

Report of Western Theological Seminary

The mission, identity, and vision statements of Western Theological Seminary (WTS) guide its life together:

Mission Statement

It is the purpose of Western Theological Seminary to prepare Christians called by God to lead the church in mission.

Identity Statement

Western Theological Seminary is an evangelical and ecumenical community of faith and learning in the Reformed tradition that serves the church of Jesus Christ. In covenant with the Reformed Church in America, Western equips men and women for Christ-centered, biblically based, theologically integrated, culturally competent, mission-oriented Christian leadership.

Vision Statement

By 2020, Western Theological Seminary will be a nationally recognized center that forms leaders to empower, renew, and plant congregations and ministries that participate in God's ongoing redemptive work in the world.

Seminary News

President's Office

Dr. Felix Theonugraha began his term as the seminary's 12th president on July 1, 2019, and was officially installed on October 30, 2019. He has spent the first year of his presidency getting to know many of the seminary's internal and external constituents locally and around the country. The President's Office has initiated a strategic planning process to prepare faithfully for the future. As a part of this strategic plan, we are reviewing the WTS mission statement to ensure that it is applicable and responsive to the changing landscape of the church and of theological education.

In July, Dr. Kristen Deede Johnson was named vice president of academic affairs and dean. In this critical role, Dr. Johnson has led the faculty through a curriculum review, while also pursuing several key initiatives, including potential partnership with Hope College, the establishment of the Center for Disability and Ministry, as well as the Eugene Peterson Center. We are grateful for her excellent work.

Western Theological Seminary, in partnership with Hope College, is working to provide for credit courses in the Muskegon Correctional Facility in Michigan. It is our hope that, in time, students in the program will be able to earn at least an associate degree.

Center for Disability and Ministry

In October, the seminary announced a newly formed Center for Disability and Ministry (CDM), naming faculty member Dr. Ben Conner as its first director. The newly developed vision statement communicates that, "The Center for Disability and Ministry at Western Theological Seminary exists to support ministry leaders of all abilities in nurturing and receiving the gifts and

contributions of persons with disabilities through formational opportunities including theological education, consultation, forums, and publications.” CDM commitments thus far include a co-edited book series co-branded with InterVarsity Press, oversight of the Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry, the Disability and Ministry DMin, and the Ralph and Cheryl Schregardus Friendship House.

Honoring I. John Hesselink

In honor of its ninth president, the seminary dedicated a room in the Jack and Mary DeWitt Learning Commons as the I. John Hesselink Room. This popular meeting space hosts all faculty meetings. It also displays notable items given to us by the Hesselink family, including Dr. Hesselink’s doctoral gown, portrait, and a Japanese script for “Theology.”

Additionally, the library has curated a collection of items from Dr. Hesselink’s personal library, including rare books, photos, letters, and art.

Churches in Mission

In November, the seminary received a \$1 million grant from the Lilly Endowment’s Thriving Congregations Initiative to learn with and from congregations as they discern God’s movement in their contexts and neighborhoods. This five-year project, directed by Shari Oosting and Kyle Small, will expand Western’s connection and commitment to the local church, while significantly learning from missional congregations that in turn will shape our own formation and equipping of students.

Alumni Honor

Two-time WTS graduate Dr. Stephen Kaziimba (ThM ’03, DMin ’07) was elected the ninth archbishop of the Anglican Church of Uganda and was installed on March 1. As the archbishop, Dr. Kaziimba will oversee 13 million Anglicans in Uganda and serve as the chancellor of Uganda Christian University. President Theonugraha and a small WTS contingent traveled to Uganda to bear witness to this momentous occasion. While there, the delegation met with representatives from Uganda Christian University and Words of Hope Uganda to discuss potential collaboration and partnerships to foster mutual learning and mutual benefits. WTS has graduated 10 students from Uganda over the last 20 years, all of whom are serving in key roles in ministries across Uganda, including Words of Hope Uganda. We discussed possibilities of faculty exchange, staff exchange, mutual mentoring, joint research, joint publications, and intercultural trips.

Eugene Peterson Center

WTS was selected by the family of the late Rev. Eugene Peterson (pastor, author, and translator of *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*), to establish a new “Eugene Peterson Center.” While the mission and programs of the center will continue to be developed and solidified in the months to come, the center will exist to promote the pastoral theology of Eugene Peterson for future scholarship, the health of pastors, and the church’s renewed imagination. The center will steward the Peterson papers and archives, create generative models for pastoral formation, provide resources to encourage pastors for sustainable, joyful, and courageous ministry, and promote robust Christian imagination among writers and culture makers in the wider church.

