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CALVIN SEMINARY

# FORUM



WINTER 2014

# Good Shepherding

The Church and Pastoral Care

CALVIN SEMINARY  
**FORUM**

Providing Theological Leadership  
for the Church

Volume 21, Number 1  
Winter 2014

**Good Shepherding:  
The Church and  
Pastoral Care**

**Articles**

**3**

Good Shepherding  
by Ronald J. Nydam

**5**

Profile of the Cover Artist

**6**

Pastoral Care and the Faith  
Formation of All Generations  
by Peter Choi

**9**

Five Characteristics for  
Flourishing in Ministry  
by Ronald J. Nydam

**Called to Serve**

**12**

The Big Picture of God's Mission  
by Bruce Buursma

**14**

Walking in the Steps  
of the Apostle Paul  
by Jinny De Jong

Cover: "The Good Shepherd," painting by  
Carlos H. Orango. (See profile, p. 5.)

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*from the president*

Julius T. Medenblik



**Pastoral Care:  
A Calling for All of Us**

**P**astoral ministry has many dimensions. It certainly flows from the identification and example of Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd, but it is meant to be extended through all followers of Jesus Christ to the world that He so loves.

Pastors who do all the "pastoral care" are not using the gifts of all the people and churches that have pastors "do it all" are not developing as a body of believers.

I hope that as you read this issue on Pastoral Care that you will be challenged to support those who lead in this ministry, but also encouraged to come alongside those who serve.

One way to understand the pastoral care dimension of being part of a church community is to see this dimension in the light of the "one another" passages of the Bible, including these:

- "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Galatians 6:2
- "Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another." Leviticus 19:11
- "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.'" Zechariah 7:9
- "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." John 13:34
- "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited." Romans 12:16

- "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." Ephesians 4:2
- "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Ephesians 4:32
- "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." Colossians 3:13
- "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:24-25

These Scriptures and others make it clear that how we minister to one another and in this world is a constant concern.

This issue of the FORUM is particularly marked by the lessons of Dr. Ronald Nydam who for 16 years has been a consistent pastoral voice at Calvin Seminary.

Professor Nydam is retiring this summer from full-time teaching ministry at Calvin Seminary, but his witness and teaching will continue in the lives and hearts of those whom he has taught. If you would like to send a more personal word of thanks and appreciation, please do so at [rjnydam@calvinseminary.edu](mailto:rjnydam@calvinseminary.edu)

Thanks for reading and thank you for your pastoral role in the Body of Christ!





# Good Shepherding

One of the warnings that John Calvin voiced so many years ago about parish ministry was that of the danger of pastors who were “shut up in their studies” and not out in the community, visiting parishioners, attending to the pastoral needs of God’s people who were under their spiritual care. Good shepherding in the parish gives credibility to good preaching from the pulpit. Parishioners who are well attended in the midst of crisis, the challenges of engaging cancer or the loss of a child, for example, will long remember and be forever thankful for good pastoral care. They will be usually be quick to forgive pastoral shortcomings, whether in the pulpit or elsewhere. On the other hand, parishioners may long remember and struggle to forgive the lack of good pastoral care. They will remember the neglect of a needed visit or the dismissal of a child with a disability or the pain of silence when an encouraging word is needed. In times of spiritual crisis, when people are in the midst of unfinished lament, good shepherding means paying careful attention to the spiritual needs of people, one by one, name by name, or family by family. The good shepherd knows the sheep.

Pastoral care might be defined as bringing someone into the presence of God—or, more carefully, as being used by God’s Spirit to bring someone into the awareness of the presence of God in his or her life. Jesus, when speaking about himself as the shepherd in John 10, states his great purpose in coming to Earth: “I came that they might have life and have it in abundance” (my favorite verse in the Bible). The goal of our good shepherd is that we might all have life to the full—life that is filled with meaning, that takes great delight in God’s creation, that enjoys the richness of deep relationships in friendship, marriage, family, church, and community. But as we all take turns

by Ronald J. Nydam  
Professor of  
Pastoral Care



with different forms of human suffering, there are times in our lives when each of us is in need of a good shepherd because life is not abundant. Often in Scripture our Lord portrays himself as such a shepherd, tending to his flock, knowing each by name, protecting those in his care from danger, and sometimes even going out in the wilderness to

find that one lost sheep. This metaphor for ministry captures the selfless, sacrificial quality of effective pastoral care in its many dimensions..

