A Learning Community of Hospitality
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I still remember moving from Kalamazoo, Michigan, to Fulton, Illinois, when I was in the first grade. A new home also meant a new school. I started a few weeks after everyone else had their first day at school. They knew each other. They had their assigned seats and even some pattern of playing together. Even though I was in the same room, I was “on the outside looking in.”

This issue of the Forum takes up the always vital theme of “Hospitality.” From the first pages of Scripture where we read that God created a place for us, we are confronted with the opportunity and the challenge of being hospitable people.

All of us have had some moment when we were “on the outside looking in.” All of us have had moments when we wondered if we were welcome or would ever be fully enfolded into a community.

As a church planter, I saw the look again and again from new people coming to New Life Church that masked their questions.

“All there anyone like me here?” “If I tell these people some of my story, will I be accepted or shunned?” “Do I have to have a certain last name, ethnicity or background to fit in?”

From articles exploring the Old Testament (Professor Sarah Schreiber) and the New Testament (Professor Mariano Avila), we learn that the theme of “hospitality” has a consistent place in God’s design for developing and shaping a people that are “image-bearers” for Him. Also in this issue, Academic Dean and Professor Ronald Feenstra will highlight some of what we are doing to shape hospitable “learning” classrooms and environments.

We hope that lessons learned at Calvin Seminary can also be helpful lessons and encouragement for all followers of Christ and members of the body of Christ – the Church. No matter the classroom or the church, hospitality is the lesson where we are called to be life-long learners.
Genesis 18 paints a picture of the consummate host: we are told that Abraham is sitting in his tent during the heat of the day when he sees three men nearby. He rushes to meet them and bows low to the ground. There’s no mention of mutual introductions or pleasantries about the weather. Abraham doesn’t bother to offer directions or ask where the men are going. Instead, right away he offers a place to wash and rest, eat and drink. When the men accept his invitation, Abraham and his household waste no time preparing a meal for the guests.

In fact, the Hebrew words for “run” and “hasten” occur a total of five times in the first seven verses of Genesis 18. It appears that the household drops everything to receive the unexpected visitors. Abraham and Sarah select the best flour and calf, and it is not a servant but Abraham himself who serves the meal to the men.

Perhaps this story of Abraham and the three visitors is the first one that comes to mind when we think of hospitality in the Old Testament. Abraham’s response to the strangers in his midst meets and probably exceeds the cultural expectations for hospitality in that time and place. Contrast Genesis 18 with Genesis 19: instead of hospitality we see violent hostility from the men of Sodom. Reading these chapters together as stories about welcoming the stranger sets up Abraham as a hero and moral exemplar. But allow me to suggest that the Old Testament presents a host and a model of hospitality even greater than Abraham in Genesis 18. The paragon is actually Yahweh—God is host and Israel is guest. Consider the exodus from Egypt and Israel’s journey to the promised land. As Abraham escorts the men under a tree to rest in the heat of the day, so does the LORD usher his people through the wilderness with a pillar of smoke by day and fire by night (Exod 13:21-22). Abraham calls for water so that the visitors’ feet may be washed; God makes it so that the feet of the Israelites never swell nor their clothes wear out (Deut 8:4). The LORD makes bitter water sweet and sends water from rock (Exod 15:22-27; 17:1-7; Num 20:1-13). Like any good host, God supplies not only fresh water but plenty of food, a regular supply of manna and quail (Exodus 16)—though the Israelites would have preferred Abraham’s choice selections!

The promised land ultimately belongs to God even though it is also a gift to Israel. The LORD is not only a guide or host in the wilderness, but also the landowner where the Israelites eventually would settle. One Old Testament text that emphasizes divine ownership of the land is the legislation for the Year of Jubilee. There the LORD commands Israel: “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners (gērim) and strangers (tôshābim)” (Lev 25:23, NIV). The promised land ultimately belongs to God even though it is also a gift to Israel. The Israelites recall being foreigners in Egypt, subject to their Egyptian taskmasters; they are...
foreigners still, but now subject to the ongoing hospitality and goodwill of the divine landowner.

The Old Testament speaks again and again about God’s concern for foreigners (gērim), not only Israelites but also non-Israelites. A gēr (pl. gērim) is someone who is apart from native land and people, so gēr may be translated in English Bibles as sojourner, foreigner, stranger, or (resident) alien. According to the Talmud, there are no fewer than thirty-six biblical laws that concern the well-being of the gēr, making this the most-repeated instruction in the law (b. Bava Metzia 59b). According to the law, proper treatment of the foreigner is tied to who God is and who Israel is. In Deuteronomy we read,

“For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner (gēr) residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners (gēr), for you yourselves were foreigners (gērim) in Egypt (Deut 10:17-19, NIV).”

What does this love look like? Deuteronomy 10 mentions food and clothing. We can imagine that as an outsider, a gēr living among the Israelites typically would be a vulnerable person in the community. According to the law, Israelites must not oppress or mistreat the foreigner (Exod 22:20, 23:9; Lev 19:33). Instead, foreigners living among them should be treated fairly, subject to the same laws as the Israelites (Lev 24:22; Num 15:15). Harvesters must leave grain and grapes in the fields for foreigners who are needy (Lev 19:10; Deut 24:19). Foreigners should be allowed to rest and be refreshed on the Sabbath (Exod 23:12). By these means and others, God loves the foreigner, and one foreigner—Israel—loves another.

There is no Hebrew word for “hospitality,” but the Old Testament gives numerous examples and counter-examples of welcoming and loving the stranger. The best model is our very own God who calls a people to himself and intends to bless all others through them. Our standard today for welcoming the stranger is not the hospitality of any culture near or far, past or present, but the unilateral act of God toward humanity. Our Lord is the ultimate host. The table fellowship of Abraham with his visitors and the gifts of manna and quail must point our attention ahead to the table where our savior, Jesus Christ, welcomes all who once were strangers to share the feast he himself has prepared for us. Even greater than the passing shade of Abraham and Sarah’s tree is the eternal home God is preparing in the new heavens and the new earth. And at this feast and in this home there is always room for more.

“According to the law, proper treatment of the foreigner is tied to who God is and who Israel is”
For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. (Eph. 2:14-18 TNIV)

How timely and powerful these words sound in a polarized political climate in the US that is exacerbating hatred, racism, divisions, hostility and phobias towards “the other,” i.e., Mexicans, women, Afro Americans or Muslims. Even more disturbing is that a large part of the American population, coincides with and supports these attitudes and actions. If something good has come out of the present political campaigns is that they have brought to the surface a reality that many claimed was non existent, a thing from the past. Sadly, those ugly attitudes are still alive and well in our society, our churches and institutions. They are entrenched in our hearts as well as in the systemic, structural realities we have created in North America. But we can and must do something about them, if we, as God’s new humanity, are going “to live worthy of the calling we have received” (Eph. 4:1).

Two New Testament books set the foundations and ethos for God’s people with the best and pertinent ecclesiology needed to become what we are: Matthew and Ephesians. Both books can be reduced to basic categories that are central marks of Jesus character and ministry: humility and service (see Eph 4:2, 12). These have profound and transforming effects in those who are called to be imitators of Jesus the Messiah. When they are embodied by the ekklesia, the very presence of Emmanuel and God’s Kingdom becomes a powerful reality (salt and light) in the world.

Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew teaches the Church what it means to be the Church (16:18; 18:17). What is expected from Jesus’ followers is incarnated by Jesus: humility (11:29; 21:5) and service/diakonia (20:26-28). Both are defined and illustrated by Jesus in every chapter of the Gospel.

He was the disciple par excellence and the master disciple maker. And he commissioned his disciples/apostles/church to “make disciples of all the nations teaching them to obey” (28:19) Jesus’ example and teachings.

Humility and service are sine qua non realities to become God’s new community. They result in reconciliation (5:23-26 and ch. 18) and in the everyday practice of being artisans of shalom, makers of peace (5:3, 5, 9). This was essential particularly in a moment in salvation history when this was a burning question, both for Jews and Gentiles: Who belongs rightfully to the ekklesia? How can we become God’s people, under the New Torah, in this crucial moment?

For the Jewish people and even for the early Jewish-Christian Church, to be an inclusive church, a church for all the nations (Abraham’s vocation)
Hospitality

was an enormous task that, in many ways, was never fulfilled, at least in the Jerusalem Church. Judaism was a self-contained religious group serving the religious needs of its own people, with little or no concern for others, particularly Gentiles. We just need to read carefully Acts 8 to 12 and 15 to see how difficult it was even for the early Jerusalem church to be open to aliens and foreigners and to accept them as co-heirs and citizens of the people of God. Jesus’ commission to disciple the nations (Mat 28:18-20) was quite a challenge and required a conversion (metanoia) in the apostles and early leaders that occurred in a very slow and painful way. The Jerusalem church remained in its ghetto and after one generation she was gone (AD 70).

Today, churches whose ethnicity has played a major role in defining their identity have to go through a similar process of conversion and change of mentality and attitudes if they want to live according to God’s calling and to become shalom makers among the nations. Particularly if we remember that we are not Israel, but Gentiles who also have been received and redeemed by God’s grace. It is amusing that in a first reading of the biblical texts, people in CRCNA churches read the command “welcome the stranger” as if they were Israel welcoming Gentiles! Paul would say to us: “Remember, that formerly you were Gentiles …and have been brought near” (Eph 2:11, 13). Furthermore, in a nation of aliens, we must welcome other aliens remembering that “we were also aliens and foreigners” (Lev 19:34) not a long time ago, and suffered discrimination and abuse from others who got here earlier.

Two groups of people are highlighted in Matthew as touchstones for the composition of God’s new family: WOMEN and ALIENS.

They were alienated from the holy community of Israel (or if you prefer were second or third class members) but now in Matthew they are vindicated and placed in a prominent place in God’s new humanity. “The last will be first” (20:16).

WOMEN.

In the opening of the gospel four women are included in the genealogy, all of them Gentiles (1:3, 5, 6).1 And all of them were shalom makers.2 “they are examples of higher righteousness” … they demonstrate Matthew’s recognition of those removed from positions of power. Judah, the king of Jericho, David, and Boaz—all of whom had the power to act but who either failed to empower others or succeeded in exploiting them—are taught the lesson of higher righteousness by Tamar, Rahab, Uriah, and Ruth.” (Levine, Matthew. 1992:340).

Jesus’ encounter with the Gentile woman (15:21-28) establishes a sharp contrast between her “great faith” (v 28, like that of the other Gentile, the centurion in 8:10), and the disciples’ little faith (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 15:16; 17:20); the contrast is even stronger with the Jews’ lack of faith (13:58; 17:17, 20). In other words, the top examples of true faith in Jesus in the whole Gospel are this Canaanite woman and the centurion in chapter 8. For Jewish Christians in those days it was hard to accept these realities as it is today for many Christians in “advanced” North Atlantic societies to realize that the center of Christianity has shifted to the South and that the fastest growing churches in the world are in poor countries. Those churches from the South are already present in the US and Canada. The great faith and vitality of those churches who struggle daily against all kind of inhuman situations are outstanding models for the mission of the Church. They do evangelize us, as the faithful women on Easter, who received the good news from the angel and later from Jesus himself and were commissioned to be the first and privileged witnesses of the risen Lord (Mat 28:1-8).

“Among the Gospel’s specific demands, Matthew emphasizes the importance of service (23:8-12). In particular, women frequently represent both the ideal of service that Jesus requests of his disciples (20:26-27) and the model of fidelity that the church requests of its members. But this service is not equated with women’s stereotypical

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duty as servant to spouse or children. Rather, women who appear apart from husband, father, or son assume positive, active roles in the Gospel (8:14-17; 9:20-22; 12:42; 13:33; 15:21-28; 21:31-32; 25:1-13; 26:6-13; 27:55-61; 28:1-10)… the Gospel recognizes the contributions made to the growth of the church by women as well as by others removed from positions of power (foreigners, lepers, the possessed, and the dispossessed).” (Ibid. emphasis added).

Indeed, in Matthew’s Gospel “the last are first.”

**ALIENS.**

The four women in the genealogy were Gentiles. An immediate lesson to the early church and to us is that Jesus was not a pure blood Jew. He was a mestizo, mixed blood. Matthew (3:89; 5:1920; 7:1314, 2127; 11:25ff; 21:2832; 23:3). In this way the exclusivist claims of the Jews start to fall down. The emphasis is placed on doing justice (5:19-20), over against people and the sensibility of pagans in the past and in the present (11:20-24; 12:4142). At the same time, Jesus reveals clearly the identity of the true family of God: those who do the will of his father in heaven (12:46-50). Faith in Jesus and obedience to God’s will define who belongs to the people of God, not ethnicity or religion.

Again, it is a Gentile who during Jesus’ crucifixion declares, “Surely he was the Son of God!” (27:54). At the end of the Gospel, the Great Commission is aimed to the Gentiles (28:1620)!

The society in Jesus’ days labeled people considering their ethnic, social, political, religious, and moral background, and treated them accordingly. Thus, we hear in the gospels different people speaking in a derogatory way of “Galileans,” “publicans,” “Samaritans,” “women,” “children,” “sinners” and of course “Gentiles.” Modern societies, even those who are proud of their religious background, are no different.

One of the best ways by which today’s alchemy transforms human beings into disposable “objects” is by placing on them labels that degrade them and turn them into non persons, heretics, and enemies (the old tactic of politicians of inducing fear to the “other,” that always works in times of crisis). Once this ideological process...
Jesus saw and valued people with a different perspective

is completed, even the most pious, moral, and even “biblical” language is used to dispose, without remorse, of these enemies and erase them from the map.3 Jesus’ own religious society is an ancient and painful example of this strategy (read in this light Matthew 23, particularly vv. 34-39).

How different was Jesus’ attitude toward his enemies, even for those who rejected and crucified him (compare 5:43-48 with Luke 23:34). Jesus saw and valued people with a different perspective and served them with compassion and love. This was the hallmark of his life and ministry and should be ours. He not only saw their sins but also the consequences and suffering caused by them. This was Jesus’ deepest pain (Matthew 9:35ff), and the urgent reason for sending his disciples into their first missionary trip. This was the clearest way to illustrate what humility and service mean.

As we read Matthew’s gospel (or any other Gospel), we discover that Jesus had a deep and genuine appreciation for all kinds of people regardless of their social, ethnic, political, religious, or even moral background. And he treated and served them accordingly. He knew that every person was created in the image of God and had a value, worth, and dignity given by God that did not depend on relative and frequently degrading human categories and taxonomies.

