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2017 marks the 500th anniversary from October 31, 1517, the date when Martin Luther nailed the Ninety-five Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. That date marks the launching of what later became identified as the Protestant Reformation. This anniversary is a time for reflection, thanksgiving, lament, and commemoration.

“How do you summarize something that happened 500 years ago that still shapes conversations and cultures?”

One summary is what became the “Five Solas” of the Protestant Reformation.

The Five Solas are five Latin phrases (or slogans) that summarize the Reformers’ basic theological principles in contrast to certain teachings of the Roman Catholic Church of that day.

“Sola” is Latin meaning “alone” or “only” and the corresponding phrases are:

**Sola Fide**

by faith alone.

**Sola Scriptura**

by Scripture alone.

**Solo Christo**

through Christ alone.

**Sola Gratia**

by grace alone.

**Soli Deo Gloria**

glory to God alone.

This Forum is dedicated to helping us see these slogans as more than a type of “bumper sticker” theology. There is a history and a hope to each of the phrases that our authors seek to illumine for the church of today. May these articles help us join the conversation and the commemoration!
“I do it myself!” That’s what my four-year-old grandson typically says whenever I try to help him with some task. It’s the same thing his mother said to me when she was that age. There is a deep-rooted desire in not just little children but full grown adults to do things ourselves—to reject any kind of help from the outside, thereby allowing us to take pride in our accomplishments.

The same thing is true with our salvation: we want to do it ourselves. Even though we know rationally that we are saved not by our deeds but by grace alone (sola gratia), it is tempting to think privately that we are better than most people and so our good works make us worthy recipients of grace. Grace may be, as we sing, “amazing,” but it is also terribly humbling! It is hard for my ego and my self-justifying mentality to accept the fact that I can’t do it myself but stand helpless and in total dependence on God’s work in Christ.

This is the important biblical truth that the Reformers tried to recapture with the phrase sola fide. In a context where the Roman Catholic Church stressed a faith that needed to be supplemented with human acts of obedience, the Reformers boldly asserted that we are justified “through faith alone.” The phrase is a biblical one, as is clear from several passages...
of Scripture. Paul, for example, states in Ephesians 2:8-9: “For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” A similar sentiment is found in the apostle’s words in Philippians 3:9: “not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.”

The Reformers saw texts like these and many others as teaching that we are sinners who are unable to live up to God’s call to holy living and so stand in his divine presence as condemned. Yet God has graciously provided salvation by means of the death and resurrection of Christ—a salvation not based on our works but one appropriated through faith alone. Faith is the means by which we are united to Christ and so take hold of the righteousness that he accomplished on our behalf.

**But Faith is Never Alone**

But though we are justified through faith alone, such faith is never alone. In other words, there is no room for the logic, “Since I am saved not by works but by grace through faith, it doesn’t matter how I live!” There is no just cause to recite the following ditty about salvation: “Walk the aisle! Pray the prayer! One-time faith will get you there!” Such misguided thinking leads to the charge of “cheap grace”—the accusation that an emphasis on a grace received through faith alone will result in an “anything goes” lifestyle.

This was the charge the Roman Catholic Church raised against those advocating *sola fide*, causing the reformer Melanchthon to respond: “Our opponents slanderously claim that we do not require good works, whereas we not only require them but show that they can be done” (*Apology of the Augsburg Confession* 1531). The Reformers were well aware of texts like James 2:14-26 that teach that a true, saving faith is one that naturally comes to expression in concrete acts of obedience. Works may not be a *condition* of being justified, but they are a consequence of being justified.

James Payton, in his helpful book entitled, *Getting the Reformation Wrong*, writes: “For Calvin and all the Protestant Reformers, we are justified by faith alone—but faith is never alone. Justifying faith leads to good works, performed in love toward God and our neighbors, in grateful obedience to God. … No Protestant Reformer ever allowed that a justifying faith could be solitary—no, not one” (InterVarsity Press, 2010: 127).

All those today who, like Luther, struggle painfully with the mistaken notion that they must do enough good works before God will accept them ought to be comforted by the Reformation slogan *sola fide*, since this phrase expresses the gospel news that they are justified through faith alone—no good works required! Nevertheless, all those who glibly cite *sola fide* to ease their conscience about any unChrist-like conduct in their life ought to be challenged by the reality that true faith naturally leads us to delight in God’s law and, with the empowering help of the Holy Spirit, to live a life full of love and good works.

**Grace may be, as we sing, “amazing,” but it is also terribly humbling!**
Sola Scriptura: by Scripture alone. What a courageous Reformation motto! But what does it mean? I remember a Sunday school song: “The B-I-B-L-E, yes, that’s the book for me.” So far, so good. But then we sang, “I stand alone on the Word of God.” That did not lift my little soul. I pictured myself standing all alone on my Bible, and socializing with the other kids was already tough enough without standing on the Bible.

A cute misunderstanding. But what does sola Scriptura mean—that the Bible is God’s only revelation? No. Jesus Christ is God’s greatest self-revelation, and all creation reveals God in a general way as well. Well then, is Scripture the only book we need to live a good life? No, we need to know many things not taught in the Bible. Maybe it means that Scripture is the only way to know about the gospel. But many people have come to faith without a Bible through the testimony of others. So what does “only the Bible” mean?

The issue at the time of the Reformation was the definitive source of Christian truth about God, the world, Christ, sin, salvation, the church, and the Christian life. The question was this: does true doctrine come only from Scripture, or from Scripture as interpreted and elaborated by the Spirit-led church? The pre-Reformation church believed that the Bible is inspired and infallible, but it also claimed that the church infallibly defines its teaching.

Reformers such as Luther and Calvin countered that Scripture alone (sola Scriptura) is the definitive source. Most Reformers agreed that the church has responsibility to interpret Scripture, and Protestant church assemblies adopted catechisms (e.g. Heidelberg) and confessions (e.g. Belgic, Westminster) as standard summaries of biblical truth. But the Reformers insisted that the church is obligated to test and revise its interpretations according to Scripture, not the reverse. (A minority of Protestants avoided official doctrinal statements and left Bible reading to individual believers and the Spirit.)
Thus *sola Scriptura* means that the Bible is the final authority about “the will of God completely and everything one must believe to be saved” and “the entire manner of service which God requires of us.” Thus we may not put “human writings … nor custom, majority, age, nor the passage of time or persons, nor councils, decrees, or official decisions above the truth of God” revealed in Scripture (Belgic Confession, Art. 7).

During and after the Reformation, when almost all of Europe was officially Christian, denominations debated and sometimes fought with each other over details of doctrine. But already in the 17th century, deists and some progressive Christians used philosophy and science to challenge basic Christian doctrines affirmed by Catholics and Protestants alike. They trusted modern philosophy, moral intuitions, and the scientific worldview (which typically denied the possibility of supernatural miracles) more than the content of Scripture. Modern intellectual culture became the highest authority. Biblical revelation was relegated “beyond reason” and re-interpreted to fit enlightened modern paradigms.

