place in preparing you for ministry because we know that it's not an easy life and we want to be as thorough as we can possibly be in the formation of knowledge, skills and character in you that we know are absolutely crucial to your flourishing. But everyone from David to James to Paul has told us that suffering and joy live side by side. Congregational ministry is no exception to that great truth of life.

When Harry Emerson Fosdick, that great Presbyterian preacher, retired from the ministry, he stood before his congregation on that last Sunday and said, "If I had a thousand lives to live in this century, I would go into the parish ministry with every one of them."

When Paul thought for just a moment that God could actually use him, the worst of sinners, to display the patience and love of Christ, he could only shout a doxology, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever."

Hang in there. Graduation's coming. I can't wait for some of you to come back to me years from now and tell me, "Duane, you were right. It's all you said it would be—the pain and the blessing." God bless you all in your studies today.

The Christian Reformed Church and Calvin Theological Seminary: A Strategic Partnership

The seminary gives theological leadership to the church and trains the church's pastors. But it can only do those things when it listens to and learns from the church.

Part of our denominational covenant is to “maintain a theological seminary” (*Church Order*, Article 19) whose primary mission will be to *train* ministers of the Word and other specialized congregational leaders. Seminary professors—to state the obvious—are to do that training. But they must do more. They must also *give theological leadership* to the church. In the words of the church order, they must “expound the Word of God and vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors” (*Church Order*, Article 20). The language hails back to the time of the Reformation. It may strike us as a bit quaint and archaic, yet this second role is also crucial in the life of the church, especially in a day of growing biblical and theological illiteracy.

Training Pastors

A colleague of mine once remarked that he could only vote “yes” for a ministerial candidate if he could also answer “yes” to this question: would I want this person to be my daughter’s pastor? That brings the seminary’s task close to home. The professors’ sacred obligation is to do all they can to model, encourage, teach, disciple and train so that we need not fear for our sons’ and daughters’ spiritual journeys.

Training people for ministry is the more obvious task of a seminary community. A seminary education must open up

by Dr. Henry DeMoor



A seminary education must open up new worlds of thought, new horizons of ideas, and new expressions of the faith—expressions that re-state in relevant ways the truth once revealed and long confessed.

new worlds of thought, new horizons of ideas, and new expressions of the faith—expressions that re-state in relevant ways the truth once revealed and long confessed. It must hone the skills required to preach, lead, teach, and counsel with wisdom, effectiveness and integrity. It must model genuine spirituality that is infectious in others.

To do that well, the seminary must listen to the church, be attuned to its experience, understand its current needs, and bring what it learns to the task of training new leaders. At the same time, it must itself be leading. It must keep the church’s focus on what is most important: the truth of Scripture, the mission of God, the gospel of grace, the time-honored witness of the universal church, and the cherished creed of that part of it known as the Christian Reformed community. That is an awesome task.

Yet we who do the training of pastors are struck by how the seminary is only a small part of the training process. Indeed, there’s a sense in which all professors can do is chip away a little, sculpt a little, inject some new notes into an already well-known melody. The bulk of preparation for meaningful professional ministry happens in the formative years, from the days of childhood to the day of college graduation and beyond. It is done in the home, in the school, in the parenting congregations. As such, it is the task of the church as a whole. Indeed, the seminary and the

A Strategic Partnership



church have a strategic partnership in this training venture.

Giving Theological Leadership to the Church

The seminary not only trains pastors for ministry, it teaches and gives theological leadership to the church as a whole. In a fascinating article entitled “Teachers and the Teaching Authority” (*The Ecumenical Review*, April 1986, pp. 152-202), Willem Visser ‘t Hooft, former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, looks in broad strokes at the entire history of the Christian church and traces within it the relationship between the *magistri*, the theological teachers, and the *magisterium*, the authority responsible for the true teaching of the church, in our case, the synod. Having recounted a “somewhat tumultuous history of the relations between” these two, Visser ‘t Hooft concludes that “they need one another” because “both are in danger of forgetting the limits of their task” and “both need a constructively critical partner.” “Great moments in the history of the church,” he continues, “have been those when the *magisterium* (the synod or church) called upon theologians to make their contribution, or when they (theologians) came spontaneously to the rescue of the church.”

