What a delight it is to feel sunshine and hear birds after a long winter! As we remember Christ’s death and resurrection at this time of year, the joy of creation itself sings of God’s power to bring life out of death. This spring, Calvin Seminary welcomed ten new residential students and three new distance learners, bringing our total degree-seeking student body to 278. We thank God for these students’ love for Christ and His church.

In this issue of Testament, you’ll read about a one-of-a-kind opportunity for Hispanic pastors to earn a certificate for Hispanic ministry from Calvin Seminary. The first class of students enrolled in 2012, through a partnership with the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation, and we will celebrate with them as they graduate in May! I am always grateful for your friendship and support of Calvin Seminary, especially as we continue witnessing the impact of your gifts. Thank you for extending that impact for years to come through your Legacy gift.

In His service with you,

Jul Medenblik
President of Calvin Theological Seminary

“I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders.” – Psalm 9:1
Planned Giving

Q&A

Great question! There are several, but here are a few of the most common misconceptions people have about estate planning:

- Many people believe the purpose of estate planning is to avoid taxes. Estate planning is not simply about saving taxes. God calls us to be good stewards. We are obligated to handle our finances in a way that honors Him. A thoughtfully prepared estate plan will not only communicate your final goals and wishes, but also honor God in the distribution and transfer of assets you’ve inherited.

- Others believe that estate planning is primarily for the wealthy. Everyone needs an estate plan. It is an intentional process of deciding where your assets should be distributed after death. Most people underestimate the value of their estates. When assessing your net worth, don’t forget to include the face value of insurance policies, retirement benefits, and the value of your home. If you do not prepare an estate plan, the state will determine the guardianship of minor children and the recipients of your assets for you.

- Many people assume giving cash is the best thing they can do for their favorite ministry, such as Calvin Seminary. While cash is certainly the easiest gift for a charity to receive, it is not always the best gift for you to make. Funding your gift with assets that have capital gain associated with them is often more tax-efficient than giving cash. Additionally, tax-deferred assets, such as IRAs, are often used to fund final bequests due to the fact that most qualified charities are not required to pay the deferred income tax on such gifts.

Testimonial by Tom and Evelyne Kapteyn

“We started a scholarship at Calvin Seminary because our hearts go out to the students. Scholarship support makes education possible for many students today. We want God’s work to continue, and we want Calvin Seminary to grow. We think it’s the center of where the Christian Reformed Church is headed. We’re also delighted that the seminary started the Center for Excellence in Preaching. As excellent preaching is vital to the future of the church, we’ve been blessed by hearing the students’ visions for ministry, and we’re happy to do what we can to help others and spread the Good Word.”

A fairly common idea in theological circles the past number of years has been that God has a “preferential option for the poor,” or, to put it in the words of the Belhar Confession, that God “cares in a special way for the poor.” What Scripture is consistently demonstrating, however, rather than a special concern for the poor, is God’s special concern for His people who suffer or are marginalized. One field where we are reminded that God is gracious and compassionate, down to and abounding in mercy to His people. Repeatedly, Scripture tells us that God is near to the brokenhearted, that they can trust Him for everything they need. And throughout the Bible we are taught that God will never leave nor forsake His people, indeed not even death can separate His people from Him.

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And who are the marginalized? Wealthy Christians can bear witness to the fact that great wealth carries with it great—sometimes almost overwhelming—responsibility. And it can marginalize a person in even very simple things, like friendship. Imagine having to always wonder whether someone you meet is really interested in getting to know and love you, or simply wants to be with you because of your wealth. And the last time I checked, the wealthy are not immune to disease, broken relationships, children who leave the church, and the like. Money cannot, in fact, buy comfort. Comfort is found by all only in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

But the phrase “poor” all of God’s children who suffer and who are marginalized is vital to the future of the church. And it implies that the brokenhearted rich, whether they are God’s own children or not, are somehow less the objects of God’s love and care.

Many well-known Latino scholars have served as visiting professors for the program, including Lázaro Baeza and Catherine Salsanos, Dr. Jorge Maldonado, Dr. David Escobar, Dr. Fernando Cascarante, and Dr. Pablo Jiménez. Students have studied exegesis, preaching and worship, community transformation, pastoral counseling, marriage enrichment, Christian education, theology for ministry, and church leadership and administration.

Instructional innovation has been another key program feature. Classes have taken different forms, including night sessions, weekend retreats, seminars, and intensives. Teaching strategies have valued academic strength alongside recognition of the students’ range of backgrounds and significant ministry experiences.

“Given the diversity of our cohort, we have learned to adapt our teaching methods to [the students’] possibilities, limitations, challenges and considerable experiential assets,” Avila reports in a program summary.

One essential element in the program’s success is that the opportunity is offered as a free gift to students through the support of the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation. Without financial support, enrollment would remain out of their reach.

This is a unique program that has opened the doors of formal theological training to 40 students who otherwise would not have had the opportunity. It is also a unique and significant opportunity for Calvin Seminary: given that most accredited seminaries in the United States have no means of serving such students in similar situations,” Avila writes.

Funding is currently in place for three more cohorts. News about the program travels only by word of mouth, and there is a long waiting list to enroll.

Avila takes great pride in his work with the students and the program. “These people have very meaningful ministries,” he says. “I’m humbled to serve them.”

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