Jesus trained his disciples for mission with his own example and teachings. He wanted a church where there is room for all kinds of people, where hospitality is practiced towards everyone, where the hungry, the foreigner/alien, the homeless, the sick and the delinquent (25:31-46) have a privileged place in the community of saints.

God’s new humanity, the Church, is composed of Jews and Gentiles, no distinctions made. Faith and obedience are the key to belonging. The inclusion of the disenfranchised is a mark of the new ekklesia:

“I was a stranger (xenos—an undocumented alien) and you invited me in (Matt. 25:35-36).

By his death in the cross, Jesus, our peace, destroyed the wall of hostility and created a new humanity, reconciling all nations to God and with each other (Eph 2:14-18). That is the Gospel. Notice how the Belhar Confession seems to have been written today for us. Belhar continues to challenge us:

WE BELIEVE

• that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Cor. 5:17, 21; Matt. 5:13, 16; Matt. 5:9; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21-22)

• that God’s life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God’s life-giving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world (Eph. 4:17, 6:23, Rom. 6; Col. 1:9, 14; Col. 2:13, 19; Col. 3:1, 4:6);

• that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;

• that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

THEREFORE, we reject any doctrine which, in such a situation, sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ. (Belhar confession CRC, #3).
In light of these clear teachings, I dream that in my church, the CRCNA, we will all learn and practice some basic skills to become God’s New humanity (Eph 2:15; 4:24):

• **To learn a new language.** We do not even know how to call each other and are still trapped in unprecise and poor language: We speak of “ethnic leaders” (as if any human being could escape being ethnic); “people of color” or “colored people” (as if we were colorless or as if being “white” is a different, superior category. Of course, that is the implication). We speak of welcoming and being hospitable, metaphors that reveal a paternalistic attitude of doing something for the others. “The house is ours but we welcome you.” Instead of “we all have been welcome in God’s house and we honor and affirm each other as co-heirs, co-members, co-sharers of the Gospel.” (Eph 3:6). Let us learn how to live with each other in this new family of God!

• **To become color blind** and relate to each other not through the labels and stereotypes systematically and historically we have manufactured for “the other”. Rather, we need to learn how to treat with dignity and respect our sisters and brothers, regardless of their color and race. *Service* and *humility* in our life together (Matt 18:4) means not to “cause to stumble” others (18:6) nor to “look down on the little ones” (18:10).

The fact that we are so concerned of fulfilling minorities’ quotas, shows how we are still captive of worldly mindsets. Notice how we love to have “people of color” in our posters, publications, and institutional promotion, but we avoid to hear what they have to say or follow their leadership.

• **To be aware** of the institutional and systemic ways by which we express our sense of superiority and keep zealously our privileges. (Our denominational, organizations, and church budgets show clearly where our heart is (Matt 6:21.) How much do we assign to the education, empowerment and growth of “ethnic minorities” in our educational systems from kindergarten to Seminary? With few exceptions, our Christian educational system remains closed and inaccessible for the majority of our Afro American and Spanish speaking sisters and brothers. How committed are we to include minorities? Are we conscious of how our racial, educational, and economic structures have kept them marginalized until today? Are we really serious when we speak so loudly of being a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural church?

• **To dignify** and really invest in the formation of our own pastoral leadership. The challenge of the fast changing demographics in the US and Canada demands from the denomination a huge investment in the solid formation of at least CRC Church leaders. Fifty years ago the Grand Rapids diocese required of their priests to learn Spanish! We still want people to learn English and be like us, to be assimilated into our sub-culture. Our own way of “admitting” “ethnic pastors” into our denomination, is a fast way to create second and third class clergy, since they can only aspire to be commissioned or associated pastors, and not Ministers of the Word and Sacraments.

• **To become a Church where** “we all (regardless of our gender and ethnic origin) are united by our faith and by our understanding of the Son of God. Then we will be mature, just as Christ is, and we will be completely like him.” In such a church my grandchildren will flourish and God will be honored. Is this an impossible dream?
We at Calvin Theological Seminary are a learning community that forms people for faithful Christian ministry. When we use the language of formation, we realize that not only what we teach but also how we teach shapes all the members of our community and forms students for ministry and work in the church and the wider society.

In light of our formational goals, we have committed ourselves to “provide a safe, healthy learning environment for all of our students and their families,” and to “support students in their formation for ministry.” We also call all members of the Calvin Seminary community to “show hospitality and compassion to one another, while avoiding behavior that undermines community” (quotations from the Calvin Seminary Student Conduct Code). In the words of our 2013 “Vision Frame,” we form “leaders who cultivate communities of disciples of Jesus Christ” by nurturing a “community of hospitality.”

Given these commitments, how can we develop a hospitable learning community that contributes to effective formation for ministry? In particular, what might such a formational community of hospitality look like in the classroom? How should we shape our teaching and learning to encourage the formation of those virtues and behaviors that should be exemplified by those who speak in God’s name? This article focuses on three key areas in which teaching and learning can serve to form people for effective ministry: hospitality to all, listening charitably, and telling the truth graciously.

**HOSPITALITY TO ALL**

In teaching and in ministry, we sometimes find it hard to provide a welcoming place for those who differ from us. We slip into “insider” language, jargon, and acronyms as comfortably as we step into our favorite pair of shoes. We make casual references to “what we all know” or “a Bible story your parents taught you,” or numbered denominational reports (e.g., Report 44). We try to establish connections with people who have familiar last names, but not with those whose last names are unfamiliar.

Yet, as we realize upon reflection, faithful ministry does not treat “insiders” better than those coming from outside of a particular community. God calls all Christians, and especially those who serve in the church, to welcome and serve the “foreigner” among us (Matt 25:35; Rom 12:13; Heb. 13:2-3). Jesus calls his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). We see the benefit of a welcoming attitude in ministry that opens up to and welcomes those who come from a background different than the majority of members already present. Faithful ministry means speaking to those who are new to the faith, or new to our tradition, just as warmly as to those who have been members for life.

How, then, do we shape a learning community that forms people for a faithful ministry of hospitality to all? How do we form students and graduates who readily and joyfully engage with those who look, act, or behave differently than they

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do? At Calvin Seminary, we use a multidimensional approach. For example, we encourage students to interact with people whose background is different than their own. So students in some programs are required to do a cross-cultural internship in a context different than one they already know. All students are invited into a program that pairs North American students with those from other parts of the world. And a number of faculty and students have taught courses or tutored in a prison near campus. Faculty have also led travel courses to Angola Prison in Louisiana and to a number of other countries, all with a goal of better understanding people in other cultures.

In addition to these efforts outside the classroom, we also promote hospitality within the classroom. Our template for course syllabi says that “Calvin Seminary welcomes and respects the diversity represented among God’s people.” The template encourages faculty and students to respect the various cultures represented in our class and community and to “use gender-inclusive language in speaking and writing about humans,” all on the basis of “mutual respect and hospitality.” Faculty also show hospitality to students by making sure that all members of a class, and not just the talkative ones, are encouraged to speak. In these and other ways, we hope to impress upon all members of our community that showing respect for and hospitality to others is foundational for effective witness to the gospel.

LISTENING CHARITABLY

Like hospitality, charitable listening is often in short supply. Whether as teachers or as those engaged in ministry, we often find it hard to listen charitably. Someone comes to speak to us and we quickly jump to an opinion about what they are saying. We see their appearance or hear a few words that they say and we already “know” how we will respond. Sometimes we even cut them off mid-sentence rather than listening through to the end of what they have to say. And if they come from a culture or perspective different than our own, we readily view them through the lenses of our own prejudices and stereotypes. Especially if we disagree with what they are saying, we listen, not to understand their point of view and the reasons for it, but to develop our own response to or refutation of their position.