So, for example, as the Third Reich developed in 1934, Karl Barth and others rescued a Protestant church “overwhelmed by a wave of syncretism” by publishing the Barmen Declaration of Faith. Today we might add the more recent example of South African theologians drafting the Belhar Confession, urging synods of Reformed churches to back away from defending apartheid policies on so-called biblical grounds. *Magistri*

The seminary must listen to the church, be attuned to its experience, understand its current needs, and bring what it learns to the task of training new leaders. At the same time, it must itself be leading.

(the theological teachers) keep the *magisterium* (the synod/church) honest. They point it, when they must, to the heart of its historic faith.

One should not make grandiose claims about the contributions of our seminary professors in the history of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. But who can deny the influence of a David Holwerda putting his hand to a report on “Neo-Pentecostalism” (1973) or an Andrew Bandstra to a hermeneutical report (1978) and a summary of the exegetical debate (2000) on women’s

The seminary must listen to and learn from the church in order to give theological leadership to the church.

ordination? Examples like this abound. Peter De Klerk’s *Bibliography of the Writings of the Professors of Calvin Theological Seminary* happens to be a two-inch-thick volume with nothing but a listing of books and articles, often written for the church. It is no exaggeration to say that many have significantly sacrificed their academic careers to be of service to the denomination. And although they are less outspoken today than in the past, faculty advisers continue to contribute to synod’s deliberations in June and serve on many of its study committees on an ongoing basis.

Here too the street between the seminary and the church is a two-way street. The church must also keep professors honest. It appoints them, re-appoints them, and occasionally fires them. As congregations play out their witness in a constantly changing world, they often tug at the professors in two directions, both vital: first, challenging them to stay within confessional boundaries and, second, reminding them that the practice of faith has out-raced their cherished formulations of doctrine and theology. Here too the seminary must listen to and learn from the church in order to give theological leadership to the church. In a very real sense, experienced pastors become their seminary teachers’ teachers on matters of church and ministry. Ideally, the seminary and church live in such a mutually serving and teaching relationship with one another so that we all “attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

As we enter a new chapter of the seminary’s history, we renew our commitment to this rich relationship with the church and trust that God will bless this strategic partnership between the seminary and the church.

An Interview with Calvin Hofland, Calvin Theological Seminary's Missionary-in-Residence



Christian Reformed World Missionary Calvin Hofland has been serving as Calvin Seminary's "Missionary-in-Residence" during the winter quarter of the 2001-2002 academic year. The seminary is considering an ongoing residency program, in which an experienced pastor or missionary would spend several months at the seminary, teaching and learning as part of the seminary community. Hofland has served for the past six years as a CRC World Missions evangelist and church planter in Guinea, West Africa, working among the predominantly Muslim Fulbé people. Forum editor Lugene Schemper recently interviewed Hofland about his experience as Missionary-in-Residence and his work as a missionary.

Lugene Schemper: Cal, describe some of the work you've been doing here at the seminary these past months.

Calvin Hofland: My experience here has been both delightful and challenging. I have enjoyed interacting with both students and faculty, and I have been impressed with the depth of spiritual and academic integrity that I have seen in my short time here. I've been speaking on various subjects including Islam, spiritual warfare, and mission strategy in a number of classes as a regular guest lecturer, bringing a missionary perspective to whatever topic is currently being discussed.

Outside the classroom, I've been pleased to have a great deal of informal contact with students. As a result of the events of September 11 and the subsequent conflict in Afghanistan, students are curious about Islam. I'm able to share a unique perspective with them as someone who has been very involved with Muslims in West Africa. I'm also particularly interested in building links between seminarians and mission agencies of the church. Christian Reformed World Missions wants to be a partner with Calvin Theological Seminary as it helps

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Christian Reformed World Missions wants to be a partner with Calvin Theological Seminary as it helps students develop a global perspective on ministry.
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students develop a global perspective on ministry. I think some of the most meaningful conversations that I have had are with students who want to know what possessed us to go as a missionary family with small children to a third-world Muslim country! I've had the opportunity to be transparent and a bit vulnerable, testifying to the calling of God on my life and to his incredible faithfulness.