In Trust Wise Stewards Initiative

Western Theological Seminary was invited to partner with the In Trust Center for Theological Schools in the Wise Stewards Initiative (www.intrust.org/Programs/Wise-Stewards-Initiative), a one-year program focusing on board governance. In December 2019, all trustees completed an assessment survey. The results were presented at the February 2020 board meeting as part of a board development session with a faculty coach, Dr. Rod Wilson. In March, President Theonugraha, along with three trustees, participated in the Wise Stewards seminar in Vancouver, Washington.

Financial Support

We are grateful for the generous support of our supporters and donors. The development team, under the leadership of Andy Bast, has been tireless in their efforts to bolster our current donors while recruiting new donors.

Enrollment

We are also grateful for a strong enrollment year. In a season when many seminaries are experiencing enrollment declines, we are grateful to report higher enrollment this year (335 students) as compared to last year (304 students). The Hispanic Ministry program continues to grow with nearly 100 students, and the doctor of ministry program has grown from 12 students to 90 students in just three years. We appreciate the innovative and creative work of Dr. Alvin Padilla, vice president of strategic initiatives and director of advanced degrees.

Seminary Events

Stoutemire Lecture, September 30–October 1, 2019

Our guest for the ninth annual Stoutemire Lecture was Dr. Leah Gunning Francis, dean and vice president for academic affairs and professor of Christian education and practical theology at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. Her public lecture was entitled “Faith Following Ferguson: Five Years Later.” The Stoutemire lectures seek to equip seminarians and Christian leaders with resources for increased intercultural competence for greater effectiveness in ministry. See www.westernsem.edu/2019-stoutemire-lecture-in-multicultural-ministry for more information.

A Theology of Singleness: A Conversation on Singleness and the Church, October 17, 2019

WTS, along with co-sponsors the WTS Gordon H. Girod Chair of Reformed Theology and Hope College Campus Ministries, hosted a panel on Singleness and the Church featuring Dr. Janna Bennett, Dr. Wes Hill, Dr. Matt Jensen, Rev. Steven Rodriguez, and Rev. Kevin Slusher. For more information, see www.westernsem.edu/a-theology-of-singleness-a-conversation-on-singleness-and-the-church.

Bast Preaching Festival, November 4, 2019

The Bast Preaching Festival (www.westernsem.edu/2019-bast-preaching-festival) welcomed Dr. Timothy Blackmon, chaplain of Wheaton College. Dr. Blackmon spoke in chapel and presented a public lecture, “The Ostrich and the Dominee: Homiletics in an Anxious Age.”

Academic Ableism, November 12, 2019

Dr. Jay Dolmage, associate professor of English at the University of Waterloo, Canada, presented a public interactive lecture entitled “Academic Ableism” (www.westernsem.edu/academic-ableism-with-dr-jay-dolmage). Dr. Dolmage led the audience in collaboration to address the ableist attitudes, policies, and practices that are built into higher education. The group also explored their own ableist biases, apologies, and defenses in an effort to build tools for anti-ableist education.

An Augustinian Theology of Mass Incarceration, February 27, 2020

Dr. Greg Lee, associate professor of theology and urban studies and senior fellow at the Wheaton Center for Early Christian Studies, presented a lecture drawing on the thoughts of Augustine to encourage new approaches toward criminal justice. The lecture was co-sponsored by the Girod Chair and Hope College’s Saint Benedict Institute.

Winn Collier Lecture, March 10, 2020

Dr. Winn Collier, pastor, columnist, and official biographer of Eugene Peterson, presented a lecture drawing on his scholarship on Wendell Berry entitled, “Holy Ground: The Sacramental Ecclesiology of Wendell Berry’s Port William.”

Osterhaven Lecture Series on Theology, March 16–17, 2020

Dr. Emerson Powery, professor of biblical studies at Messiah College in Pennsylvania, presented “Is the ‘Good Samaritan’ Good? Listening to the Parable’s Later Witnesses” (www.westernsem.edu/osterhaven-lectures-in-theology-with-dr-emerson-powery).

Doxophilia, April 20–21, 2020

WTS welcomed performing artist Liz Vice to lead this year’s *Doxophilia*—an exploration of worship and worship renewal. Liz led chapel and directed a song-writing workshop.