Of course, such behaviors are lethal to good relationships, whether in ministry, in teaching, in friendships, or in families. People can tell when we are not listening carefully or taking their point of view seriously, and they don’t like it. If people get the impression that we are not going to listen carefully to them, they sense the arrogance in our attitude and likely will not be inclined to listen to our response to them.

But God calls all Christians to a life of humility (Rom. 12:3-5; Phil. 2:1-11). One aspect of humility is being willing to listen to and learn from others (James 1:19-20), without assuming that we already know what they will say or already have the right response to them. Christian humility also recognizes that each person we meet is the image of God, just as we are, and therefore deserves our thoughtful attention. We see the benefit of humble, charitable listening in ministry that listens long and patiently, and in ministry that realizes that sometimes we don’t really disagree but only think we do because we have not listened carefully enough to what the other person has said. Charitable listening of this sort is vital to effective Christian ministry, since ministry often involves dealing with people who see things differently from one another.

A community of hospitality is also a community of charitable listening

If we want our graduates to embody humble, charitable listening, what sort of learning community do we need to be? For starters, a community of hospitality, as described above, is also a community of charitable listening. Those who cultivate Christian hospitality need to be charitable listeners. We share lunch with those we don’t know well because we want to listen and learn, realizing that God might well use them to speak truth and wisdom to us. As faculty members, we meet with students to hear how God called them into ministry and to understand how we might best serve them. In fact, several faculty members at Calvin Seminary make it a regular practice to meet outside of class with all the students in
their courses precisely in order to listen to what they have to say.

And how do we promote charitable listening in the classroom? We do so, in part, by having students read a diverse array of perspectives on the topic at hand, including perspectives that challenge their own preconceptions. Then we encourage one another to find the strengths in positions with which we disagree, and also to recognize the weaknesses in positions with which we agree. As we learn to find strengths even in readings with which we disagree, we gain the valuable ministry skill of listening charitably to others. Students and faculty are also encouraged, in their interactions with one another, to listen carefully to one another as God’s image bearers, looking for the wisdom and truth that the other has to offer. In many courses, group projects and small-group discussions serve this formational goal. Through these and other ways, Calvin Seminary is developing a learning community that shapes a ministry of faithful, charitable listening.

TELLING THE TRUTH GRACIOUSLY

Gracious truth-telling is at least as hard as being hospitable and listening charitably. Those engaged in teaching and ministry may find it easy to tell the truth, but not to do so graciously. And sometimes simply telling the truth is itself a challenge. When we disagree with others, we readily lapse into the sort of distortions of the views of others that are all-too-common in life, and that we see displayed, for example, in many political campaigns. Despite the Heidelberg Catechism’s interpretation of the commandment not to bear false witness, we twist someone else’s words, we engage in gossip, and we harm rather than advance our neighbor’s good name (Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 112).

Such behaviors undermine our attempts to speak the truth of the gospel. Rather than serving as gracious witnesses of the gospel message, we serve our own self-interests and prejudices. When people recognize our distortions and half-truths for the lies that they are, they no longer believe us when we try to represent God’s truth.

But God calls us to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), with tongues held in check (James 3:1-12). Faithful ministry does not corrupt the truth of God with lies and distortions from an unbridled tongue. God calls those who deliver the gospel of grace to do so in a way that is both gracious and truthful.

So how can we cultivate a learning community that forms people for a faithful ministry of telling the truth graciously? For starters, we show our respect for others and our desire to serve them by communicating clearly in both writing and speaking (which is no small task in itself). In addition, we must be a community marked by both grace and truth, where speaking the truth in love is the order of the day. We also need to be a community that is willing, if we see something that seems wrong, to say something. Our saying something, whether to the offender, the person hurt, and/or someone in authority, must be motivated by a desire to stop the wrong and bring healing to the situation.

In the classroom, telling the truth graciously means giving the best interpretation of what someone else says or does, especially if we disagree. Telling the truth graciously also means encouraging students to develop their own voice and to “contribute to the class from [their] own cultural richness” (Syllabus template). Rather than expecting students simply to repeat what they say, good teachers try to equip students with tools to address new issues they will confront in ministry. An effective classroom promotes the knowledge, skills, and character that students need in order to develop their own theological and ministerial voice. For example, in many programs, students in a capstone course are given a “case study” of a difficult ministry situation. Students have time to develop a response to the case study, then present and defend that response in front of a panel of two faculty members and a local pastor. This is one of many ways in which we encourage students to develop their own gracious and truthful voice.

CONCLUSION

We at Calvin Seminary continue to work to be a learning community that is marked by the grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ and that forms people for effective Christian ministry. We hope that a community that exemplifies hospitality, charitable listening, and gracious truth-telling will form both faculty and students to serve as God’s faithful witnesses in church and society, thereby cultivating communities of faith that draw people to love and serve the God who shows hospitality to sinners, graciously listens to our cries for help, and tenderly speaks to us the truth of the gospel.
When I hear the word “hospitality,” what immediately comes to mind is a picture: a room lit by the warm glow of candles, a beautifully set Thanksgiving dinner table, place cards noting a spot for each guest, and a feast of food and drink for all to enjoy. Now, of course, this is extravagant; it goes without saying that hospitality is present to us in many different forms—some extraordinary and others routine, some around the table and many in other areas of life, some in the company of many and others in a brief one-on-one encounter. But, in this picture of a quintessential Thanksgiving celebration, there is often more than just one table. If we back up, surveying the whole area, while this table remains the focal point, we often find at least one more: the kids’ table. At this table, everyday dinnerware replaces fine china, mismatched paper napkins are found in place of the pristinely matched cloth sets, and simple food dishes are served in place of the [sometimes unfamiliar!] culinary adventures of the adult table. There are reasons for this separation, many apparent and pragmatic. But, in my family, at least—a gathering much less extravagant, but nevertheless full of laughter and love—this separation raised an important question: when do I get to “graduate” to the adults table? Or, when do I get to be privy to the conversations, food, and other mysteries of that table?

These same questions, I’d contend, can get asked by young people in the church. In the past few decades, some of the well-intentioned efforts to present an age-appropriate message of the gospel have left our young people wondering when they, too, will “graduate” to the adult table. That is, when they will be privy to the deep theological conversations and questions, engage difficult theological and biblical texts, and have the opportunity to ask hard questions that go beyond the “Sunday school answer” of “Jesus.”

For some families, hospitality has meant changing—or abandoning altogether—the “kids’ table” at their family gatherings. In a similar vein, some churches and institutions have been rethinking the way they think about young people and theological education. It was this type of thinking that spurred the Lilly Endowment to pilot a new initiative in 1998: Theological Programs for High School Youth. This initiative provided grants that created opportunities for young people to explore deep biblical and theological questions, foster excitement for this type of study, and consider ministry as a vocation at a place where robust theological learning was already happening, seminaries!

Since the announcement of this initiative, over forty seminaries have created opportunities for young people who are still in high school to come to their campuses for an extended residential program. Young people were invited to live in community together, think about questions of vocation, and explore scripture, important theological texts, worship, and service, all under the guidance of faculty members, seminarians, chaplains, and local pastors. Chris Coble, Vice President of Religion for the Lilly Foundation, writes, “young people today want to make a difference … [youth theology programs] connect them to faculty and religious leaders who will help them explore that longing by drawing more deeply on scripture and theology as they make decisions about their futures.”