Schemper: What challenges does the church face in its ministry to Muslims in Guinea?

Hofland: There is a spiritual battle going on for Africa. Islam is pushing to make Africa a Muslim continent and the fundamentalists are trying to take over regions which are already Muslim. The Wahhabist fundamentalist movement is widespread and well-financed. Although its adherents are still only a minor percentage of the Muslim population in places like Guinea, it is making significant inroads throughout West Africa, with vast sums of money from the Middle East financing the construction of mosques and schools and providing financial incentives to those who will embrace this more rigid form of Islam. In Guinea, it's tearing whole families apart as children reject the "mediocre" faith of their fathers and adopt a strict Wahhabist stance.

Schemper: Do the Fulbé people have a negative perception of the United States?

Hofland: On the one hand, most Fulbé are intrigued by America and desperately want to come to this prosperous land. Most of them have relatives who have come to the U.S. and send money home to help out less fortunate family members in Guinea. On the other

Hofland
Interview

▶ hand, the Fulbé are confused and quite honestly rather disgusted by what they see in the media. Television, videos, and magazines from the West bring them images of an incredibly decadent society, a people given over to drugs, sex, violence, and extravagant lifestyles. Unfortunately, the negative image they have of our society isn't as far off from reality as we would like it to be, and is a deterrent to the spread of the gospel.

Schemper: How will the events of September 11 and its aftermath affect your work in Guinea?

Hofland: Islamic fundamentalists are confronting Muslims everywhere to make a decision to be on one side or the other ("Join us or be counted as against true Islam.") They have declared a *jihad* against the West and have called on Muslims around the world to join them. If the American response begins to appear more broadly as an anti-Muslim response, there will likely be serious repercussions not only for us, but for Christians and Americans around the world.

At the same time, this event provides us with a huge opportunity. Since millions of Muslims are being forced to make a decision anyway, this is a perfect opportunity to "wage peace" and show them the love of Christ through word and deed. We are hoping and praying that recent events will serve as a wake-up call to Christians around the world to pray fervently for the Muslim world and to be bold enough to reach out to them with the love of Christ. We desperately need more missionaries and more churches willing to send missionaries, particularly to Muslims. While I've been here, I've tried to communicate that mission challenge to Calvin Theological Seminary students.

If you want to see people in Pakistan come to Christ, start by reaching out to the Pakistanis in your midst.

Schemper: Many North Americans live in places where they have regular contact with Muslims. Can you give advice to us about how to reach out to Muslims whom we know?

Hofland: We have an unprecedented opportunity today to reach out to Muslims around the world by reaching out to the Muslims in North America. There are many countries where Christian missionaries are not welcome because of very restrictive laws. At the same time, thousands of people from those very same countries are right here in our midst as students, residents, and even naturalized citizens. If you want to see people in Pakistan come to Christ, start by reaching out to the Pakistanis in your midst. If you want to help us in our efforts to reach out to the Muslim Fulbé in Guinea, West Africa, show the love of Jesus to the thousands of Fulbé who live right here. Those who are here are much more likely to come to Christ than if they were at home because they are somewhat removed from the incredible pressures to conform which they experience under Islam. These people usually have very strong ties to their families back home. Many of them eventually return. That means that when you are reaching out to them, you are also reaching out to thousands of others who would otherwise have no opportunity to hear the gospel. For example, when Amadou in Chicago telephones his mother Fatimata in Guinea and says that some Americans have really been kind to him since September 11, that that will do wonders

for our relationship with Fatimata and Amadou's whole extended family. Just think what would happen if Amadou became a Christian!

Schemper: Can you give us some concrete suggestions to help us do that?