The tradition of pastors attending to the needs of people has, of course, a long history in the life all the church. But the discipline of pastoral theology that informs good pastoral care is the youngest of the theological perspectives on ministry. It was once called *poimenics*, a word correctly translated as “shepherding.” In the 1950s, a Lutheran pastoral counselor named Seward Hiltner parsed out shepherding functions to include the practices of healing, sustaining, and guiding. Later, church historians Jaekle and Clebsch added reconciling as a fourth function of shepherding ministry. Each of these roles in ministry is an opportunity for pastors, elders, and other

*Good shepherding often involves entering the suffering of God’s people and praying such prayers with a tear in our own eye.*



## ▶ Good Shepherding

caregivers such as Stephen ministers to shepherd God's people in the name of Jesus Christ. And they give us a lens through which to see the good shepherding that we are called to do.

## Healing

Our prayers for healing are usually our most desperate—whether from physical, emotional, or spiritual distress; whether caused by suffering or by our own sin; whether for ourselves or for someone dear to us. “Lord, if it be thy will let this cup pass from me” or “Lord, have mercy” are very often our first prayers to God when we are knocked sideways in this very broken world. We long for restoration, for forgiveness, for a return to the way things were; we long to be healed. Good shepherding often involves entering the suffering of God's people and praying such prayers with a tear in our own eye. Good shepherds, realizing their own need for deliverance, are able to pray for deliverance for others—from addiction or from cancer or from the heartbreak of marital breakdown. Pastoral care is sometimes a commitment to suffering with those who hurt from the missteps and tragedies of life. People who experience hardship sometimes push everyone away, including God. And then the challenge of coming close, being next to individuals or couples who are suffering may mean gently pursuing them, all in the name of Jesus. Facilitating healing by God's Word, by our prayer, and by heartfelt empathy is part of good shepherding.

## Sustaining

Keeping our faith and keeping our faith strong entails the need for nourishment. When Jesus instructs Peter

*The ongoing work of reconciling is critical for the future of a congregation. Good shepherding means keeping the flock together, being one in Jesus Christ.*

to “feed my sheep” he makes explicit the importance of the pastor's role as a nurturer of the flock. Faith that is not nurtured and grown may lack the staying power needed in times of difficulty. Assisting those in our care to sustain faith in the face of doubt, for example, or in the face of broken relationships, or in the face of terminal illness is an important pastoral challenge. There are times when holding on to faith becomes a serious spiritual challenge, and at those times God's presence, mediated through the care and concern of a pastor, elder, or Stephen's minister, is of great importance. Much of the work of sustaining faith comes from the pulpit. Pastorally sensitive sermons must be part of the lived experience of the community of faith. When, for example, people are in the throes of doubt because of what appears to be God's distance from them, good shepherding may mean coming alongside these people, hearing their laments in all their painful detail. And God's Word faithfully preached the Sunday before may be the foundation for personal shepherding during the week. We do well to remember God's covenantal promise to never leave us or forsake us as a worshiping community as well as within personal pastoral conversation.

## Guiding

Jesus was a Rabbi, a teacher. This is part of his shepherding role in our lives. Pastoral guidance has to do with offering spiritual direction. “God's Word is a light unto our path”—but there are times when we need help discerning that path. Sometimes guidance is asked for, sought after by someone who desires to hear from their pastor what they should do. In other circumstances, pastoral guidance may mean gentle persuasion—that is to say, pushing in a certain direction for the spiritual good of the parishioner. And sometimes such guidance may be a word of accountability, a spiritual reality check of sorts, when a person's attitude or behavior falls short of the mark of a Christian lifestyle. Yes, pastoral guidance may sometimes require a word of admonition for sinful behavior. The challenge in all of these circumstances is to carefully provide direction and explanation for the spiritual disciplines of lifelong learning in faith.

## Reconciling

*“Just as God the Father has reconciled all of us unto himself by the work of Jesus Christ the Son, so we ... .”*

The ministry of bringing estranged people together, of building bridges between people in conflict, must be an important part of the pastoral agenda. A good shepherd will labor for reconciliation in a wide array of situations: marital breakdowns; situations of bias against gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, and so on; factions over issues of doctrine, styles of worship, or other polarizing topics. In any congregation where these experiences are relevant, the whole congregation grieves.





When we count the cost—the collateral damage of fractured relationships—it becomes so evident that reconciliation is not only ethical, it is also wise. There are times when the directive of Jesus to love our enemies becomes a spiritual challenge that needs the mediation of a thoughtful and sensitive pastoral voice. In fact, the ongoing work of reconciling is critical for the future of a congregation. Good shepherding means keeping the flock together, being *one* in Jesus Christ.