In other words, many young people deeply desire a space to think about deep, challenging biblical and...
For seventeen years, Calvin Seminary has offered Facing Your Future (FYF) to high school seniors and recent graduates in order to help them discover their gifts and callings. This program, generously supported by Lilly Endowment and church offerings, has also given participants solid biblical grounding in Reformed theology and piety through instruction and encouragement from Seminary faculty and seminarians.

Today many FYF graduates are actively involved in professional ministry as pastors, church planters and missionaries; as theologians and teachers. Others serve faithfully as elders and deacons while also cultivating God’s Kingdom in a range of professional callings.

In the last three years, Calvin Seminary has welcomed six new faculty members and a brand new admissions team so it seemed best to us to pause for a year in order to seek their ideas and advice about how to frame the next chapter of FYF to serve future servants for Christ’s global church in a dramatically changing world. We have suspended the FYF program for this one-year “sabbatical” in order to review, rethink, and redesign this engagement experience for late teens.

In the next few months, we will be unveiling the new and improved FYF. Based on our listening sessions with a range of stakeholders of the program—ministry leaders, FYF alumni, and high school students—we already know that key changes will include more focused and sustained engagement between each FYF participant, their vocational mentor, home church, and Calvin Seminary. We want to do more to support FYF graduates as they plug back into ministry in their home communities. Stay tuned for more updates as we look forward to our 2017 re-launch.
Earning a College Degree Behind Bars

By Chris Meehan

Armondo grew up in a violent home. Most of his family was hooked on drugs or alcohol or both. Being in that environment, he said, took its toll and played a role in his committing the crime for which he is now confined to Handlon Correctional Facility in Ionia, Mich. Not a churchgoer as a youth, Armondo nevertheless had an inkling of faith in God, and that faith led to him enrolling in a new bachelor of arts program in ministry leadership offered at the Handlon Facility by Calvin College in cooperation with Calvin Theological Seminary.

“I enjoy being part of this program. It gives me the chance to break the perpetual cycle of nonsense you can get into when you are in prison,” Armondo said after a convocation ceremony celebrating the Calvin Prison Initiative.

“I’ve done bad things and made mistakes. This program is something to keep me occupied and to change my attitude.”

Since September 2015, Armondo and 19 other inmates have attended classes on the Old Testament, philosophy, and English three days a week in a classroom at the prison. This joint effort between the college and seminary is unique in the prison system. Any inmate in one of Michigan’s 31 prisons can apply and, if accepted, will be transferred to start classes in September.

John Rottman, professor of preaching, gave the convocation address, reflecting on how he took some students to the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola in 2010. They went to Angola, once known as one of the “bloodiest” prisons in the U.S., to learn more about the education program offered there by New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.
“That week at Angola changed my life,” said Rottman. “I taught, [and I] visited death row and the hospice. We had worship. I saw the prison in its totality and saw how there were moral reforms as a result of the program with the Baptist seminary.” On the way back from that trip, he said, he and the students wondered if a similar program could be launched in Michigan, but they decided it couldn’t happen.

However, in the spring of 2011, some inmates at Handlon wrote the seminary a letter, asking if they could start a program there.

Ronald Feenstra, academic dean at the seminary, looked into it and approached Dan Heyns, director of the Michigan Department of Corrections, who was familiar with Calvin. Heyns eventually recommended that the warden at Handlon allow the seminary to start offering a class on Tuesday nights.

Meanwhile, David Rylaarsdam, professor of historical theology at the seminary, put together a proposal for a bachelor’s degree in ministry leadership and approached Calvin College to join in and seek accreditation for the initiative.

Once accreditation was in place, the prison gave the go ahead.

During the convocation, inmates showed a video, featuring photos of themselves and their friends and families from the days before they were placed behind bars.

In the video, they admitted they had failed those who loved them. But they also said: “We are human beings, and, because of your love and support, we are hopeful, encouraged, inspired, and redeemed, and one day we will be world-changers. Thank you, Calvin College.”
WELCOMING YOUTH continued from page 15

develop theological questions, a space for serious theological study and inquiry. Rather than picturing theology as inaccessible, an obscure, arcane discipline for an elite few, these programs help us envision a way to open up the table, so to speak – a way to bring young people into conversations that once may have seemed off-limits to them.

While the grants for these seminary programs have now come to an end (grants for college youth theology programs are now being offered), the seeds that the initial Lilly grants planted and saw to fruition have created thirty-four vibrant programs around North America. As a way to continue supporting these youth theology programs, the Lilly Foundation helped to establish the Lilly Youth Theology Network. These programs have connected with some of the deep desires of young people; they highlight that young people hunger deeply for theology, for the beautiful, challenging, dynamic, rich Christian life that it points to. Indeed, the success of these programs helps to show us that not only do young people hunger for theology, they have a capacity to engage these materials – to learn difficult concepts, to teach each other, to teach those of us who have studied theology already for some time – in a robust way. These programs show us a way to enable young people to explore the riches of theology and biblical studies in a powerful way.

These programs all share a primary purpose: to explore theology with young people, giving participants opportunity to ask difficult questions about their faith, reflect theologically on contemporary challenges, and examine how faith calls us to lives of service. Embracing this primary purpose, however, each program pursues that purpose in a unique way. These programs encompass different theological traditions and emphases, different pedagogical practices, different lengths of residency, different forms of leadership, and more. The network gleans wisdom from each of these programs. Calvin Theological Seminary’s own youth theology program, Facing Your Future, has been privileged to learn with – and learn from – these programs for many years.

The Lilly Youth Theology Network and the many programs it represents have much to teach us about what it means to welcome youth into our theological education. They model ways of taking young people seriously, as learners and teachers capable of deeply engaging theology, reflecting theologically on their context, and applying themselves in ministry and service. These programs encourage young people to take classes with seminary professors, engage in interfaith dialogue, plan and lead worship services, and the list could go on. But, perhaps one of the greatest insights we can glean is that young people are ready and eager to take part in these theological explorations. They may not have already learned the language that can sometimes act as the entry point of theological study, technical language like soteriology and superlapsarian, but young people certainly have the capacity to engage the conversation – and are often eager for the challenge. What we need to do? Invite them to the table.

For more on these programs, see: youththeology.org
Scott Hoezee, director of the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Seminary, has played a key role in offering another invaluable resource for preachers through serving as the editor for *The Abingdon Preaching Annual* (2017). The *Abingdon Preaching Annual* offers a unique resource to preachers: rather than offering a manual for producing sermons, or exegetical commentary on Scripture, the Annual is designed to spark the preacher’s imagination and insight on the text. The heart of the book is lectionary sermon and worship aids. Based upon the lectionary schedule, the Annual offers reflections and prayers for the lectionary schedule each week. Each reflection begins with a “preaching theme” that seems to emerge most strongly from the lectionary readings. This theme, while clearly based in sound exegesis of the lectionary texts, is broad enough to spark the preacher’s imagination and point the way towards any number of sermons. The weekly reflection also includes a secondary preaching theme that heads in a different direction of thought, often based on a lectionary text that seems to convey a different theme than the other lectionary texts. Mixed in are various opening prayers, prayers of the people, and closing prayers.