Hofland: The first thing is to not be afraid. Fear and lack of love are probably the two biggest barriers that keep us from developing meaningful relationships with Muslims. 1 John 4:18 tells us how to defeat fear: perfect love drives it out. So the first step is asking God to give you a true heart for Muslims, so that you can love them as he loves them. The next step is to pray. Anyone coming to Christ requires the work of the Holy Spirit in her or his life. So pray—a lot. Ask God to give you a heart not just for Muslims in general but for specific individuals whom he may have in mind. Next get to know Muslims, talk to them, ask them questions, listen, and do some reading about their home country and about Islam. Try to discover what drives them and what aspirations, hopes, fear, and worries they have. Share God's Word with them and ask them if it is okay for you to pray for them about specific things that they have mentioned. Most would be delighted that you cared enough even to think about it. Also, be sensitive to their culture and customs and don't argue with them or act as though they are ignorant. You can't argue anyone into the kingdom, but genuine love and faithful prayer go a long way. And finally, don't give up. It may take years or even generations. So keep your eyes focused on what God is doing over the long haul. Try to move them closer to Christ one step at a time and remember that every step is not only a victory, it's a miracle that you should celebrate because it indicates the hand of God at work. I hope you enjoy watching God redeem people to himself as much as I have. It's awesome!



In this column, Dr. Henry De Moor, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Church Polity answers some of the many questions he regularly receives from church council members.

Q. I have Article 4 of the Church Order in front of me, the one with a clearly prescribed procedure for the election of officebearers, and I also understand that Synod 1989 discouraged the use of the lot in the selection process. But are these the only two models? Aren't there any creative new models that follow, if not the letter, at least the spirit and intent of this article? (This question came to me five times in the last two months alone.)

A. I harbor the hope that there will be at least a few who read this question and say: "That sounds familiar." You're right. It's the same question I dealt with in the Spring & Summer 2001 issue of *Calvin Seminary in Focus*. In my response at that time I presented and commented on seven models, then invited readers to add to the list so that they could be passed on to all at a later time. Well, I received two more and pass them along now with a final comment.

h) The congregation is asked to suggest names; the council nominates more than needed. The congregation votes and the votes are counted. The nominees that receive a majority of the votes cast are elected but not announced until all selections are made. The remaining positions are filled by lot from among those who have received the most votes (though not a majority). The number of those included in the lot procedure equals the number of unfilled openings plus one. The officebearers selected by majority vote and the lot are announced in alphabetical order. The congregation then votes on the entire slate.

i) The congregation is asked to suggest names; the council compiles a list of potential officebearers consisting of approximately three to four times the number needed. Council then invites these people to a weekend workshop led by the pastor. The workshop focuses on the congregation's vision, mission, and values; on the roles of elder and deacon; and on discovering gifts. Those who do not accept the invitation are not nominated. Those who attend are called

back together at a later date for a time of prayer and determination of their inner calling. Anyone who does not feel called is not nominated. Council confirms the nomination of those who do feel called and are willing to let their names stand. The congregation is informed of the list and votes "yes" or "no" for each person. Members are also encouraged in advance to approach the council before the congregational meeting and inform it of any serious reservations so that "no" votes have a context known to council.

Two observations about this last model. The first is the obvious question: "What happens if too many are called and chosen?" Upon reflection I decided not even to pose it. It would be a nice problem to have. The second is the inclusion of something I hinted at the last time: are we truly developing potential candidates from among our membership so that their selection is not thrust upon them but is an expected conclusion to a process of awakening interest and willingness to serve? That hint, by the way, received roughly twenty "Amen's" by way of e-mails and phone calls.

Both models, I believe, do not in any way seriously violate the principle discussed the last time: meaningful involvement of the congregation in the selection process. But who am I? It would be nice if synod could be persuaded at some point to revisit the issue in view of recent developments. An overture, anyone?

Q. I am thoroughly confused by letters to the editor of *Christian Courier* and other printed advice (including yours) about whether a minister may serve on the board of a charitable organization. Is there not a way that we could stay clear of violating both civil and ecclesiastical law? (from an Ontario elder)

A. You're in good company. I've heard from at least four people in the past week alone who share your concern. One of the problems may be that we're simply talking past one another in the "public press." I've been guilty of that myself from time to time. Since it involves the welfare of all of our churches in Ontario if not also the other provinces, perhaps the time has come to convene a task force under the auspices of the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA or the Canadian delegates thereof. We could gather the best legal advice and come to some preliminary conclusions about the matter.