### Challenges with the Shepherding Metaphor

The shepherding metaphor puts a great deal of pastoral responsibility on the shoulders of the pastor. At times perhaps too much. Although there are certainly moments in our walks of faith when the pastor’s presence

is critical, a wider view of pastoral responsibility would include the contribution to ministry made by many in the community of faith. We are to “bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). The Reformation theme of the “priesthood of all believers” should be kept in mind as we in the Christian community minister to each other, all in the name of Jesus Christ and in the presence of his Spirit. Remembering that we are all part of one body, and that we each have roles to play in that body (Eph. 4; 1 Cor. 12), challenges us to keep balance between seeing the pastor as the provider of care and seeing the community of faith as the provider of care. Small groups, families, friends, neighbors, and coworkers can play a vital role in this spiritual work.

The idea of being sheep within the

fold also has its limits. We are called to our own spiritual growth—our ongoing sanctification. Put differently, we are to “grow up in every way into Jesus Christ.” Good shepherding is also about maturing the flock. The Good Shepherd wants such a life for each of us. Jesus Christ came and modeled how we are to be with each other, emptying ourselves for the sake of the other. In so doing we ask not so much what the community of faith can do for us, but (in our maturing) what can we offer to our church community, especially as it relates to the good shepherding that we are all called to do. The great privilege of pastoral ministry is the gift of entering the lives of so many people and demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ thoughtfully, carefully, empathically, all for the glory of God.

### Profile of the Cover Artist

Carlos H. Orango, a.k.a. Miguel “the Chin” Velez, is currently serving a life sentence in Angola State Penitentiary in Louisiana. He is also a friend of Calvin Theological Seminary.

The artist is Columbian born; accused, and convicted of being one of the most notorious hit men for the infamous ‘Columbian Medellin Cartel.’ He was sentenced to life in prison for participating in the killing of Oilder Barry Seals on February 19, 1986—a pilot, drug runner, and later informant for the United States Government in Baton Rouge.

Miguel’s life has been profiled in part in the HBO movie *Double Cross*, and books: *Cocaine Cowboys*, *King of Cocaine*, *Inside of the Medellin Cartel*, and *The Man Who Made Snow*.

Miguel spent 20 years confined in a solitary cell. In this extreme isolation, God gave him purpose to live through the gift of art—and the forgiveness of all his sins.

Miguel surrendered his life to Christ and became a faithful Catholic, and now lives at peace with God, who is guiding his life. For this, Miguel is now creating magnificent pieces of art to enrich heart and soul.

—John Rottman



# Pastoral Care and the Faith Formation of all Generations

**T**hroughout the Bible we see God's enduring concern for how well each generation works together to form the faith of the next one. And so when the people of Israel were about to enter the promised land, God impressed upon them the importance of sharing stories with their children at all times and in all places in order to pass on the faith: "when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deut. 11:19).

When Paul was looking for a way to encourage his friend Timothy in the work of ministry, he pointed out that Timothy's faith was not his own but a gift flowing from his grandmother, passed down through his mother (2 Tim. 1:3-5).

When we share the reason for the hope in us with friends who are strangers to our faith, one of the more compelling points we can make is that our our beliefs are not of our own making. Far from it. Ours is a faith that has been handed down to us throughout the generations.

Inasmuch as pastoral care involves the task of healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling, it is imperative that we think of this work as cross-generational, and therefore ongoing and never finished. Put another way, good pastoral care in action looks like

intergenerational faith formation. Envisioning pastoral care in this way enables us to identify opportunities for forming faith at every stage of life.

In offering the scenarios below, I am drawing on my time of service on the Faith Formation Committee of the CRC and church planting work in a university town. It is far from an exhaustive list, but my hope is that a few concrete illustrations might spur even more creative thinking. (Visit [www.crcna.org/ministries/initiatives/faith-formation](http://www.crcna.org/ministries/initiatives/faith-formation) for more resources.)

## Forming faith in our baptism

It is in our baptism that we receive our identity as members of Christ's

*In fact, as a table made possible by undeserved grace toward God's people, it is the ideal place for an intergenerational gathering.*

by Peter Choi  
Director of Distance Learning



body. And while baptism occurs in one moment in time, living into our baptismal identity is a lifelong journey. Since we are prone to forgetfulness, good pastoral care can stir remembrance throughout our lives.