The weekly reflections are nourishing in and of themselves, and provide a treasure of insight and encouragement to pastors. One could easily envision this text becoming a regular part of any person’s devotional life. A scripture index in the back allows pastors who do not follow a lectionary schedule in their churches to quickly see if a text they are interested in preaching on is discussed in the book. Other resources include helpful excerpts from recent, critically acclaimed books on preaching, and eight sample sermons by gifted preachers. This year’s Annual offers a compelling and creative way to ease the burdens and pressures pastors feel in producing fresh sermons each week, and open the door to hearing a fresh voice from the Spirit.

As part of *The Church at Worship* series, *Karin Maag’s Lifting Hearts to the Lord: Worship with John Calvin in Sixteenth-Century Geneva* offers a fascinating window into sixteenth century Geneva. Dr. Maag, director of the H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies and professor of history at Calvin College, is an ideal guide to opening up this key period in church history. Composed primarily of a wide range of primary sources, from sermons to church polity documents to anti-Protestant rhetoric, Dr. Maag makes the work accessible and applicable through helpful historical commentary and images contextualizing these texts. A chapter entitled “Suggestions for Devotional Use” offers helpful suggestions for ways to incorporate life-giving elements of sixteenth century Genevan liturgy and worship practice into modern daily life as well as questions to both challenge and affirm contributions of Calvin’s Geneva to contemporary worship.

Calvin P. Van Reken, who is finishing his final year as Professor of Moral Theology at Calvin Seminary this year, has offered up an important work on metaethics (the study of moral language, moral ontology, and more epistemology). In *Principia Meta-Ethica*, Dr. Van Reken approaches metaethics primarily from the angle of moral ontology and epistemology. The book is both an accessible and rigorous scholarly defense of the classical position of moral realism. Moral realism, the concept that there is a universal moral order that human beings must...
Arie Leder is only half-joking when he says he expects to “make a little dough” following his retirement from teaching Old Testament studies and narrative literature at Calvin Theological Seminary.

He is making the unusual transition from teaching future pastors the Pentateuch to possibly tossing an occasional pie and helping out with administrative duties at “Toppers,” a Grand Rapids pizza establishment in which he’s invested with his son, Nathan.

At the age of 70, Leder still has plenty of questions to ask, and almost as many possible answers to consider, as he ponders life after almost 30 years at Calvin Seminary.

“These have been very good years—years of personal challenge, intellectual challenge, in so many ways,” said Leder. “What have I been doing here all these years? Asking questions, mostly. What’s the theme of the Bible? If Jesus is the answer, what’s the question?”

Leder has devoted his years at the seminary to probing the Pentateuch and mining the wisdom literature at a time when most students are in a headlong rush to get to the gospels and epistles of the New Testament.

“The Scripture of the Apostles was what we called the Old Testament,” Leder contended that “you can’t understand Jesus unless you’ve read the Old Testament,” yet acknowledged that many Christians today, and pastors, too, spend precious little time in the Old Testament outside of the Psalms.

Leder recalled that Marcion, one of the first heretics in the church, “hated the cruel God of the Old Testament, and said He couldn’t be the father of Jesus. Marcion reduced the gospels to a version of Luke and the Pauline epistles. Sadly, there’s a practical Marcionism alive in the church today.”

What’s more, Leder said, a creeping fundamentalism also has wreaked havoc on a fuller understanding of the Bible in many parts of the church today.

“I understand the drive to Jesus, since Jesus is the major manifestation of God,” he said. “But fundamentalists
don’t really answer the question of the Bible as narrative. I’ve approached reading narrative from the point of view of literature. The Bible is God’s Word, but it’s also literature. And what’s the problem this literature is trying to solve?”

Leder believes that many modern Christians find the Old Testament “kind of earthy, and too honest about who we truly are. We want to get away from it. We think it’s dirty and violent and we don’t want a violent God or a violent Jesus. We want justice to prevail, but there’s not recognition that justice sometimes demands violence.”

A native of Wassenaar, The Netherlands, Leder immigrated to Winnipeg on the Canadian plains of Manitoba when he was a 10-year-old boy, and came to study at Calvin College at the age of 19. After earning his undergraduate degree from Calvin, Leder enrolled at Calvin Seminary and graduated in 1973 with a bachelor of divinity degree and a pastoral call to serve a Christian Reformed congregation in Trenton, Ontario.

Later, he served as a missionary in Puerto Rico and Costa Rica for Christian Reformed World Missions before returning to Canada for further studies at the University of Toronto.

He’s written one book on the Pentateuch entitled “Waiting for the Land,” and plans to craft a new tome with the proposed title, “Waiting for the Rest That Remains.”

Leder also hopes to find opportunity to teach in the Spanish language once again, and to continue his advocacy on behalf of the whole counsel of God through academic essays and occasional preaching assignments and visiting lectureships.

“I have told my students that my job is to undo your Bible reading, because most reading of the Bible doesn’t really honor the text or the traditions,” said Leder. “I know how hard this is. We don’t get a lot of instruction in how to do it.”

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strive to discover, is both basic and foundational to a sound metaethic, but remains suspect in the wake of postmodernism. Dr. Van Reken is to be commended for an important contribution to the field that offers a sound defense of moral realism but on solid philosophical grounds that do not depend on any particular religious framework. This work will be of interest to philosophers, thinkers, and any believer interested in winsomely engaging a postmodern world.

Michael Williams, professor of Old Testament at Calvin Seminary, has provided a helpful Hebrew reference guide for preachers and lay persons whose knowledge of Hebrew is limited. Designed to be used with the most popular Bible software programs on the market (BibleWorks, Logos, and Accordance), the book defines and explains the grammatical terms the software identifies in the Hebrew text. For someone who has never taken Hebrew, this guide provides an easy way to quickly understand the significance of the terms the software points out, without needing to learn the language. For someone who has learned Hebrew but has failed to make it a regular part of their study of the Old Testament, the guide offers a quick refresher on the key terminology as well as a reminder of how significant understanding Hebrew is for our interpretations of the Old Testament. One key way the book keeps a focus on the significance of Hebrew is through insightful “exegetical insights” after each term, which open up the impact understanding these terms has on our understanding of the Old Testament. For lay persons or persons whose knowledge of Hebrew has grown rusty over the years, Williams’ book helps open up the Hebrew text, and may spark regained interest in Hebrew becoming a more regular part of the pastor’s study practices.
Throughout his life, Calvin Van Reken has responded with growing trust and obedience to the vocational invitations that have come his way—first to pastoral ministry and then to teaching moral theology to a generation of students at Calvin Theological Seminary.

“The calls that I’ve had in my life were external calls,” he said. “I never felt I had to be in the church or I had to do this (a 25-year faculty appointment at Calvin), but I felt like I was being drawn into it. I felt I was gifted for it, I could do it pretty well, and it made sense to me.”

It certainly made more sense than his initial career choice—selling real estate back home in the western suburbs of Chicago following his 1971 graduation from Calvin College. It was a time when mortgage interest rates were soaring into double-digit territory, making home ownership unattainable for many people.

“I couldn’t sell anything,” Van Reken said, “and then about 10 people said to me, ‘You ought to think about becoming a minister.’ So I committed to going into seminary for one year. I loved it. I loved the classes and the topics. When studying philosophy I could not appeal to Scripture, but in seminary I was required to use it. I loved having a resource in the Bible.”