We could take a good hard look at whether Canadian churches should be incorporated by way of Public Trusteeship in the provinces, or whether they should be incorporated under Part II of the Canada Corporations Act (as our Church Order Supplement suggests). And if they are incorporated provincially, one wonders why we couldn't simply define the Board of Directors as being comprised of the council of the congregation minus all paid employees including the minister. That way, the minister and any other paid employees would simply not vote on any issue involving financial matters or on policy with clear financial implications. But they would be available for the decision-making on all matters assigned to a council by our creed and our Church Order.

You will note, no doubt, that I am not clearing up your confusion here. I'm simply raising a couple of issues that, from where I sit, should be explored. And I'll end the same way I did answering the previous question. If the suggested task force is a good idea, you might consider requesting the Board to do this or, if necessary, steering an overture synod's way to instruct the Board to look into it.

Robert C. DeVries



Susan J. Zonnebelt-Smeenge



Getting to the Other Side of Grief

*Beginning with the publication of **Getting to the Other Side of Grief: Overcoming the Loss of a Spouse** (Baker, 1998), Dr. Robert C. DeVries, professor of Church Education and Director of M.A. programs at the seminary and co-author Dr. Susan J. Zonnebelt-Smeenge, licensed clinical psychologist at Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services, have been busy writing and speaking on issues of grief and bereavement. Both of them experienced the death of their first spouse in the early 1990's as well as the death of brothers and/or parents. Four years ago they decided to marry each other after writing their first book. Recently they published **The Empty Chair: Handling Grief on Holidays and Special Occasions** (Baker, 2001) which came on the market just prior to the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001. This small gift book was quickly adopted by the Salvation Army in their grief counseling at "Ground Zero" in New York City. We talked with Susan and Bob about this ministry and their suggestions to pastors and other caregivers who wish to support those who are grieving.*

SEM: Why do people seem to have a difficult time talking about grief, when we will all have to face grief many times in life?

SUSAN: Part of the answer is that we like to talk about happy, joyful things. We tend to avoid talking about tough stuff, the truly emotional things. Someone's death—especially if we had developed a very close bond with that person—seems so far out of our control that most of the time we just don't know what to say. In fact, we tend to want to cover it up, run away from it, deflect our attention from it, or do anything we can to just plain avoid it.

BOB: One of the things this means for pastors and other caregivers is that we should not try to push or hurry a bereaved person back into a "normal" life or their prior regular routine. Death does change things—it changes relationships, family structures, values and dreams, even faith itself. People perpetuate a myth when they think that a bereaved person can somehow return to "normal" if they mean returning to the lifestyle pattern they had prior to the death.

SEM: Do you mean that someone who has experienced the death of a loved one will always grieve?

SUSAN: No, quite the opposite. We truly believe that grief not only happens to us naturally, like other emotions that simply well up within us at a certain point, but grief also takes intentional work. Grief takes time, sometimes much longer than some people might expect. Grieving the death of a spouse or a child, or anyone else

really close to you, can take up to two or three or even four years. If during that period of time you cannot discern a significant reduction of emotional pain, then that person would likely benefit from some professional counseling. By "work" we mean engaging in specific deliberate activities designed to help the bereaved person face the pain and work on it.

SEM: Can you give us an example or two of what these interventions might look like?

BOB: Certainly. Actually both books not only contain a myriad of specific interventions, but they are organized around *five basic tasks* of grief work. Unlike the popular view that there may be "stages" of grief, we promote the view that grief work is best described as "tasks" which weave in and among each other throughout the grief process. Grief is like a journey—a pilgrimage. We think David's words in Psalm 23 need to be taken quite literally where he says that we walk *through* the valley of the shadow of death. You don't go around, over, or under grief. You must go *through* it. And the *first task* is to confront the reality of the death. You need to accept the fact that your loved one has died and is unable to return. That may sound pretty simple, but often bereaved persons' minds and emotions can play tricks on them and keep them from facing the finality of that death. Even as caregivers, we tend to minimize, or soften, the blow by talking about someone being "lost," or "gone to a better place," or "passed on." There is no end to the euphemisms we use

for death, but using the words "dead" and "died" is far more helpful.