One way might be to begin a tradition of celebrating baptism birthdays. Looking at

photos, listening to audio recordings or watching videos of the baptism service, setting out mementos of the occasion, sharing stories and testimonies that celebrate God's faithfulness—all these activities can be a way of holding fast to the promises of God in our baptism. Marking the date of our baptism provides occasion to teach our children that we celebrate not just their lives but the life God has given them, not only their achievements but what God has accomplished in them.

Another way to renew our baptismal identity is to use it as a source of comfort and a guide for counsel. "Remember who you are," we tell each other as members of Christ's body. These are comforting words in times of trouble. Because we belong to Christ, in life and in death, we can endure pain and sorrow. They are also instructive words when we are trying to discern God's will in our lives. That we belong to Christ gives us the confidence we

need in times of uncertainty. We've all been there, in conversations with a hurting or bewildered person, lost for words in the face of staggering loss or a confounding dilemma. There are probably worse places to begin in moments like that than with these words: "Remember your baptism."

### Forming faith at the table

When we gather around the table of the Lord's Supper, it is the very drama of redemption in which we participate. And so there is solemnity but also gratitude, remembrance of Christ's death as well as celebration of his resurrected life, the hope of Christ's ascension that pervades our lives as we wait for his coming again, and a foretaste of the table he will spread before us in that day.

While it points to a powerful spiritual reality, there are also astonishingly physical aspects to the Lord's Supper. It is an opportunity to see, touch, and taste as well as hear the proclamation of the gospel. It's the kind of thing at which children rightly marvel. And if we can pause from our hurried, frenetic pace of life, it can be a clarifying and evocative moment for grownups too. In fact, as a table made possible by undeserved grace toward God's people, it is the ideal place for an intergenerational gathering.

There are many ways to do this well, but gathering in a circle around the table can be especially meaningful. It puts not only the bread and the cup in full view of the church, it also helps us to see the body of Christ made up of ordinary people—dressed in their Sunday best perhaps but with their

*Acts of service provide the ideal occasion for experiences that help connect what we do in church to how we act in ordinary life. An intentionally intergenerational approach can add another layer of richness to the journey.*

foibles and failings nonetheless. We don't need to get caught up with forms, moreover, as it's just as possible to see people's faces passing you in a line. What's important is that all members of the church family, young and old alike, welcome each other in a manner that recognizes our common need for spiritual nurture.

### Forming faith as we profess our faith

There is wisdom in calling Christians as they progress in faith to affirm their baptism through a public profession of faith. For those who were baptized as infants, there is a distance of time that separates one moment from the other. For those who come to the baptismal font as youths or adults, God's action in baptism and theirs in professing faith occur in closer proximity. Regardless, there is God's initiative and our response.

Some churches prepare their youth for profession of faith by connecting them with a spiritual mentor. Others host a retreat to create space for deeper

reflection. Or a service project can provide opportunity to exercise obedience flowing from gratitude. No matter what is involved in the preparation, what's important is coupling tangible actions with the words of profession so that a pattern emerges where keeping covenant goes hand in hand with covenant renewal.

### Forming faith as we serve together

With any liturgical event or practice in the church, it is important to think about building bridges to life outside the institutional church. Acts of service provide the ideal occasion for experiences that help connect what we do in church to how we act in ordinary life. An intentionally intergenerational approach can add another layer of richness to the journey.

One particular experience stands out in my mind of leading an urban plunge team as a campus minister. As we prepared, we worked to recruit a team that was as multi-generational as possible. Surprisingly—or now as I look back, not at all surprisingly—a lot of pastoral care happened during the course of our trip. Students opened up to each other about what they had seen and were learning as they inched along in bumper-to-bumper traffic. Grad students began mentoring relationships with undergrads. Estranged friends started talking again.

There's something else etched in my memory from that action-packed week. We spent a morning at a rescue mission on skid row in Los Angeles. One afternoon we were at an afterschool tutoring program in





**Pastoral Care and the Faith Formation of All Generations**

Lincoln Heights. At the end of the week, we prepared dinner at a home for homeless families in northwest Pasadena. It was a dramatic and fitting culmination to a week of learning about justice in the city. Seeing poverty and homelessness not as an individual matter but as something that affected whole families—even parents with adorable children—touched our entire team in a powerful way. For hours we lingered after dinner, babies on laps, laughter at some of the tables, and hushed silence at others as we heard testimonies of God’s faithful provision from parents still living in dire straits. There was something transformational about seeing not only the cross-generational reach of poverty but also the vitality of intergenerational faith in families going through tough times. We saw how hardships become more bearable when generations stick together.

