Welcome to the Fall 2014 issue of Testament!

Each new season brings hope and excitement, new friendships and new beginnings, and a time to welcome the next season in life. At Calvin Seminary we began the 2014/2015 academic year by welcoming 74 new students from 11 different countries representing five different programs. Praise God for our students!

In this issue of Testament you’ll find a reflection on the past 10 years of the Center for Excellence in Preaching (CEP). The reflection provides a thorough review of CEP and her impact on the church during this time.

Additionally, you’ll find an article about the Veenstra Legacy Garden dedication held this past summer. Please enjoy the photos as they carry a snapshot of the beauty of the day.

As I write this, I am reflecting on the fact that I am entering into my fourth year as President of Calvin Seminary. Many of you who read this newsletter are friends I have gotten to know well over the last three years. I look forward to continuing those relationships and forming new ones. Know that I value our friendship and your faithful support of Calvin Seminary. Thank you!

In His service with you,
Jul Medenblik
President of Calvin Theological Seminary

It began with a dream and a hope of the Seminary’s then-new president, Neal Plantinga, around the year 2001. Preaching generally had a high profile in the Christian Reformed Church as well as in the Protestant tradition. John Calvin esteemed the Word preached as a key means of grace for the church, and thus Reformed churches that bore the stamp of Calvin’s influence had long accorded the sermon a particular place of prominence in worship services. Given this history, and the present-day importance of the weekly sermon, what could the Seminary do to promote good preaching? Plantinga found an answer: create a center with the sole purpose of helping active preachers do their jobs better.

By 2004, the Seminary had secured generous funds from a number of donors who understood the vision and wanted to do something to make preaching better. By late spring of 2005, Rev. Scott Hoezee was selected as the Center’s new Director, effective July 1 of that year.

Since the Center got off the ground in 2004, its programming has steadily increased, both in-house at the Seminary itself and...
thinking that many pastors are looking for in order to craft fresh, invigorating sermons. The Center for Excellence in Preaching continues to fulfill the vision of doing something positive throughout North America. Today the Center’s biggest “front door” is its website. Visited by as many as 10,000 different pastors every month, the website houses a standing collection of resources to put preachers in touch with outstanding commentaries, books, and sample sermons.

But the vast majority of visitors to the website gravitate to the Lectionary-based sermon starter articles that are posted every Monday morning with ideas for next Sunday’s sermon. These are the most visited part of the website each week. (And yes, the busiest day of the week for this part of the website is Saturday!) These weekly postings provide the “jump start” in creative thinking that many pastors are looking for in order to craft fresh, invigorating sermons. The website’s archives now house sermon ideas on hundreds of preaching texts as well as for the entire Lectionary.

The Center received $200,000 from the John Templeton Foundation to develop resources to help churches make positive use of the insights of science in ministry settings. More recently, in the Fall of 2013, the Center was awarded a $500,000 grant from Lilly Endowment, to help refine how preaching is taught at the seminary level and to form peer learning groups of pastors throughout North America.

In its 10-year history, in addition to the generous funds provided by many donors, the Center has been awarded two major grants. In 2008, the Center received $200,000 from the John Templeton Foundation to develop resources to help churches make positive use of the insights of science in ministry settings. More recently, in the Fall of 2013, the Center was awarded a $500,000 grant from Lilly Endowment, to help refine how preaching is taught at the seminary level and to form peer learning groups of pastors throughout North America.

Continuing Education seminars for pastors are another key part of the Center’s work. Among the most successful one- and two-week seminars that have been offered the past decade are, “Imaginative Reading for Creative Preaching,” “The Preachers’ Oasis,” and “From Text to Sermon.” In addition to these seminars—typically offered in the summer—dozens of regional events have also been sponsored for pastors and led by Seminary Professors Jeff Witima, John Rottman, Neal Plantinga, and Scott Hoezee. The Center has also co-sponsored big conference events like the annual Symposium on Worship and the Festival of Art & Writing, and smaller one-day fall and spring preaching conferences that have featured outstanding preachers like Thomas G. Long, Mark Labberton, Craig Barnes, and Jeff Manion.

Other activities sponsored by the Center include the Seminary’s “Book-of-the-Semester” events, which have been offered the past decade are, “Imaginative Reading for Creative Preaching,” “The Preachers’ Oasis,” and “From Text to Sermon.” In addition to these seminars—typically offered in the summer—dozens of regional events have also been sponsored for pastors and led by Seminary Professors Jeff Witima, John Rottman, Neal Plantinga, and Scott Hoezee. The Center has also co-sponsored big conference events like the annual Symposium on Worship and the Festival of Art & Writing, and smaller one-day fall and spring preaching conferences that have featured outstanding preachers like Thomas G. Long, Mark Labberton, Craig Barnes, and Jeff Manion.

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