SUSAN: And at the funeral, the bereaved need to make certain that they have a viewing of the body. Actually seeing the corpse plants the reality of death in one's psyche in such a way that avoiding or minimizing it becomes more difficult. Grieving the death of someone lost in the Twin Towers following September 11 will be more complicated for those whose bodies were never recovered. My brother died in a plane crash a number of years ago, and we were not allowed to see his body. That doesn't mean you cannot resolve grief; but seeing the body, and doing everything else you can do to confront the reality of death is helpful in moving through the grief journey.

SEM: You mentioned five tasks of grief. What are the other four?

SUSAN: A *second task* is to express all of the emotions associated with the death of your loved one. I think many of us realize that we cannot store emotions very long—at least if one tries to store them they will eventually come out in many other, often unhealthy, ways. Emotions do not just go away. They need to be expressed.

BOB: That is one of the reasons why we stress in our workshops and presentations the need for Christians to lament—to do what the Psalmists so often did. We need to know we have the right and freedom to wail in God's presence. And we need to know that God understands this need. Even Jesus wept, standing before the tomb of Lazarus

just prior to bringing him back to life.

SUSAN: A *third task* is to work on storing the memories of this deceased person so that the bereaved person eventually feels free to move on with his or her own life. Memories are just that—they are events and relationships which we have experienced but are no longer present. They have become “historical,” which means that a bereaved person does have to “let go” of the relationship with the deceased. Although one cannot have a relationship with the deceased person anymore, that does not mean that he or she needs to forget. Quite the contrary! An essential task of grieving is learning how to formulate honest, realistic and balanced memories of a person. Store them where they can be retrieved. Do with those memories what you have done with all of the other important events and relationships you have had in your life which are no longer present. But this does mean that you have to let go of them as part of your present life.

BOB: So often we try to comfort each other by asserting that we will at least see this person again in heaven—with the assumption that we will re-establish the same kind of relationship that we had here on earth. We need to be cautious about this for two reasons. First, the Bible is virtually silent on the issue. It doesn't say anything very directly about the type of relationship we will have with each other. The emphasis in the Bible is on the relationship we will have with Christ, the Lamb who has been slain. Second, the Bible does say that marriage will *not* be part of the arrangement. The form of intimacy and depth of relationship many people experience here on earth is not a part of heaven. We see this as all the more reason to store the memories, move these relationships into a treasured part of our past, and move on with our life.

SEM: So then, the remaining “tasks” must have something to do with building a new life.

SUSAN: Exactly. A *fourth task* for bereaved persons is to work on re-formulating their own identity independent of the relationship they had with the deceased.

The *fifth task* is then to reinvest in life with your own sense of purpose and direction. When someone close dies, especially a member of one's family, it is like taking one of the figures off a mobile hanging over a baby's crib. The whole thing is thrown out of balance. We often develop our own sense of identity in relationship to others. But when a person is no longer alive, we are forced to ask ourselves the question: “who am I without this person?” Or even more pointedly, simply, “who am I—alone, by myself? My loved one died. I did not. What is my purpose, my calling in life?”

SEM: What do you mean by “resolution” of grief?

SUSAN: What we mean by “resolution” is that one can get to the point where the emotional pain no longer controls one's daily activities. A person is able to move back into a fulfilling and rewarding life unhampered by the weight of those emotions. There may well be times where those emotions may be triggered—some milestone life event like the marriage of an adult child. But we try to make a distinction between grief, which refers to the more lengthy and complicated process which *can end* versus the emotion of sadness which we all experience from time to time on many occasions. We will all feel momentary sadness from time to time because of the death of someone we loved. But those who have resolved their grief are also able to experience that brief sadness, understand it, and move *through* it once again.

SEM: What advice can you give to pastors and other caregivers who have the challenge of ministering to bereaved people regularly in their churches?