144th Commencement

On May 11, 2020, Western celebrated 83 graduates. Forty-two candidates earned MDiv, MA, and ThM degrees. DMin degrees were granted to 29 students, 22 of whom were from the first Brazilian cohort. Five students earned the Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry, and ten students earned the Graduate Certificate in Pastoral Ministry. In addition, one student completed the Graduate Program for Christian Educators. Professor Emeritus Dr. Tom Boogaart gave the commencement address. May 11 was also Alumni Day, which included reunion celebrations for the Classes of 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000. Karl Overbeek ‘66 was honored as the Distinguished Alumni during the commencement ceremony.

Notable Personnel Changes in 2019

- Dr. Kristen Deede Johnson was appointed dean and vice president for academic affairs
- Dr. Alvin Padilla was named the seminary’s first vice president for strategic initiatives and advanced degrees
- Dr. Kyle Small has expressed his desire to conclude his role as the dean of formation for ministry at the end of this academic year. Beginning in 2020–2021, Dr. Small will remain

a part of the WTS community as professor of church leadership and director of teaching and learning for our Lilly-funded project, "Churches in Mission."

- Brenda Dieffenbach joined the advancement team as associate director of development.
- Krista Greendyke joined the admissions team as administrative assistant

Celebrating Faculty Accomplishments

In 2019, a Korean-translation edition of Dr. Todd Billings's *Rejoicing in Lament* was released, as well as a Spanish-translation edition of his *The Word of God for the People of God*.

Additionally, he was interviewed in all six episodes of Season 2 of the "Living and Effective" podcast, a *Christianity Today* production hosted by Richard Clark and Joy Beth Smith that focused on the prosperity gospel, grief, and what the Bible says about suffering. One episode also includes an interview with Tim Brown, and another episode interviews Travis West. For more information, see <https://livingandeffective.com>.

Dr. Chuck DeGroat published *When Narcissism Comes to Church* (InterVarsity Press), available in both hard- and softcover. He is appearing on podcasts and has speaking engagements related to this subject.

Dr. Han-luen Kantzer Komline was named the Patricia H. Imbesi Saint Augustine Fellow for Spring 2020 at Villanova University. She is the first Protestant scholar selected by Villanova, a Catholic institution. Dr. Kantzer Komline also received the Manfred Lautenschlaeger Award for Theological Promise, an award given annually to ten theologians around the world who show exceptional promise. Dr. Kantzer Komline joins our own Dr. Todd Billings, who received this award in 2009.

Dr. Ron Rienstra received a grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship for his 2020 sabbatical project. In addition, his new book, *Church at Church: Jean-Jacques von Allmen's Liturgical Ecclesiology*, was released by Pickwick Press in March 2019. The book, based on his dissertation, is a monograph on the twentieth century Swiss Reformed theologian and how his work speaks to present ecclesiological, homiletical, and liturgical issues.

Dr. Travis West is working with a WTS student on a project funded by a Calvin Institute of Christian Worship teacher-scholar grant. They will take some of the distinctives of the WTS Hebrew course and translate them into an eight-week multimedia, interactive adult ed curriculum for congregations. The curriculum has been developed and piloted and is now being taught by two different guest teachers to test the usability of the materials. It will hopefully be published by next year.

Trustee Appointments

Three new members joined Western's Board of Trustees, effective July 1, 2019:

- Becky Renner Anderson is a financial advisor with Edward Jones and a member of Thornapple Community Church in Ada, Michigan.
- Kate Bolt is the owner of Living Lark and a member of Third Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan.
- Rev. Alberto Salazar Gavia is pastor of la Senda del Amor Reformed Church in Ontario, Canada.

Trustees Kris DePree and Carol Wagner completed their terms of service on June 30, 2019.

Petitions Approved by the Board of Trustees of Western Theological Seminary

The Board of Trustees approved the following petitions by classes to substitute a period of supervised ministry for part of the 24-month requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry:

- Katherine Alley – Holland Classis
- Kyle Boer – Holland Classis
- Alissa Davis – Holland Classis
- Samuel Eldersveld – Great Lake City Classis
- Rachel Klompmaker – Zeeland Classis
- Alyssa Muehmel – Holland Classis
- Wayne Otten – Holland Classis
- Daniel Stidham – City Classis
- Trey Tirpak – Holland Classis
- Matthew Wohlford – Zeeland Classis

The Board of Trustees approved the request for an alternate means of meeting the biblical languages requirement for:

- Ryan Buikema
- Heather Kramer
- Aaron Westhouse