In the last two centuries, modern theologians have reimagined Christianity in terms of various intellectual perspectives—romanticism, idealism, historicism, existentialism, pragmatism, liberalism, and scientific naturalism. Much postmodern theology has abandoned the notion that there is one true meaning of Scripture and celebrates a pluralistic group-hug of Christianities, sometimes including other religions.

Meanwhile, most historic Christian churches and their theologians, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, have sought to remain faithful to their creeds and doctrinal standards. Most have also not isolated themselves from science, culture, politics, moral sensibilities, and intellectual trends. Instead they have engaged and evaluated modern developments from their biblically based perspectives, incorporating what is compatible, rejecting what is not, and contributing helpful insights. Confessional and evangelical Protestants have attempted to practice the Reformation principle that Scripture alone is the final authority. This is certainly true in the Dutch Reformed tradition that generated Kuyper, Bavinck, and the CRCNA.

The challenge has not passed. Our commitment to *sola Scriptura*—the Bible is the decider—is currently tested in the CRCNA on many issues. For example, what do we mean by a Christian perspective on learning and culture? Is it still to understand all subjects and activities from a biblical-Reformed perspective, as Kuyper and Bavinck held, or is it creatively rereading Scripture and doctrine to accommodate current perspectives? In politics, is Scripture’s view of social justice best expressed by (conservative) liberal individualism, (progressive) social pragmatism, or something else, and if so, what? Most basically, our culture is overwhelmingly hedonistic—driven by desire to feel good. Are our life-styles and spiritual disciplines shaped more by Scripture or culture? Do we really live by *sola Scriptura*?

May God guide and preserve us by his Word and Spirit.
“In Christ alone my hope is found / He is my light, my strength, my song.” These first two lines of Keith Getty and Stuart Townend’s popular hymn resound with the believer’s confident statement of total reliance on Jesus Christ. Yet in the Reformation era, the assertion that faith rested on Christ alone, “solus Christus,” was not necessarily a straightforward or widely-accepted claim. Today, this statement is equally controversial, albeit for different reasons.

For Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, and John Calvin, the affirmation of Christ alone as the source of salvation stood against what they perceived as the Roman Catholic Church’s over-confident assertion of its own role in salvation. In particular, the Reformers rejected any power of the papacy—or the Catholic church’s clergy more generally—to offer salvation through the sacraments of the church, especially baptism, penance, and the Eucharist.

Another source of concern for the Reformers was the role assigned to saints and to the Virgin Mary in interceding for believers before God. According to the Reformers, ascribing such intercessory powers to human beings was to deny Christ’s rightful role as the sole mediator and intercessor for the faithful. So, for instance, Huldrych Zwingli proclaimed in his sixty-seven articles (presented to the city council of Zurich for debate in 1523), “The
summary of the Gospel is that our Lord Christ, true Son of God, has made known to us the will of his heavenly Father and has redeemed us from death and reconciled us with God by his guiltlessness. Therefore, Christ is the only way to salvation of all who were, are now, or shall be.”

It is important to note that the Reformers’ emphasis on Christ alone as the agent of salvation needs to be understood in the broader context of the other four solas. In fact, the Reformers’ focus on Christ alone stood at the center of their theological approach. It was because salvation came through Christ alone and for God’s glory alone that Christians were justified by grace alone and through faith alone. Human deeds and effort, no matter how worthy, could not make a person right with God. And Christ’s pivotal role in salvation was revealed in Scripture—hence the Reformers’ emphasis on Scripture alone as the source of authority in the church.

The enduring significance of the Reformation’s emphasis on Christ alone is hard to under-estimate. In Protestant areas, especially in Reformed territories, the veneration of the saints and the Virgin Mary largely ceased, and their images were removed from places of worship. At the same time, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper became understood as signs of God’s grace and covenantal promises, but not sources of salvation in and of themselves. Thus, the proclamation that Christ alone saves dramatically reconfigured both worship practices and theology from the Reformation onwards.

Yet today, the phrase “Christ alone” can be challenging for the church, in a number of ways. First, the phrase makes strong claims about Christ’s unique role as savior, a stance that clashes with more pluralist or inter-faith approaches. Second, some churches and believers may tend to put Christ at the center and under-emphasize the Father and the Holy Spirit, weakening or distorting the rich blessing of fully-orbed Trinitarian theology. Third, within modern-day churches, the proclamation of Christ alone as the source of salvation runs counter to a growing trend of congregations preferring a gently-couched message of moral self-improvement under the eyes of a benevolent God.

At its root, the assertion that salvation comes through Christ alone means that human beings can do nothing out of their own efforts to make themselves right with God. But in a culture and a time in which few are willing to acknowledge their fundamental brokenness, Christ is more often viewed as the greatest moral example, wise teacher, or superhero of the faith. For instance, I have a friend, a faithful church-going Christian, who told me that she struggles with the weekly confession of sins in worship because while she makes mistakes and has faults, she does not see these as sins. For her and others, the message that Christ alone saves us from our sins and reconciles us to God has lost its power. So the strong Reformation proclamation of Christ as the source and author of salvation is highly relevant today.

The church needs to proclaim again that salvation is through Christ alone, not through human merit or efforts.
“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound / That saved a wretch like me.” Martin Luther never knew this song, but if he had known it, he would have sung it with gusto. Luther was schooled in a theological tradition in which the sound of grace was not always so sweet. He had been taught that God grants saving grace only to people who merit (earn) it with acts of love for God and neighbor. “Draw near to God,” his teachers told him, quoting James 4:8, “and he will draw near to you.” Divine favor was not so much a gift as a reward.

So Luther tried it. He became a monk, taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. He prayed to God almost nonstop, confessing the tiniest sins he could remember. He flogged himself, deprived himself of sleep, and starved himself so severely that, according to one report, “his belly button touched his backbone.” But rather than drawing nearer to God, he felt himself slipping further away. It was not until he began an intensive study of the Book of Romans that he finally realized that our right standing in the eyes of God is not something we must earn; it is God’s gift to us sola gratia—by grace (undeserved favor) alone. “All at once,” Luther later recalled, “I felt that I had been born again and
God is not only willing and able to save wretched people like us, but—sola gratia—he actually does.

At the heart of this doctrine of salvation sola gratia is not just the nature of God but the condition of humanity. God’s grace is so amazing because we are so in need of it. Contrary to what Luther had once been taught, we do not have the inner resources to find our way back to God. As fallen creatures, each of us is deceitful at the very core of our being (Jeremiah 17:9) and spiritually “dead in [our] transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). We are like people who have fallen into a pit and are lying unconscious at the bottom. The only way out is a rescue from above—someone who reaches down to us, revives us, and pulls us to freedom. As the Canons of Dort put it, humanity is in such a sorry state that “without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit [we] are neither willing nor able to return to God” (III.3).