BOB: We hear fairly regularly from church people whose loved one died after an illness, that the church was certainly there during the illness, but following the funeral, many of them felt abandoned. Pastoral calls stopped rather abruptly, or certainly slowed down to a trickle within a couple of months. Just about the time they were really feeling the reality of their loss, church life had gotten back to “normal”—

only they had not! We would really like to see churches develop an action plan to minister intentionally and at regular intervals to the bereaved for at least twelve months following a death. After that they should receive visits on significant occasions until they reinvest in a “new beginning.”

SEM: Even though we are through the Christmas holiday season, tell us a little bit about your latest book *The Empty Chair* and what you say to people who are facing holidays and special occasions.

SUSAN: The holidays are potentially difficult times for bereaved people since holidays normally focus on family gatherings and family relationships. People also tend to link the death of their loved one to one of the nearest holidays. These situations underscore the fact that the deceased person is not there. And then some families tend to avoid mentioning that person's name. Somehow they think that talking about the deceased person will make the bereaved person feel worse. In reality, the opposite is true. If you give grieving persons an opportunity to mention the name of their loved one, or have someone else recall a fond memory, then that deceased person's memory has been honored.

BOB: We also encourage the bereaved person to plan, prioritize, balance being with people versus spending private time alone, and gain a new perspective on the meaning of the holiday. That means that a bereaved person should exercise the freedom to choose what he or she wants or does not want to do for this holiday. Grieving persons don't have to go to all the parties. They might find it most helpful to participate to some degree, but they might also want to give themselves the space for quiet reflection. And this is also a good time to remember the purpose of the holiday. With Easter coming, for example, the bereaved person can certainly remember the real meaning of the event in that Christ in fact *conquered* death and, though we grieve like everyone else, we do not grieve (as Paul said) as ones with no hope. We do have our final hope solidly resting in Christ our Savior.

Financial challenges test new leaders' philosophy

Money follows vision. Do the right things and good things happen. Those two statements stake out a whole philosophy when it comes to faith and finances and leading an institution like the seminary. Both President Plantinga and Vice-President for Administration Kelderman had several opportunities to articulate their philosophy regarding finances in interviews ranging from search committee to synod. But neither expected that his philosophy would be tested so quickly and dramatically. As Dr. Plantinga became president January 1, 2002, seminary general operating reserves had been totally depleted. The new administration and the Development and Finance Committee of the Board of Trustees are working hard to deal with these financial challenges.

"There's no single explanation for the financial situation we face," Kelderman explains. "On the revenue side, ministry shares, annual fund gifts, and tuition have all been somewhat down. On the expense side, the seminary stepped out in faith a year ago, adding a couple of positions judged to be strategic to its future. Put all of those things together, and we're facing as big a challenge as folks who have been around the seminary a long time can remember." But Kelderman quickly points to God's blessings. "The seminary has raised more money in the last two years than in any two years in its history. Every dollar for a \$4.6 million building expansion has been pledged and the pledges are coming in beautifully."

And both Plantinga and Kelderman state all the more strongly their belief that God will meet the needs of the seminary. Plantinga has just started meeting with potential donors to the seminary. "In the short amount of time that I have been talking with folks about our financial needs, I'm deeply encouraged by all the goodhearted people I've met. They love

the Sem and they want our ministry to flourish."

Kelderman has no doubt that God is at work, even in this financial challenge. "As a pastor I've just seen it so many

times. God says, 'Do you really trust me?' God is challenging us to trust him. How does that spiritual go? 'He's never failed us yet.'"

—Kathy Smith

Ministry focus group meets at seminary



What skills do church leaders need today? What recent changes in ministry should we be aware of as we train church leaders? CTS hosted an afternoon forum with various church leaders to get their answers to those questions. Pictured (from left to right) are Marilyn Rietberg, Jim Osterhouse, Kathy Smith, Norm Thomasma, Don Byker, Duane Kelderman, Reggie Smith, Fred Van Dyk and Mariano Avila.

Seminary students use new computer room

One of the first benefits of the seminary expansion has been the new computer room, in use since the fall quarter. Access to Logos Bible software has been a great help to seminarians.