**Forming faith by getting together**

It can be amazing to see how much ministry happens when people simply get together. Of course, getting intergenerational gatherings going can be a bigger challenge. I heard it all the time as the pastor of an intergenerational church in a campus context. Undergrads would tell me they were intimidated by the adults in the church. Parents of young children

*There was something transformational about seeing not only the cross-generational reach of poverty but also the vitality of intergenerational faith in families going through tough times.*

would wonder out loud what in the world they had to offer young hip college students.

Then slowly, they started getting together. Having intergenerational ministry teams helped. The worship team, the welcoming team, the retreat planning team—at every opportunity, we did our best to throw a broad range of ages together into doing the work of ministry. Families began opening up their homes to undergrads who missed home cooking or had rarely experienced family meals growing up. We saw undergrads rubbing shoulders with tired parents. We witnessed the miracle of perennially busy, corporate-ladder-climbing, young adult professionals slowing down to play with messy toddlers. Many of our graduates would later remark that they were blessed with greater sobriety about discipleship after college because of the

intergenerational relationships they had formed during college. People of all ages got a glimpse of what faithfulness in a different stage of life might look like.

We got asked often whether we were a campus church or a church for families or whatever other affinity group that might come to mind. It was difficult to answer because we were simply the church together and enjoyed being together across generational lines.

**Pastoral care as intergenerational faith formation**

“Strange that we should grow older and yet grow worse, receive more from Christ and yet do less for him.” The revival preacher George Whitefield wrote these pensive words to a friend in the aftermath of the Great Awakening. What Whitefield knew from personal experience and what we can learn from examining our own lives is this crucial insight: We never outgrow the need to grow in Christ. At every stage of life, we stand in need of healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling.

And if we have eyes to see, we will realize that there are opportunities all around us to serve joyfully together in the work of intergenerational faith formation. For we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses—not only in ages past, but in the many ages present today.

# Five Characteristics for Flourishing in Ministry

by Ronald J. Nydam, Professor of Pastoral Care

**W**hat are the gifts of personality that might lend themselves to ministry? What are the characteristics that would mark the kind of person who might be interested in different aspects of Christian service? Put differently, what might be the pastoral skills given to us that the Holy Spirit could make most use of in terms of flourishing in ministry?

Life is so much about God's grace, about our accepting ourselves as who we are, and knowing this well. Knowing our strengths and our weaknesses is a large part of figuring out whether we might be fit for ministry. Here are five characteristics that are invaluable for anyone who answers a call to ministry.

## **Requirement #1: Know yourself.**

### **Characteristic: self-awareness**

An essential characteristic for flourishing in ministry is the spiritual discipline of self-awareness.

John Calvin had a comment about this. He said, "If you really want to know yourself ... you have to know God." And then he flipped it around: "If you really want to know God, if you want to understand who God is and what God is like, you've got to know yourself." To know God is to know ourselves; to know ourselves is to know God. There is an inherent connection

between going deep into ourselves and understanding who God is. *It is in the depths of our human experience—in the depths of our souls—that is where we learn about what God is really like.*

Think of self-awareness in terms of how we have been blessed—that is, what are the gifts that other people have pointed out in us? Comments such as, "I like how you present yourself. You listen well. You have a knack for talking with people. I like how you did that meditation at the campground the other night." When other people give us feedback, it is wise to take it seriously. A call to ministry is not simply something that comes from inside: in the polity of the Christian Reformed Church we are not really called to ministry until the church confirms our calling; therefore, we must pay attention to the feedback we receive from those who make up the church.


But there is the other side of the story: what about the negatives? What

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about the spiritual discipline of self-examination? How well do we know ourselves with regard to the ways we've been hurt? How much do we know about how we have packed away the injuries of life? How easily can we pinpoint the parts of our personality that rub others the wrong way? Seminarians consistently present themselves in such a positive light, and understandably, we're most often defensive about our weaknesses. It is hard to look at our hurts; it is hard to look at what is not well with us. We may struggle with anxiety and be so caught up in our own performance that we cannot have a calm heart and know the peace of God. Or perhaps our struggle is with fear: fear of failure or fear of expressing our anger about a situation. We may need to learn the true meaning of forgiveness. Are we able to be honest with ourselves?