Unfortunately, the truth of salvation by grace alone often gets overshadowed in North American Christianity because it is so countercultural. We are a performance-oriented society, dominated by a can-do spirit. We work for good grades in school, earn victories on the basketball court, compete for awards, receive merit pay at work, and get demerits if we misbehave. In the midst of all this striving and achievement, it is not easy to admit that when it comes to meeting the deepest need of our existence, our restlessness for God, we can do absolutely nothing ourselves. We are totally reliant on outside help.

That is why the grace that Luther rediscovered five hundred years ago is so amazing. We don’t deserve it. We can’t earn it. And yet God is not only willing and able to save wretched people like us, but—sola gratia—he actually does.
The Westminster shorter catechism famously begins with the question, “What is the chief end of man?” Its answer is pithy and to the point: “To enjoy God and glorify him forever.” My parents taught me this truth when they told me that I could do whatever I wanted in life, just so long as I did it for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

This concern for the glory of God lay at the heart of the Reformation. To be sure, the Roman church at the time did not deny the principle of Soli Deo Gloria in any explicit sense. But its teachings often undermined the principle in practice by shifting Christians’ attention away from the sovereign grace of God given in Christ toward all manner of human efforts at securing or mediating salvation.

For example, the church encouraged believers to pray to saints rather than directly to God in time of need. It called them to seek salvation through acts of penitence, pilgrimage, or patronage, or through participation in the sacraments of the church, rather than by trusting in the cross of Christ. And it insisted that sinners could prepare themselves to receive God’s grace and had to cooperate with that grace if it were to be effective in their lives. On top of all that, the Roman church claimed for the papacy and the church hierarchy a glory that should have been reserved for Christ himself.

The net effect of all of this was to rob God of the sole credit and glory for salvation. It was to distract human beings from the God on whom we depend for every good thing.
To be sure, the Reformers recognized that Jesus shares his glory with believers by inviting us into the Trinitarian communion of love (John 17:22-24). Indeed, they affirmed, the whole creation will be brought into the liberty and glory of the children of God (Romans 8:21). And those whom God justifies and sanctifies, he also glorifies (Romans 8:30).

Still, they insisted that because all of this is God’s work, from start to finish, all the glory for it ultimately belongs to God, from start to finish. As the Apostle Paul memorably concluded, “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?” For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen” (Romans 11:35-36).

We live in a time when men and women believe their ultimate duty is to be true to themselves above all as they seek happiness and fulfillment in life. Indeed, a body no less august than the Supreme Court of the United States has declared a person’s right to determine ultimate meaning for him or herself a most basic and inalienable human right. Never has God’s claim to glory been more suspect in the eyes of his own creatures.

And yet, the more we trumpet our own inviolable dignity and glory as human beings, the more we struggle to explain where that dignity and glory comes from in the first place, or why it even matters. Though science gives us greater and greater knowledge of the glory of creation, we neither glorify God nor give him thanks (Romans 1:21). We continue to exchange the glory of the immortal God for idols of our own making.

Still, as has always been the case, our sin merely serves to advance God’s glory as our judge and as our savior (Romans 3:7; 10:12-13). And it does so in mind-boggling fashion. As Jesus taught his confused disciples, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. . . . And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:23-24, 32).

God’s character is most clearly revealed—and his glory must be most clearly proclaimed by the church—in the willingness of his son to set his glory aside in order to become a suffering servant on our behalf, even to the point of death on a cross (Philippians 2:9-11). In the final analysis, the glory of God redounds to our benefit and then back to him, so that, as Paul reminded the Corinthians, “the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God” (2 Corinthians 4:15).

...because all of this is God’s work, from start to finish, all the glory for it ultimately belongs to God, from start to finish.
John Cooper Retires

John Cooper admits he’s been stuck in a bit of a rut ever since he arrived for his first kindergarten class in Passaic, New Jersey, almost 65 years ago.

“I’ve been trying mightily to be a good boy in school since I was 5 years old,” said Cooper. “Maybe at age 70, I can give that up.”

By any measure, it has been a very long stretch of schooling, with largely high marks for comportment. And now, with the imminent close of the current academic year, it is about to come to a satisfying end for Cooper who has taught philosophical theology at Calvin Theological Seminary since 1985. Prior to joining the seminary’s faculty, Cooper taught just across the pond in the philosophy department at Calvin College from 1978 to 1985.

As he reflected on his nearly four decades on campus, Cooper observed that he “tried to hand on to my students what was given to me from the great Christian tradition, from the Reformed tradition, from the Kuyperian/Bavinckian branch of that tradition. If I rightly understood it and passed it on in a way that was not just replication, but application to the next generation, then I would have accomplished a great deal. And if I did that with any enthusiasm or contagious interest, then that was an extra blessing.”

In addition to serving as a guide and mentor to his students at the college and the seminary, Cooper also made himself readily available as a resource to the Christian Reformed Church Synod and other denominational leaders as the church struggled with a drumbeat of difficult theological and cultural controversies during recent decades.
He has written fearlessly about women in church office, inclusive language for God, same-sex marriage, creation and evolution, and other topics on which there are strong and divergent opinions in the CRC.

“I’ve done so not because I wanted to lobby one way or the other, but because I wanted to keep us on track about scripture, about proper hermeneutics, and sound doctrine,” he explained. “I wanted to keep us honest because there was a lot of misunderstanding of Scripture and misrepresentation of others’ positions by both sides.”

Cooper unapologetically holds a traditional, high view of the authority of Scripture — a stance that causes him concern about developments in many parts of the church today.

“It seems like part of the church embraces the theology and politics of American evangelicalism and another part endorses the theology and politics of mainline Protestants,” Cooper said. “I am grateful for those who remain Reformed in doctrine, piety, and the vision of the Contemporary Testimony, ‘Our World Belongs to God.’ ”

In addition to his defense of historic theology for the CRC, Cooper has published widely read books and articles on the human body-soul relation and also on panentheism, the primary mainline view of God and the universe. Both of those themes are major current issues in philosophical theology.

Cooper, the son of a preacher who migrated from the Reformed Church in America to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and then on to the CRC, is at times bluntly critical of many current trends in the church — but he also sees signs of faithfulness and hope both inside the denomination and in other churches where confessional Reformed thinking, worship, evangelism, and engagement with the world are being articulated afresh.

“Our faith is in the gospel of Jesus Christ and if you understand and practice it well, then life flourishes”

He hopes to spend more time in his retirement traveling with his wife, Sylvia, and perhaps put the finishing touches on a couple of books he is writing. Cooper also expects to maintaining his practice of swimming three or four times a week year-round and running in Michigan’s more hospitable seasons.