The one-year experiment as a student at Calvin Seminary turned into a three-year commitment that yielded a degree and a direction—ordination into the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Van Reken, who also earned a Ph.D. in moral philosophy from the University of Chicago, entered the pastorate with “every intention of staying in the church my whole professional career.” He served churches in Momence, IL, and South Holland, IL, before Calvin Seminary approached him with the call to return to the classroom.

“I was a pastor and a philosopher, and they needed a moral theologian,” Van Reken said of his appointment to the seminary’s faculty in 1991. “They got me instead and they kept me for a long time. I’ve played my role, done my part, and I tried to be faithful. I’ve made mistakes, but on the whole it’s been a pretty good run.”

Van Reken conceded that the time is ripe “for younger faculty to lead a growing younger generation of potential pastors and teachers” to serve the church.

He also acknowledged that his teaching interests during his time at Calvin Seminary has shifted more toward biblical work than moral theology.

“I’ve been focusing more on biblical ethics, and for students who want to go on in ethics, it might be better for them if I were teaching (Karl) Barth or (Emil) Brunner,” Van Reken said. Nonetheless, Van Reken has deeply appreciated his time at the seminary, which he describes as “a wonderful place with a collegial spirit.”

Said Van Reken: “I hope it flourishes mightily. I think it’s getting harder and harder to serve the church. and harder and harder to train people to serve the church. Churches are less similar to one another, so it’s not like we stamp out students. Students are quite a bit different in terms of gifts and interests and sense of call than when I first came here, but perhaps there will be at least a couple of good students for every kind of church.”

Despite the changes, Van Reken retains confidence that congregations in the Christian Reformed Church will “continue to insist on the gospel understood in a Reformed fashion,” and will encourage the seminary to continue preparing students who can faithfully lead those congregations.

“The institutional church really needs to focus on its main calling,” Van Reken said. “Its main calling is the proclamation of the gospel and the preaching of the word in all kinds of contexts. I would like the institutional church to focus energy on its job -- training and helping people in their individual lives be Christians to the world.”

Van Reken hopes to devote more time to travel and visiting family in New York City, Orlando and Chicago in the years ahead, as well as continuing to preach and write.
If you ask Rev. Al Gelder how he came to serve at Calvin Theological Seminary as the Director of Mentored Ministries, he says clearly, “It was a God-thing.” While pastoring five CRC congregations for over 40 years, he never saw himself as part of an academic setting. “I had no plan that would ever involve being at Calvin Seminary.” After five years, it is clear that God brought him to CTS at just the right time. Pastoring a variety of congregations, serving as President of the Board of Home Missions, and being frequently delegated to Synod prepared him well. Chris Wright, his Assistant in Mentored Ministries says, “Al’s experience as a pastor and at Synod gave him a good understanding of the work and allowed him to assume the responsibilities with little training needed.” Gelder stepped right into the job, a one-year interim appointment, and thrived. He laughs and says, “I had so much fun in my one year, it turned into five!” Gelder was key in shepherding some significant changes at Calvin Seminary during his five years. He effectively handled the growth in the number of non-North American M.Div. students who needed internships, preaching opportunities, and placements that would help them effectively navigate matters of language and culture. Brandon Kim, a Korean 2015 M.Div. graduate and now Youth Pastor at Ann Arbor Hope CRC, noted how Gelder helped him to overcome barriers of fear and doubt. Although Kim was unsure of his ability to minister in a predominantly Anglo congregation, Gelder helped him find two internships in California that assured him that with God’s help he can serve in different contexts. Kim gave credit to Gelder for his formation: “The internship broke down the walls of doubt and uncertainty. So I know I can do it. I can be a pastor and use my experience and different perspective to influence others.” Gelder also worked hard to create effective and personalized practical ministry training for the new and growing Distance Learning program. Distance M.Div. student Cari Fidyrchuk expressed her gratitude for Gelder’s work to help distance students overcome isolation and feel connected to the seminary community. “This spirit of love for one another stems from the leadership of this program by Al Gelder. He has a caring nature and genuine desire to walk alongside the students of the distance program in order to ensure they know they are not alone.” Fidyrchuk appreciates the personalization that Gelder brings to Mentored Ministries. “This past summer, I was able to complete my cross cultural internship, pastoring alongside my Dad. This has been a dream of mine for many years and Al Gelder was a part of making that happen. I will be forever grateful.” Calvin Seminary is grateful for Gelder’s five years of faithful service. Wright’s assessment is accurate: “Al has a servant’s heart. Everything he does exemplifies Calvin Seminary’s motto, ‘Called to Serve,’ as it reveals his desire to serve students and the Church.” We are confident he will continue to be faithful as he is “Called to Serve” in retirement, along with his wife, Jan, in Grand Rapids, MI.
The majesty of the mountains enthrall Darwin Glassford, who dedicates time each year to hiking a portion of the Appalachian Trail with one of his two daughters, and summiting a 14,000-foot peak in Colorado with the other.

Amid scenic vistas along mountain trails, the allure of adventure speaks to Glassford’s soul and sensibilities, offering both abundant beauty to behold and the opportunity to explore places he’s never encountered before.

Now, after a decade as professor of church education at Calvin Theological Seminary, Glassford is forging onward, seeking out a new venue in which to serve the church.

“I move on praying and asking that God will continue to bless this place in order to continue to train and equip the next generation of ministers in the church — whether that’s commissioned pastors, ordained ministers, Ph.D. students, whatever it might be,” said Glassford, who came to the seminary after 16 years of teaching and academic leadership at his alma mater, Montreat College in North Carolina.

“My wife and I sense that God is calling us to continue our journey in a different context, and so we step out in faith, trusting in God’s Providence,” he added.

For the past few years, in addition to his teaching responsibilities at Calvin Seminary, Glassford has been serving as the part-time executive pastor for Harderwyk Ministries, a Christian Reformed congregation in Holland, Michigan. He intends to continue in that position while pursuing a new role that will allow him to equip people for church planting and church renewal.

“I’m one of those people who just gets restless,” he acknowledged. “I think one of the things I’ve wrestled with during my 10 years here, and probably much more acutely in the last three or four, concerns the role of theological education and whether it should be anchored in an academic setting or in the church.”

As Glassford has reflected on that tension, he increasingly has felt drawn to exercise his gifts “in the heat of the fire of ministry.”

His experience at Harderwyk, he added, has fueled that desire, although he remains open to returning to the classroom in an undergraduate setting, or even in a theological training setting that’s focused on distance-learning instruction.

“The big question is how do we prepare the next generation of church leaders in a changing culture,” Glassford said. “I’m not against academics, but at some point do we become gatekeepers to ministry or are we empowering people for ministry?”

Glassford grew up in Miami, Fla., in a family that attended church services on Christmas and Easter, and spent most weekends fishing in the Keys or hunting in the Everglades.

“I became a Christian late in high school,” he said, adding sheepishly that he began attending Old Cutler Presbyterian Church “for all the wrong reasons — why does a high school guy show up at a youth group?”

But a youth director at Old Cutler “immediately took me under his wings, started discipling and mentoring me, and that sparked an interest in learning more,” Glassford recalled. “The church was very encouraging and very supportive when later I wrestled with a call to seminary and to ministry.”

Glassford said that he and his wife, Janet, are taking leave with the conviction that “this is a healthy decision both for us and for the
seminary. One of the great joys of this has been processing this decision with the administration. It wasn’t a decision that was made in a vacuum and we leave with great appreciation for what we’ve been able to do here, and having been able to serve here. We are parting as friends, and brothers and sisters in Christ.”