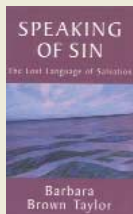
The Book of the Quarter

One of the dreams of our new president was to have one book for common discussion between students, staff, faculty, and board members in each quarter of the year. The chosen book would be provocative, appealingly written, and inexpensive. According to President Plantinga, "We might not agree with nearly everything in the book, but it would help us see God, the world, and ourselves with new eyes."

Two books have been chosen for the fall and winter quarters and have been made available at a discount in the seminary bookstore. They are described below in Dr. Plantinga's words and have been the subject of discussions within Calvin Seminary and various book clubs outside the seminary. We recommend them to *Forum* readers as well.

Fall 2001:

Speaking of Sin: The Lost Language of Salvation by Barbara Brown Taylor, (Cowley, 2001).



"The author is an Episcopal priest, widely known for the clarity and artfulness of her preaching. *Speaking of Sin* is intriguing in lots of ways. One of them is that its author is a mainline Protestant preacher who wants plain talk about sin and repentance in a time when many conservative Christians have quietly set these topics aside."

Winter 2001-2002:

Open Secrets by Richard Lischer, (Doubleday, 2001).



"In this memoir, an older-but-wiser seminary prof recalls the beginning of his ministry, and what he learned from people less educated than he. With his head full of redaction criticism and Marxist slogans, the young Lischer had begun a pastorate in rural southern Illinois among conservative Lutherans. The collision of values and expectations between pastor and congregation is, to put it mildly, instructive."



International Student Orientation group gathers with CTS staff members Rich Sytsma and Ina DeMoor.

From the World to West Michigan

After attending Calvin Theological Seminary's first-ever International Student Orientation, one student thought he was ready to return to his home country! Actually, that was an exaggeration, but new students really appreciated the three-week orientation to life, culture, and education in the U.S. The program included four components:

Worship. Each day began with a short time of prayer, singing and meditation led by faculty, staff, and students. Prayers were offered in many different languages, but the Lord bound all together in a beautiful unity.

Reformed Theology. Rev. Gerrit Koedoot, retired missionary to Japan and the Philippines, did a marvelous job of guiding students through the basic themes of Reformed theology. This mini-course also introduced students to American pedagogy and helped them hone their English language skills in listening, writing, and giving oral presentations.

English. Mrs. Teresa Renkema, former missionary to Honduras and Puerto Rico, taught English as a second language. She and Rev. Koedoot reviewed written assignments for theological content and English composition style. Students who needed extra help in English were enrolled in an ESL course at Calvin College.



by Richard E. Sytsma

Culture. Students were introduced to West Michigan culture, beginning with a tour of seminary and college facilities, including the food pantry, clothing bank, computer labs, and library. Next came a tour of southeast Grand Rapids including nearby malls and grocery stores and a video overview of Grand Rapids. CTS staff gave helpful presentations on adjustment to American culture and on expectations and services at CTS. Finally, on an excursion to Holland, Michigan, the students were given a brief overview of Christian Reformed Church history by Dr. Robert Swierenga in the historic Pillar Church.

Overall, the orientation was a great success. In the future we hope to make the orientation a two-way street, also orienting North American students to life in the CTS international community. As Dr. Henry De Moor said in his orientation meditation, international students not only can receive much at CTS; they also can give much. This year CTS students come from 21 countries and bring a rich variety of God-given gifts. The more we can encourage the expression and sharing of these gifts, the richer we will all be, and the more God's kingdom will flourish.

—Richard E. Sytsma,
Dean of Students &
International Student Advisor

Could he be your pastor some day?

The pastors of the future are asking questions in churches today.

They're wondering about God and challenging what the church believes.

They're looking for answers in a changing world that offers lots of choices.

Which students do you think God is preparing for a calling to ministry?

They aren't the best-behaved ones.

They don't ever wear "pulpit clothes."

They don't settle for easy answers.

They do want faith that works and makes sense today.

They do care about the world beyond their local church and community.

They do want to know God.

**Listen to their questions,
and point them to another
great place for asking questions.**



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