“As he takes leave of Calvin Seminary, Cooper voiced hope that the school will “continue to educate our ministers in Scripture and in confessional Reformed theology, but in a way that’s practical and life-relevant. It’s my hope that Calvin Seminary will continue offering enough intellectual substance and an emphasis on reading the Scripture deeply and applying Scripture and its basic doctrines to real life — because it’s the Word of God that shapes your life.”

He hopes to spend more time in his retirement traveling with his wife, Sylvia, and perhaps put the finishing touches on a couple of books he is writing. Cooper also expects to maintaining his practice of swimming three or four times a week year-round and running in Michigan’s more hospitable seasons.

“Our faith is in the gospel of Jesus Christ and if you understand and practice it well, then life flourishes,” he said. “Orthodoxy and existential flourishing are two sides of the same coin for me.

Cooper continued: “In God’s good providence I can see that the best of what the CRC is and stands for is shared by other churches, as well. For example, Tim Keller (a pastor and writer in a Presbyterian Church in America multi-campus church in New York City) has a vital ministry and is proof positive you can be thoroughly Reformed and grow a mega-church in a culturally diverse metropolis.”
I thoroughly enjoyed the parish ministry at the beginning of my career and this season of teaching at the seminary also has been a great gift,” said Deppe, who joined the Calvin Seminary faculty in 1998 as a professor of New Testament.

Yet even Deppe’s sunny disposition and relentless positivity have been tested severely during the past two years as he’s battled through daunting health challenges brought on by the diagnosis of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma and the resultant chemotherapy and stem-cell transplant treatments.

At times, he acknowledged, the pain and dizziness have been excruciating, leading him to write psalms and journal entries in his online Care Pages chronicling his suffering and his dependence on God’s faithfulness and the support of his community of faith.

During the darkest days, Deppe penned a psalm of raw lament that began with this stanza:

“This psalm will not end in confidence. All of my pain must come out.

This ode will not break into praise. My tears must be allowed to flow.

I will not allow my duty to win out this time. I will feel the pain and say ‘OK.’

I will face all of the darkness and I will not flinch from my deepest desperation.”

Dean Deppe’s cup always has been half full or better — whether serving as a pastor to people in the core city, suburban sprawl or a more rural outpost in the Minnesota hinterlands, or lecturing on the life lessons and hard sayings of Jesus to an adult education group or classroom of students at Calvin Theological Seminary.
And in the midst of it all, he wrote this entry:

“I am determined to fight this disease with all my strength. Probably the best way to fight it is to be at rest and at peace in the Lord. I know that there are cancers of the soul and spirit that I must fight as well. My pastor says that the Lord wants to transform D words like discouragement, depression, despair, disease and death to R words like renewal, repair, resurgence, reconciliation, and my favorite, resurrection.”

Now in remission and able to handle a full teaching and advising load, Deppe has nonetheless decided to retire at the close of the current academic calendar, as he marks his 66th birthday.

“We would like to make the seminary more of a positive place.”

“I’ve been feeling really great this fall and winter, but, even without the questionable health concerns, when you hit 65, something happens with your energy level.” he said. “You still can do it, but everything becomes a little harder.”

Deppe is a 1973 graduate of Calvin College and holds two master’s degrees from Calvin Seminary and his doctorate from the Free University in Amsterdam. After serving Christian Reformed congregations in Grand Rapids, suburban Toledo, Ohio, and Prinsburg, MN, he joined the seminary faculty the same year as Ronald Nydam, who was a close friend and confidante.

“We knew each other, and both of said we would like to make the seminary more of a positive place,” Deppe recalled. “All of us in the academy have been trained to be critical, trained to find something wrong. You look for mistakes, you look for the missing pieces. So both of us decided we would try to make a difference by affirming the strengths of students instead of looking first or only for their weaknesses.”

Deppe especially appreciates the growing diversity of the student body at the seminary, serving this year as the leader of a mentoring group that includes students from Ethiopia, South Korea, China, Canada and the U.S.

“One of the strengths I have is to get students ready for the pastorate,” said Deppe. “Today, churches are so different from each other. I tell students that not only are you interviewed by the church, but you need to interview the church so you know what their philosophy of ministry is in order to get a more perfect fit.”

Deppe also has sought to make the Bible a source of endless curiosity for his students, asserting that “since you have to spend the next 40 years with the Bible, it can get a bit boring if you don’t have a way of making it come alive in yourself, and in the lives of your congregation. So I try to get students to ask questions of the text — why this? Where does that come from? I try to be enthusiastic myself for the text, and have that enthusiasm run off on them.”

Throughout his academic career at Calvin Seminary, he’s taught the New Testament narratives, including the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, and also prepared his students for understanding the New Testament by teaching the Greek language.

And now, after the faith-building yet harrowing journey through the valley of the shadow, Deppe is facing the next season of life with characteristic gusto. As he wrote in a psalm he entitled, “A Deeper Strength for a Higher Challenge:”

“But now Deep is calling to deep in my life. The shallowness is falling away.

The voice is strong and a new layer, a deeper foundation, is created with each divine encounter.

The mountain leading to the sky is tall, but the Lord is lifting me to see his high places.

With each steeper climb, my legs become firmer, for the Lord is strengthening me.

At the top of the mountain, the vision is clear. There is no doubt. My Redeemer lives!”
In chapter twenty-seven of his gospel, when Matthew describes the temple curtain being torn, the earth shaking, and the rocks splitting (verse fifty-one), he was describing the death of Christ shaking the world at its core, theologian N.T. Wright told a group of Calvin Seminary students and faculty during the Stob Lecture, held earlier this year in the seminary chapel.

“The crucial thing that comes through again and again is that Christ’s crucifixion sent shock waves through the whole creation,” said Wright in the subsequent Q&A presentation moderated by John Witvliet, director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. “Christ’s death and rising showed the victory over the dark powers of evil. … The cross robs them of their power.”

In the atonement, said Wright, something explosive has happened—the powers that “have had the world in a stranglehold” lost their grip and a great force of love triumphed, saving the world and its people from sin. “God has lowered himself to the world and put it right. … Jesus comes to a place where sin is heaped up and dies for that sin.”
The Stob Lecture program, supported by an endowment from the Stob family, is jointly run by the college and the seminary. Beginning in 2017, each year the Stob Lectures will underwrite a January Series speaker who has expertise in apologetics, ethics, or philosophical theology. Combining the Stob Lectures and January Series provides an opportunity to use the endowed lectureship to reach a worldwide audience. Because the January Series has significant recognition as a platform to discuss important ideas from an intellectual and theological perspective, the leadership of the seminary and college believe this new format will broaden the scope and impact of the Stob Lectures.