## **Requirement #2: Hold yourself.**

### **Characteristic: differentiation**

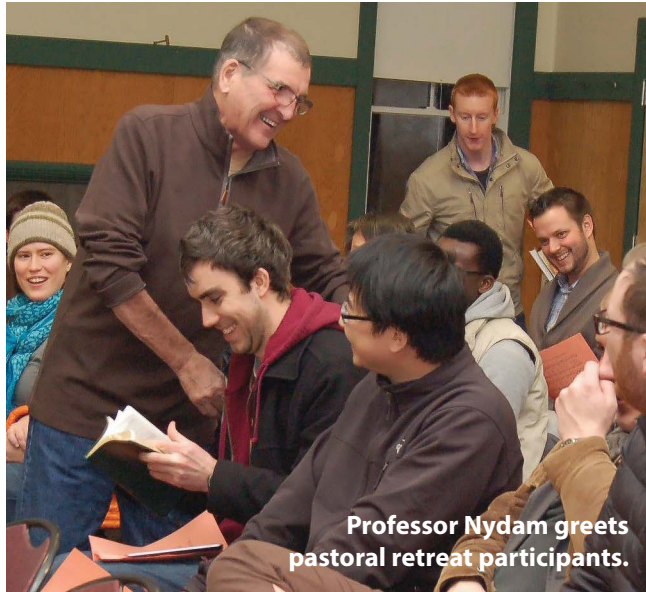
Being secured in ourselves as followers of Jesus gives us the freedom to stand alone. The Holy Spirit gives us strength to resist both the vainglory of praise and the despair of criticism. A second valuable characteristic is something called differentiation. If we are well differentiated we are going to do well in ministry; if not, we are going to get into trouble—that is how high of a value we put on this idea. *Differentiation is the ability to* 

## Five Characteristics to Flourishing in Ministry

*be yourself—to hold onto yourself—in the presence of others, especially people with whom you disagree.* Jesus tells us to love our enemies. Do we realize how hard that is? It is hard to love people who have hurt us. We really cannot do it well until we understand why they needed to injure us in some way.

In ministry we have to be able to hold onto ourselves in the presence of others. We have to be able to hear feedback without being defensive. In a counseling class that I teach, I ask each student to make a critical comment about my teaching, out loud, in front of everybody. Their mouths get dry, their throats tighten up, and it is especially difficult for students who come from cultures where it is almost insulting to say something negative to your teacher. And yet, I ask them to do it in order to become more aware of what differentiation is.

Differentiation is the ability to hold onto yourself when you are anxious and to say, “This is how I see it; this is who I am.” It is critical for ministry. What if the prophet Amos worried about what other people thought, had he not been well differentiated? Would he have the confronted Israel about her wayward ways? Would he have told Israel what to do? If ministry is a popularity contest, we are sunk. Sometimes we have got to be able to tell someone in our care, “You’re out of line. You shouldn’t be behaving this way. You’ve got to change some things in your life.” And often, that will not go well because what people think of us sometimes matters too much to us. Love your enemies, especially when they are on the church council.



Professor Nydam greets pastoral retreat participants.

### Requirement #3: Leave yourself.

#### Characteristic: empathy

Caring about people as Jesus would demands that we enter into their life experiences in some way. That is, in order to be pastoral to others, we must first leave ourselves in some way. We start here by saying what empathy is not: empathy is not sympathy. Sympathy is literally *sympathos*, “feeling with.” It often comes off as feeling sorry for someone. “I feel bad with you because of the car accident.” *I feel bad with you, but I am talking to you about “me.”* I feel bad. Sympathy is “I have feelings of sadness because of the tragedy you have gone through” or “I am joining you in being sad because I am bringing my sadness to the story so that we have it together.” Sympathy is commiserating—two people joining together in sadness. Sympathy does not have much pastoral muscle. Empathy, on the other hand, is leaving yourself. Empathy is getting into the skin of somebody else and wondering what it is like to be that person, to walk in his or her moccasins. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is saying, “I am not you. Please tell me what it is like to be you.”

Philippians 2 captures this idea so well. What did Jesus do when he came to earth? The passage uses the Greek word *kenosis*. It is to empty yourself, to give yourself away. Empathy is emptying yourself in order to enter the life of another. It is from that place where you bring people into the presence of God as the Holy Spirit leads you and works through you to understand the life of another.

Jesus emptied himself to enter our life experience—that is what God is like. Jesus entered the world, he entered the lives of

broken human beings, he literally got into our skin, and when Lazarus died, he really wept. When he looked at the city of Jerusalem, he really cried. He turned over the tables in the temple because he really was angry. Our capacity to understand the experience of the person next to us is the beginning of our ministry to that person. An important tool in pastoral ministry is such empathy—the capacity to know the heart of another person. Entering the lives of others just as Jesus did is critical to good ministry.