For now, the Glassfords will remain in Grand Rapids, experimenting with intergenerational living with one of their daughters and two of their grandchildren. The fact that both of their daughters and all four of their grandchildren live in Grand Rapids is a powerful attraction, but Glassford said he would love to return to Salt Lake City, where he taught earlier at a now-defunct evangelical seminary. There are, after all, some mighty mountains in Utah.

Welcome Back, Ann Plantinga Kapteyn

Twenty-three years after graduating from Calvin Seminary with an MTS and eighteen years after leaving Grand Rapids to serve overseas with Wycliffe Bible Translators, I find myself back at Calvin Seminary as the Lee S. Huizenga Distinguished Missionary in Residence. This isn’t my first time back; several times during our missionary career I was drawn back to Calvin Seminary to hone skills necessary for ministry. The first time was after our first few years living in Brazil. My husband Ray and I lived in Brazil for six years as we served with Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL*. Ray was a missionary pilot and I filled various teaching and administrative roles. In Brazil I saw the deep need for pastoral care for missionaries who are far from home and live under great stress, so I took several pastor care classes at the seminary during our home service. Later when we moved to Cameroon in 2006, I was more directly involved training national Bible translators, and I realized I needed a refresher in Greek and New Testament courses. Prof. Dean Deppe was kind enough to allow me to audit his course. I am thankful to Calvin Seminary for not only providing me with a great education at the beginning of my career, but also for the continuing education I received along the way as my ministry role changed and grew over the years.

Now I have another occasion to spend time at Calvin Seminary, this time as the Missionary in Residence. In this role I have the opportunity to have conversations with students about all kinds of topics, from missions to parenting to linguistics to worldview differences. My special interest is the study of cultural differences and how this knowledge should mold and inform a person’s ministry. I plan to teach a Cultural Anthropology and Contextual Ministry course in which we will examine these issues together. During my year at Calvin Seminary I will also continue my work with Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL, traveling several times to the Central African Republic to work with national Bible translators there.

I look forward to seeing what God will bring out of this wonderful opportunity to participate in every aspect of the life of Calvin Seminary this year.

*SIL is a faith-based non-profit organization which serves language communities worldwide, building their capacity for sustainable language development, by means of research, translation, training and materials development.
The Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees this year named two recipients for the 2016 Distinguished Alumni Award. The award is given annually to recipients who have brought unusual credit to their alma mater by their distinction in Christian ministry. For 2016, the recipients were REVEREND LUGENE A. “ARCHIE” BAZUIN and REVEREND DR. LEANNE VAN DYK.

LUGENE A. “ARCHIE” BAZUIN is a 1950 graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary. His first pastorate was in Kanawha, IA (1950-1954), followed by pastorates at First CRC in Fulton, IL (1954-1958) and Jewel CRC in Denver, CO (1958-1963). His final pastorate—and one of the then rare long-term pastorates within the CRC denomination—was at First CRC in Munster, IN (1963-1992). During his ministry, even in retirement, Archie served as a “bishop” and counselor to many. He also served as a long-time pastor and leader at Cedar Lake Camp in NW Indiana, where camp experiences served to develop relationships and friendships as brothers and sisters of Christ from a wide range of churches and backgrounds. He continued that ecumenical and evangelistic work as chaplain at Village Woods (retirement home) for 22 years. Retirement was just a change of address for ministry. (Archie just stepped away from the Village Woods Chaplain position at 90 years of age.)

Preaching has been Reverend Bazuin’s passion. He preached in 100 churches in his days as a seminary student due to a shortage of pastors in the churches at that time.

During his ministry, he also served nine times as a delegate to the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church. He was a regional pastor for 15 years for Illiana Classis. He promoted missions and chose to visit missionaries in lieu of a sabbatical.

In each community Reverend Bazuin served, he was a popular speaker and spoke at many conferences throughout the denomination. During his pastorate at First CRC in Munster, IN, he was part of a live broadcast of their Sunday evening services for 25 years.

As a pastor, he was a lover of people, and he wanted to share their joys and sorrows. The testy ones he claimed as friends.

Now retired, Reverend Bazuin and his wife, Ellie, enjoy friends and family (three children and six grandchildren), with thanks to our Lord for the wonderful life they were given.

Reverend Bazuin offered these words of encouragement to the graduating students this year:

You are beginning a wonderful life of service. Always remember this is not only a profession, it is a high calling. People come to church, not to hear your wisdom, but to see Jesus. Finally, love people, all people. Those in your church and the community have been created in God’s image and must be treated with respect. May the Lord richly bless you and those you serve.
REV. DR. LEANNE VAN DYK is a 1987 graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary. As one nominator stated—“Rev. Dr. Van Dyk’s record of achievement as a scholar, teacher, and academic leader is clearly outstanding.” Rev. Dr. Van Dyk first obtained a bachelor’s degree in music and education from Calvin College, followed by a master’s degree in Early Childhood Education from Western Michigan University. Those degrees prepared her for her early career as an elementary school teacher. In responding to her call to Christian ministry, she undertook study at the Theologische Hogeschool van de Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands and obtained her M.Div. from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1987.

Rev. Dr. Leanne Van Dyk holds degrees from Calvin College (B.A.), Western Michigan University (M.A.), Calvin Theological Seminary (M.Div.) and Princeton Theological Seminary where she earned her Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, magna cum laude. Rev. Dr. Van Dyk served as a faculty member at San Francisco Theological Seminary and Graduate Theological Union from 1993 to 1998, and at Western Theological Seminary (WTS) from 1998 until 2015. At WTS, she quickly took on an ascending series of leadership roles, as Dean of the Faculty (2002-2005), Academic Dean (2005-2006) and Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs (2006-2015). In 2015, she was appointed and began service as the 10th President of Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, GA.

Rev. Dr. Van Dyk’s other professional experience besides serving as a member of the Board of Commissioners of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS); a member of the Wabash Center’s Consultation on Theological Education; and on various projects with the Office of Theology and Worship for the Presbyterian Church (USA). One of her efforts remembered by many in the PC (USA) was as a member of the Catechism Committee which completed its work in 1998. She also participated in the Re-Forming Ministry project with the Office of Theology and Worship.

She has served on the editorial boards of Perspectives, the Journal of Reformed Thought, and the Scottish Journal of Theology. Rev. Dr. Van Dyk has published several books, including A More Profound Alleluia: Theology and Worship in Harmony for which she was also editor (Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005); Believing in Jesus Christ, part of the “Foundations” series sponsored by the Office of Theology and Worship of the PC (USA) (Geneva Press, 2002); and The Desire of Divine Love: The Atonement Theology of John McLeod Campbell (Peter Lang Publishers, 1995).

Rev. Dr. Van Dyk offered these words of encouragement to graduating students:

Surely one of the biggest challenges of Christian ministry is facing down the constant temptation to limit God. C.S. Lewis once memorably said that God is not safe but God is good. This worries us. We would prefer a safe and predictable God. I encourage you to be constantly amazed at the wild goodness of God. What an adventure ministry is! I congratulate you on this day of your graduation and wish for you the warmth of God’s face shining upon you.
BIBLICAL STUDY TOUR TO TURKEY & GREECE

with Dr. Jeffrey A.D. Weima of Calvin Theological Seminary

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