Reflecting on this most recent Stob Lecture, Ronald Feenstra, academic dean and professor of systematic theology, noted, “N.T. Wright is one of this generation’s finest New Testament scholars. In his Stob Lecture Colloquium, he highlighted ways in which the cross of Jesus is God’s victory over evil powers and brings healing to the world. Wright helpfully notes the role of the cross in healing the fallen creation and leading to the new creation being prepared by God for his people.”

In his lecture, Wright said he wants to expand the idea that Christ’s death on the cross was, as commonly believed by a range of evangelical Christians, an act that absolved people from their sins. While Wright believes in this teaching, which is also called “penal substitution,” and emphasizes that Jesus did defeat sin on the cross as our substitute, Wright argues there is much more to what happened on the cross that is often neglected: the cross, he said, has opened the door to the full transformation of creation. “We need a larger vision of the biblical narrative if we are to understand, preach, and live out the message and meaning of the cross,” he said.

Wright argued that the doctrine of penal substitution, when separated from this larger picture of the restoration of creation, can easily be distorted into the idea of “God being determined to get his revenge on someone for something and then taking it out on someone who is innocent. … The trouble is, people can take this idea and use violence to justify what they believe is right.”

Asked about heaven during the Q&A, Wright said, “The whole emphasis of the New Testament is not interested in where people go when they die. What is significant is about the kingdom coming to earth as it is in heaven.”

Wright is an award-winning author with nearly fifty published works, including Simply Christian and his most recent book, The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus’ Crucifixion.

Preparation for Reaccreditation

Calvin Theological Seminary is preparing for a comprehensive evaluation visit by the Association of Theological Schools. The ATS evaluation committee is scheduled to be on campus in March 2018. If you have any comments concerning Calvin Theological Seminary’s qualifications for continued accreditation, please send them in writing to the President or Board Chair of Calvin Theological Seminary (3233 Burton St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546) and/or to the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools (10 Summit Park Drive, Pittsburgh PA 15275-1110).
Handlon Students Mark First Milestone at Convocation

by Jonathan Gorter

“You’re running against yourself,” said Ronald Feenstra, academic dean and professor of systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary. Addressing a crowd of students at the Handlon convocation ceremony, Feenstra charged students to resist the temptation to compare themselves to others around them, and to instead focus on knowing their abilities and pushing themselves to do their best. “We are all running against ourselves. Not our professors. Not each other. Ourselves,” insisted Feenstra. “But we also do not run alone.”

Though Feenstra’s message is universally applicable, the address had a particular weight given that the recipients were inmates. Comparison can be crippling in any sphere, but certainly when one is living behind prison walls.

A year and a half ago, the first cohort of twenty students from the Handlon Correctional Facility in Ionia, MI, began the process of earning a bachelor’s degree in ministry leadership through Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary. The Calvin Prison Initiative (CPI) is a five-year program, and these students have just received a certificate for successfully completing one and a half years of their education—one of three major milestones along the road to earning the B.A.

“This makes another crucial step in the process,” said president of Calvin Theological Seminary Julius Medenblik, who welcomed the students and faculty to the convocation ceremony. As provost Cheryl Brandsen called their names, the students continuing their second year stepped forward and received their certificate.

After earning their certificate, the qualified second year students are looking forward to earning their associate’s degree in another year and half. After that, they’ll reach for the final milestone, the bachelor’s degree.

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Handlon Students Mark First Milestone at Convocation

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“We take these classes seriously,” said Rafael, a first year student. “We all learn at our own pace, but we are committed and we do learn.”

Not only has negative behavior decreased, but positive repercussions have already begun spreading …

Currently, thirty-seven students are enrolled in the growing program. Last year, the first convocation was held in the visitors room; this year, students and faculty had to meet in the more spacious gymnasium.

According to the staff at Handlon, as the program grows it requires more effort on their part to monitor visitors and activity around the facility. But Corey Traylor, a resident unit manager at the prison for the past eighteen years, noted how this effort has paid off.

“We take these classes seriously,” said Rafael, a first year student. “We all learn at our own pace, but we are committed and we do learn.”

Misconducts have gone dramatically down. Arguments among inmates have gone down. These guys are like minded individuals and they support each other,” said Traylor. “They get incentives, and there’s positive pressure put on them now that they’re students.”

“There’s been a 180 degree turn-around in the way [the inmates] conduct themselves,” said Maurice Williams, a guard at Handlon for the past four years.

Not only has negative behavior decreased, but positive repercussions have already begun spreading from the prison and into the surrounding area. “These guys want to help. They put together a math and algebra program for local elementary students that they tutor, and they’re expanding their curriculum to include a geometry program soon.”

René and Armondo, two second-year students enrolled in CPI, have even started growing their hair out. “We want to donate to Locks of Love,” said René. “It’ll take two years at least to get ten inches, and we want to wait until everybody’s hair is ready so we can all donate at the same time.”

Arthur, a first year student, attributes some of the new energy to the faculty who “pump positivity” into the students whenever they teach. But it’s not just the students that benefit from the teaching at Handlon.

“It’s invigorating for the faculty,” said Elizabeth Vander Lei, Academic Dean at Calvin, who works closely with selecting professors for teaching at Handlon. “Where does our Calvin mission live out any more than it does here?”

Though CPI aims to equip inmates with degrees, the program’s influence is much larger than a certificate on paper.

“This is about helping individuals who have fallen to get back up

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for more information contact
Dr. Jeffrey A. D. Weima
616-328-3110 | weimje@calvinseminary.edu
www.jeffweima.com

OCTOBER 5 – 17, 2017
Walk in the footsteps of the apostles Peter, Paul, and Mark during the day, then study their New Testament writings and lives at night!

Highlights include visits to the Vatican with its Sistine Chapel and St. Peter’s Cathedral; the impressive monuments of ancient Rome; Hadrian’s Villa; the city of Pompeii; Paestum; and St. Mark’s Basilica in Venice.

The tour also involves visits to other sites of historical and cultural importance such as Assisi, Florence, and Ravenna.

Most evenings feature a study session that deals with the ministry of the apostles Peter, Paul, and Mark.

For more information contact
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basically non-existent. The first year class has a GPA of 3.55, and the second year class has a 3.65. That’s impressive, and these students are dedicated.”

“This program] is like the hand of God coming in and touching us,” said Valmarcus, a first-year student. “There is nothing more fulfilling than living out your purpose. CPI helps us live that out.”

Though they study and take tests in a different setting, students enrolled in the CPI program are proud of their Calvin identity.

“So, what’s going on at the Knollcrest campus?” asked Arthur.
“Mexico does not exist in reality,” we were told by Pastor Dan González of the Comunidad Teologica (a consortium of denominational seminaries) on our first evening in Mexico City. “In reality there are many Mexicos.” As the days passed, I began to understand what he meant.
From January 2 to January 11, five students from Korea, China, Canada, and the United States, travelled to Mexico for the course, *Seeds of Justice, Harvest of Shalom*, led by Professor Mariano Avila of Calvin Theological Seminary. We were there to explore the complex relationship between church, culture, mission, and justice within the Hispanic context.