### Requirement #4: Deny (or forget) yourself.

#### Characteristic: unselfconscious

Consider the refreshing delight of being un-self-conscious. Being un-self-conscious means that we are so secure in who we are—someone who loves Jesus Christ and who is loved by Jesus—that there are things we do not worry about because we do not even think about them. Every minute that we are thinking about ourselves, we cannot think about our husbands or wives, we cannot think about our children, we cannot think about our parishioners, we cannot think about God. This



becomes the idolatry of self. *Well, one of the hallmarks of the Christian walk is un-self-consciousness.* Appearances are on the back burner of awareness. What we drive, what we wear, with whom we associate—all of these do not matter much because we are more concerned about the lives of others.

Jesus Christ, by the presence of his Spirit within us, gives us the capacity to be un-self-conscious. “Deny yourself, take up your cross, follow me,” do not worry about what things look like. Do we see the freedom in not being self-conscious? When we preach a sermon, can we get past our own nervousness to see the power of the gospel and forget about who we are? If we really know ourselves in Christ, we can forget about ourselves. As long as our own needs and our opinions of what matters keep popping up on the front burner, we cannot be un-self-conscious, we cannot get into the world of another person, and we cannot truly be with people as Jesus was.

#### **Requirement #5: Reform yourself.**

#### **Characteristic: Be open to change.**

A final characteristic that is essential for good ministry is being open to change. We need to be reforming ourselves! We need to always be listening for the Spirit’s leading. This discipline is sometimes called “progressive sanctification” which means that God’s Spirit keeps working on us, and we find ourselves able to change our minds, able to change our approach to people, and able to change some of our thinking because our relationship with God is a living one. In such a living relationship, there is growth and change, and much of the time, the growth and change come out of conflict. It is not our nature to sit down

*It’s not just our theological perspectives that matter, it is also the persons that we become as followers of Jesus who are gifted by His Spirit that impacts ministry work.*

in a chair and say, “Well, what should I change about myself?” Change usually happens when we are up against a wall. We have to rethink the way we have been living because we have new information; that new data may come from somebody sitting in front of us in tears. We may have brought offense to someone in ways we didn’t understand, and so we may have to take another look at the way that we are presenting ourselves and the way we are thinking about things.

We get some sense of this idea from Paul. Wasn’t Paul the one who was always saying, “Be all things to all people for Christ’s sake”? Have an open mind, not in any way that would compromise the basic truths of Scripture, but in a way that makes us wonder how we can change to be more Christ-like. Listen for the whisper of the Holy Spirit. How can we change to do a better job in ministry? How can we change so that God can make more use of us? Some of that will be easy for us, and some of it will be hard. Doing the dance of “I am who I am, but I want to be changing to be more conformed to Jesus Christ” creates a tension. We want to hold onto our identity but

there are things about us that need to change.

This idea is now part of the Calvin Seminary experience. We, too, are reforming. We have sometimes thought of seminary education for the most part as an exercise in downloading theology. When we had the five loci of systematic theology in place and we understood the historical redemptive themes in the Scriptures, and we had a working knowledge of the Bible, then we graduated. That is the old way. The new way to think about the seminary experience is as “formation for ministry,” a common phrase around CTS these days. We must not only fill our minds, we must also shape our hearts. It’s not just our theological perspectives that matter, it is also the persons that we become as followers of Jesus who are gifted by His Spirit that impacts ministry work. Our focus is more and more upon the whole person. How are we going to use our stories for ministry? We are challenging our students to think of who they are as persons in ministry. And so, the relational part of life in the body of Christ really starts to come to the front burner.

Reforming is moving away from being defensive and moving toward being more open. Paul says this to the Ephesians (4:22-24): “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” This last phrase is be a life-long goal for all of us, especially those of us in ministry—that we put on the new nature created after the likeness of God, in true righteousness and holiness in order to *be* good news and *spread* the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## The Big Picture of God's Mission

*The following article was written in conjunction with the Missional Reading of Scripture conference sponsored by Calvin Theological Seminary this past November, 2013 at which N.T. Wright was a featured guest. Audio of conference available at [www.calvinseminary.edu](http://www.calvinseminary.edu).*



N.T. Wright

**N**.T. Wright's rapier wit and deadpan demeanor make him a suitable candidate to be cast as a vicar, say, on Masterpiece Theatre. But the retired Bishop of Durham in the Church of England has a far more important role to play as he continues to mine the inexhaustible riches of the Bible and to brandish the timeless themes of God's grace and justice as gemstones for this generation.