Mexico is an alluring country of striking contrasts – abundance and poverty, beauty and sadness, hospitality and unrest. One begins to appreciate this reality when immersed in the history, art, landscape, and narratives that define Mexico’s people. And so, we spent time exploring some of Mexico’s national and historic treasures. Visits to the historic center of Mexico City and the Templo Mayor, one of the main temples of the Aztecs, the ancient Mesoamerican city of Teotihuacan with its pyramids (both UNESCO World Heritage sites), as well as the National Museum of Anthropology exposed us to the wealth of creativity, ingenuity, and visionary thinking of the indigenous peoples. We experienced the Mexico of music, dance, passion, sensuality, story, and art through the beautiful and disturbing works of the great muralists at the Palace Beaux Artes, the enthralling Ballet Folklórico, and the fun of the Mariachi.

And then there were the difficult days. The days where we acutely witnessed the suffering and injustice that is daily life for so many. Here is where we experienced another Mexico, one where the gospel is alive and becoming flesh. This is the gospel of the woman on the street selling tortillas, the gospel of the many ways to say hello, the gospel of the funeral celebrations that bind disparate theologies into one unity, and the gospel of the warm welcome to the stranger and the foreigner. And this is the Mexico where every day, small seeds of justice are planted in the hope and assurance of a final harvest of Shalom.

We visited a church that provides sanctuary, safety, food, clean water, and rest for migrants making the treacherous journey across the country on the freight train commonly known as ‘The Beast.’ When we offered to pray, one young man asked us to pray that he would survive the next day. The pastor of this church told us the story of a recent migrant who arrived with a badly wounded arm, sustained in an assault on the road. He was taken to hospital but his arm couldn’t be saved. The doctor told him that this is where his journey ended, since two arms are needed to hold onto the rail car. To stay is to die. To leave is to be at the mercy of armed gangs and criminals, facing likely rape, theft, beatings, and then deportation at the end of it all. It’s an impossible choice. For some migrants, this was their third attempt to reach a chance at life. The desperation compelled a desperate response among us. Those who were able, handed over sweaters, backpacks, money, and the shoes on their feet. I imagine it was a somewhat amusing scene, this group of students and their teachers, traipsing back to the seminary in sock feet.

During such moments on this trip we all had to ask ourselves, when does their pain become our pain, their trouble, our trouble, their suffering, our suffering? At what point are we willing to enter into an injustice and make it our injustice? Because that is what Jesus did. For Him, it became very personal.

I remember what a Catholic Priest told us at during our visit to his mission. He told us that maracas used to be filled with seeds. He said, “When we shake them, we recognize that we are bringing life. When we put maracas on our ankles, we are imposing life on history. We are walking… stepping on history with new life.” It’s a powerful image. I think all of us left Mexico convicted that we were to walk in this way. With the seeds of life on our feet, each step bringing God’s world closer to Shalom.
They didn’t tell us there’d be snow. “It will probably rain,” Professor Weima warned us, “and it might not be as warm as you think.” But snow, adorning palm trees and turning marble streets into long slip and slides? Unexpected. Some of us thrilled at the novelty of witnessing the largest snowfall in Greece in thirty years. And almost all of us said, at one point or another, “So, you mean, Paul might have seen snow? Would he also have wandered through the valley below the Taurus mountains and glanced up at their snowy caps? The early Christians might have worn something on their feet other than sandals?!"
The January study trip to Turkey and Greece was an exercise in shattering perceptions. Many of us pictured the Biblical lands as flat and dusty. But we were met with mountains, rivers, lush valleys, and everywhere we looked, the sea. We learned that the white marble statues and temples we value so highly for their pristine, calm purity were actually colorful and intricately decorated. In museums we cocked our heads in astonishment at the technology of ancient safety pins and gazed closely at gold jewelry so intricate it can’t be replicated today.

In just two or so weeks, we saw so much. We walked through the city of Ephesus on a cold, clear day, unhampered by the usual crowds of tourists. We climbed over the massive ruins of the temple in Didyma, climbed to the top of the theater in Aspendos, built snowmen on the acropolis in Assos, felt small wandering through the cliff monasteries of Meteora, and stood tall next to the Parthenon in Athens.

And everywhere we went, we felt the layers of religion built up over time. In Antalya we stopped by a 2nd century pagan temple turned 6th century church turned 10th century mosque turned 14th century church turned 16th century mosque, finally destroyed by a fire in the 19th century. In Turkey we heard of the challenges that come with being a Christian in a Muslim country. In Greece we visited a Protestant Church, and I was surprised to hear that Protestant Christians also face pressure and disdain in a predominantly Greek-Orthodox country. In our study sessions, we learned of the particular challenges the early church faced because religion was so closely tied to social and political life – following Christ was strange, unpatriotic, and an economic burden. It seems not much has changed.

And so the trip was surprising and fascinating and informative, but mostly, it was humbling. I was humbled by the grandeur of creation. I was humbled by the faith of Christians much stronger than my own. And I was humbled and awed by the faithfulness of God, who has caused his church to persevere and continues to use broken vessels to declare his praise.
Forming Better Leaders for Today’s Churches

by Geoff Vandermolen, Director of Vocational Formation

“Our interns have been life-giving to our congregation,” wrote Pastor Nate DeJong-McCarron in a recent email to the Vocational Formation Office. DeJong-McCarron, pastor at Fuller Ave CRC, went on to say that Calvin Seminary interns at Fuller have strengthened Fuller’s ministries and helped several of Fuller’s members recover their own passions for ministry. DeJong-McCarron concluded, “Interns have spurred on a culture of ministry engagement at Fuller!”

Reflect for a moment on these descriptors: life-giving, strengthening ministries, and spurring on a culture of ministry engagement. Most ministry leaders would be honored to have these words define their ministry impact.

With that in mind, it is wonderful to hear that these are the outcomes arising from the work of a small group of first year seminarians engaged in a pilot project at Calvin Theological Seminary. The goal of this initiative is to marry Calvin Seminary’s fine academic learning with the day-to-day classroom of local church ministry. Participating students attend their regular classes and serve simultaneously in a local church setting. This process encourages students to integrate academic learning with contextual experience. This integrative strategy is being implemented with the hope that students will gain the kind of ministry experience and skills to be well formed for ministry leadership upon graduation.

**The goal of this initiative is to marry Calvin Seminary’s fine academic learning with the day-to-day classroom of local church ministry.**

The students engaged in this project were asked why they took up this challenge. Derek Ellens, an MDiv student from Canada, wrote:

*When the opportunity to jump right into a pastoral internship, rather than wait for two years, was proposed to me, it was only natural for me to say yes. What also drew me to contextual learning was that I was intrigued with how I could put into practice what I was learning in the classroom immediately.*

Matt Mulder serves alongside Ellens as an intern pastor at Fuller Ave CRC. Mulder offered these observations:

*I have enjoyed building a practical bridge between my academics and the tangible work of ministry. I’ve also enjoyed embracing and being embraced by a church community that is glad to have me in their midst.*

In addition to building bridges between the classroom and their ministry context, students are realizing that this experience has a formative impact on their life. Zachary DeBruyne, also from Canada, was able to offer this important observation:
My concurrent internship changes the way I interact with my education. I regularly incorporate and contextualize the classroom content that I am learning. It has changed me to become a more reflective, organized leader.

These statements are hopeful signs that Calvin Theological Seminary is once again improving the formation of the hearts, minds, and leadership skills of emerging leaders in the church. In fact, the findings of this pilot project have caused the faculty of Calvin Seminary to courageously create and adopt a new plan to integrate contextual and classroom learning as the new normal.

Starting in September 2017, students from both the MDiv and MA degree programs will be placed in concurrent contextual learning environments as part of each degree program. In addition to having the opportunity to learn in the classroom from astute and insightful faculty for which Calvin Seminary is already known, opportunity will also be given for students to in real time ministry aimed at increasing their engagement in theological, practical, and formative learning.

Within a concurrent contextual learning environment, each student will be paired with an on-site Vocational Mentor. This mentor will be from the concurrent site at which the student is serving, and will teach ministry skills and encourage the formation of emerging student leaders. This mentor will also process vocational assessments such as the Birkman, as well as engage in theological and evaluative conversations with the student from within the context of ministry. In addition, students will also be part of a modular, peer based Formation Groups. These Formation Groups will be a consistent group of peers with whom the student can study, learn, grow, reflect and pray. These Formation Groups will be led by a new leader each semester who is skilled in the area of ministry focus for that semester. Finally, each student will participate in deliberate vocational assessments at both the launch of their degree program and the midpoint of their studies.

Why would Calvin Seminary make changes to well established programs? In short, because we care deeply about local churches. We also care about the formation of excellent pastoral leaders who can lead with humility that is born out of the potent mix of biblical and theological training, healthy self-knowledge, and formative ministry experience. Finally, we care about helping our students meet the challenge of being well formed disciples and leaders for the sake of the church and for the glory of God.

Want to learn more about these plans? We would love to hear from you. Please feel free to contact the Vocational Formation office by emailing vocationalformation@calvinseminary.edu, or simply give us a call at (616) 957-6045. We would love to share more about our passion for forming emerging leaders for God’s Kingdom.
Baptized in First Christian Reformed Church in Muskegon, MI, by his grandfather, Rev. Samuel Eldersveld, Howard Vanderwell subsequently received his early education at Muskegon Christian Schools and Western Michigan Christian High School.

In 1959 he received the A. B. Degree from Calvin College. In 1962 he was awarded the B.D. Degree from Calvin Seminary and later the Th.M. Degree. In 1989, he received the Doctor of Ministry Degree from Westminster Theological Seminary in California.

Over forty years he has served four congregations: Lebanon, Iowa; Trinity, Jenison, MI; Bethel, Lansing, IL; and Hillcrest, Hudsonville, MI. He has also served on numerous denominational boards and committees and has served as delegate to the CRC Synod ten times, five times as an officer. He was elected the president of the Synod in 1990, 1992, and 1998. Throughout his ministry, the preaching of the Word, faithful worship, and the provision of pastoral care have been his high priorities.

He has authored eight books, co-authored two books, and with Norma dewaal Malefyt produced one CD and edited a book on intergenerational worship. We anticipate his next book on Caring Worship in the near future.

In 2002, he retired from the pastorate and began a position as Pastoral Resource Specialist at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and as adjunct professor of worship at Calvin Theological Seminary. Currently he battles a fourth encounter with cancer. To God be all the glory!

Advice for graduates – 2017:

1. If God has called you to the pastoral ministry, then embrace it with all your heart, give it your absolute best, and know that though it will not always be easy it will always be rewarding as you share a front row seat in participating with God as He grooms His people. You will discover there is no more special way to have spent your life than in the gospel ministry.

2. If the local parish becomes the location for your ministry, embrace it willingly and affirm that it is the location in which God’s people are formed spiritually, children and youth are brought to faith, spiritual discernment is developed, and the gospel meets the world constantly.

3. When God’s people gather in worship and you have the privilege of leading them, consider that place of worship a sacred place, provide for them the best of God’s word, give them God’s gracious greeting, promise them His grace, and send them out with a sacred benediction. Always provide a worship liturgy that will caringly nurture their spirits. As you stand before them always love them.
**REVEREND JOSEPH TONG, PHD**

Born in Xiamen, China on July 17, 1942, his father died when he was 17 months old. Raised by his devout mother, he migrated to Indonesia with his mother, four brothers and one sister. He heard the call to ministry at the age of 16 and entered South East Bible College at age 17, graduating at age 21. He was called and ordained as the pastor of the Synod of Church of Christ the Lord Indonesia at age 24.

At the age of 30, Rev. Tong came to the U.S. for advanced studies, obtaining a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy at Calvin College, and a Bachelor of Divinity and Th.M. in 1974 and 1975 at Calvin Seminary. Later, he pursued and received a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology, specializing in Personality and Socialization, Research Methodology and Counseling (1978) at the University of Southern California, and an M.B.A. specializing in Church Administration (1991) at the Graduate Theological Foundation, Indiana. He has been heavily engaged in Theological Education for nearly 50 years. He has taught systematic, philosophical, biblical and pastoral theology, as well as education and management courses. He retired from the Presidency of International Theological Seminary (ITS) in Los Angeles, California and Bandung Theological Seminary, in Indonesia in 2008 and 2009, respectively. Now he serves as Professor and President Emeritus at ITS. He served as Chair of the Board of Trustees of ITS (2010-2012) and serves as Chancellor at ABDI Allah Seminary in Indonesia and China Aletheia Theological Seminary.

In recent years, Rev. Tong has been heavily engaged in speaking at conferences and seminars, teaching in various countries, and serving as an adjunct professor at various seminaries and universities in the the United States, China, Brazil, the Philippines, and Indonesia. He has founded over eight Theological Seminaries and Training Centers in Indonesia, USA, and China, and has over 1,000 Baccalaureate graduates in China alone. He was responsible for bringing over 1,300 key church leaders, pastors, and theological teachers from the majority world to the United States to complete their advanced studies, obtain their Master’s and Doctoral degrees, and return to their home countries to serve the Lord there.

Dr. Tong has written hundreds of articles, books, and treatises including: *Basic Christian Beliefs; A Reflection and Rebuilding of Christian Beliefs; On being a Servant without Shame; Collection of Theological Treatises; Philosophical and Ethical Contemplations; Theological Contemplations; A Study of the First Born Rights.* Most of his works have been published in Chinese and/or Indonesian and are available on the web.

**Dr. Tong’s words for graduating students:**

**A Person with Whom God Is Well-Pleased**

**Be human**

**Be a servant**

**Be a servant of God**

Lest you think that you are Master of the world, other human beings, and even God!
Reflections by Missionary–In–Residence Wayne TenHarmsel

We have all heard it said that God works in mysterious ways. Often the saying can seem like a cop-out used to avoid reflecting more deeply on God's ways in our lives. But when I reflect on my story, I believe the saying is an appropriate description. Here's why:

The first mystery was my landing at the University of Arizona to pursue an advanced degree in Chinese History. I knew nothing about Arizona, other than that it was hot and far away from home (Holland, MI). For eight long years I was in Arizona, making up undergraduate courses, earning an MA, and laboring on a PhD that never did get finished. I had to settle for an “All But Dissertation” status.

Armed with my ABD in Chinese history and saddled with a not insignificant amount of debt, I returned to Holland with my family. Finding a job in any way related to my field proved to be impossible at the time. My wife, with her infinitely more practical degree in accounting, found a job with no trouble. So for the next eight years or so, I was sometimes a stay at home dad, other times working in more or less temporary jobs.

The second mystery was finding myself at Calvin Theological Seminary in 1993. For several years worst grades in high school and at Calvin College were in speech classes. I was too old—over forty. I could not afford the time or cost. And so on. But I did go to seminary, and I did make it through. And Calvin

But I did go to seminary, and I did make it through. And Calvin Seminary gave me a solid foundation, biblically and theologically.

I had been feeling more and more drawn to ministry. The mystery of that is that I (and probably everyone who knew me) did not consider myself “seminary material.” I was introverted and quiet. I did not feel comfortable speaking in public. My

Seminary gave me a solid foundation, biblically and theologically.

And then the third mystery happened. One summer day in 2005, when I was serving a church in Lynden, WA, I got a phone call from
Christian Reformed World Missions (but really from God). They said they had an opening in China and asked if I would be interested. What a question! I was trembling, but calmly told them I would discuss it with my wife. Of course we went. And for ten years we experienced the mysterious miracles of God over and over.

One more mystery. One day I found myself sitting in an office at Calvin Seminary with my name outside the door. I took a picture. I am honored to be here and to be teaching a class about the church in China. My goal is to get to know all the students and to talk with many of them about missions, miracles, and mysteries.
Laura Palsrok joined Calvin Seminary last fall as the Assistant to the Director of Development. Laura has a B.A. in English and German from Calvin College. Prior to coming here, Laura worked for 20 years at the Christian Reformed denominational headquarters in the office of Pastor-Church Relations. Her primary focus was working with pastors and churches as they moved through the search process. In desiring to find new opportunities and challenges where she could use her gifts, Laura applied for and was offered this new position. Her primary duties include coordinating events for the President and the Development staff as well as supporting the Director of Development in his work in a variety of other tasks. In her spare time, Laura enjoys spending time with family and friends and especially her Miniature Schnauzer. Laura is a member of Hillside Community Church in Cutlerville.

Pastoral Theology & Care at the Margin: African American Experience & the Holocaust

October 7-10, 2017

Join Prof. Danjuma Gibson along with current seminary students in visiting the African American and Holocaust museums in Washington, DC. You will be exposed to salient themes related to the Black experience in America and the Holocaust, primary & secondary texts and case studies.

Limited seats reserved for non-students; please contact travel@calvinseminary.edu for more information.
Presidents’ Reformation Tour 2017

In March, 2017, President Michael LeRoy of Calvin College and President Jul Medenblik of Calvin Theological Seminary jointly hosted a Reformation Tour of Germany and Switzerland, commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. This group photo was taken in Worms where Martin Luther appeared before the Diet of Worms in 1521 and refused to recant his writing when faced with charges of heresy. “I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen.”

The tour ended in Geneva where guest lecturer Dr. Karin Maag (right), gave historical and theological perspectives on such topics as education, worship, and church discipline. This photo is taken in a classroom at the University of Geneva, founded by John Calvin in 1559. The night before, Dr. Lyle Bierma, the other guest lecturer, introduced the group to the John Calvin, noting that he was a second-generation reformer (25 years younger than Luther) who had studied law, not theology and was a self-taught theologian never formally ordained to ministry.
Every year, especially during January, Calvin Seminary offers students the opportunity to travel outside of our Michigan location to study in other places in God’s world. These travel-based courses are instrumental to student learning in a variety of important and lasting ways, including:

**Enriching the way students read Scripture**

**Deepening students’ understanding of and appreciation for Reformed theology**

**Opening students’ eyes and imaginations to how God is present and working in his world.**

Past opportunities have included travel-based courses to Mexico, Turkey & Greece, and Angola Prison in Louisiana. To this dynamic list, Calvin Seminary is pleased to announce a travel-based course to Israel/Palestine.

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**Taste and See:**

**A Study Tour of Israel/Palestine**

**January 2-14, 2018**

In this two-credit course, students will experience the land, geography, history, climate and culture out of which the Bible emerged. Readings, presentations, and papers will be coupled with the lessons of place, such as the Sea of Galilee, Mt. Carmel, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem.

Our purpose—and prayer—for students who enroll in this travel course is that it will deepen their understanding of Scripture and generate for them fresh, compelling ways to communicate the good news of the gospel to the church and the world.

Please consider these ways you can participate:

**Pray** for our students as they make decisions about the possibility of their participation.

**Support** a student financially. The total cost of the trip is about $4,000. Some will receive travel scholarships but all will have some funding gap to fill.

**Join** us in our study tour of Israel/Palestine. Limited seats are reserved for non-student learners.

For more information please contact the travel course leader, Prof. Gary Burge (**travel@calvinseminary.edu**).
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Pray for our students as they make decisions about the possibility of their participation.

Support a student financially. The total cost of the trip is about $4,000. Some will receive travel scholarships but all will have some funding gap to fill.

Join us in our study tour of Israel/Palestine. Limited seats are reserved for non-student learners.

For more information please contact the travel course leader, Prof. Gary Burge (travel@calvinseminary.edu).

Every year, especially during January, Calvin Seminary offers students the opportunity to travel outside of our Michigan location to study in other places in God’s world. These travel-based courses are instrumental to student learning in a variety of important and lasting ways, including:

Enriching the way students read Scripture

Deepening students’ understanding of and appreciation for Reformed theology

Opening students’ eyes and imaginations to how God is present and working in his world.

Past opportunities have included travel-based courses to Mexico, Turkey & Greece, and Angola Prison in Louisiana. To this dynamic list, Calvin Seminary is pleased to announce a travel-based course to Israel/Palestine.

Calvin Seminary: God’s World, Our Classroom