This was the essence of the message he brought to Grand Rapids recently with his keynote addresses to a Calvin Theological Seminary-sponsored conference entitled, "A Missional Reading of Scripture. The conference attracted almost 700 attendees from throughout the North American continent and about a dozen other nations.

Wright, an Oxford-educated apologist in the tradition and spirit of C.S. Lewis, has dedicated his life to searching the scriptures and seeking to more fully grasp the character and purposes of God. After publishing more than 100 books and delivering thousands of homilies and lectures, his quest has attracted a global following of readers

and listeners whose perspectives on the Bible and the Creator of the Universe have been enlarged immeasurably.

In addition to delivering a plenary talk at the conference, Wright also gave a public lecture at Mars Hill Bible Church to a weeknight crowd of about 2,500 people who sat spellbound for an hour-long address on "The Big Picture: The New Testament and the Mission of God," and another half-hour of conversation moderated by CTS President Julius Medenblik and Mars Hill's Preaching Pastor Kent Dobson.

"In the strange mercy and providence of God, the Bible as we have it does tell a single big story," Wright declared. "Like any great epic, there are all sorts of other things going on inside the big story. Nevertheless there is a big story. And the ultimate theme of this story is the faithfulness of God."

Wright explored a number of subplots, or "layers" within the biblical story, beginning with the opening act of Creation. "In the beginning, God made the heavens and the earth," he said. "And in the end, God will remake the whole thing—a new heaven and new



**President Jul Medenblik welcomed almost 700 guests to the Missional Reading of Scripture Conference, November 2013.**



earth. In between, it's God's project to make this Creation a wonderful, flourishing place."

A second layer comes when God, who has fashioned humans in His own image, gives those image-bearers a mission—to reflect God's love into the world, and the adoration of Creation back to God. But the plot thickens when humans rebel.

"Forces of corruption and chaos and death are unleashed into the world," Wright noted. "And when humans mess up, there are thorns and thistles. Yet, what does the God of generous love do when faced with this situation? God calls one couple, Abraham and Sarah this time, and says, 'In you and your family, all the families of the earth will be blessed.' God has got a rescue operation."

Over time, the rescue plan culminates in the story of Jesus, whose intervention in human history is the ultimate expression of "the faithful generosity of the Creator God, this time wearing human flesh, living in our midst," Wright declared.




**Professor John Bolt assumes the role of a student as he takes notes during one of the plenary sessions, joined by conferees from around the world.**

"What's he come to do? Jesus has come to bring Israel's history to its climax...Israel was there for the sake of the whole human race. And now, Jesus is launching God's kingdom on earth as in heaven. The resurrection is the launching of a new Creation—this is the beginning of God's new world... This is where the whole story comes rushing together... When Jesus comes out of the tomb on Easter morning, the

new Creation has begun. That is the new massive reality. This is the thing the Bible is concentrating on.

And this is where Christ's followers receive their mission.

"At the end of John's gospel," said Wright, "the risen Jesus breathes on his disciples and he says, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. As the Father sent me, so I send you.' That means you have to go back and reread the gospels. This forms a blueprint for us as a people—to do for the world what Jesus did for Israel. Has it ever occurred to you, that's the basis of the whole mission of the church? There is no room for comfortable passengers in the kingdom of God. The challenge of Jesus is that people will follow him all the way. I know that we are all called, at some point or another, to carry a cross. The New Testament is full of the message that this is actually how the kingdom comes."

As God fulfills His promise to remake this world, Wright added, "He wants us in the present to put up signposts to that future world here and now. The garden and the city were made for one another. In Revelation 21, we see a picture of a city which is also a garden—the new Jerusalem." 



**Seminary staff and students donned orange t-shirts to stand out as they answered the "call to serve" our guests at the conference. From left to right: Karlene Werner, assistant to faculty, Denise Mokma, academic office administrative assistant, and Calvin Seminary graduate, Ferry Yang.**



## ► Missional Reading of Scripture Snapshot

The future world is framed in grace and beauty, but also justice. “We need a rediscovery of nerve to live this story in the post-modern world,” he said. “Christian conversion is not simply just a sigh of relief. We are saved in order to be part of God’s project, reflecting God’s wisdom into the world and the praises of the world back to God.”

It is at once a glorious and fearsome project, for while “He wants us to share in his glorious love, when you read the whole story, we find ourselves at Romans 8—if we suffer with him, we may be glorified with him. The world itself will have its exodus.”

In an interview, Wright spoke of his affinity for Calvin and the Reformed expression of Christianity.

“Unlike some Anglicans, I stand very happily in the Reformed tradition,” he said. “It’s a huge danger when you leave go of that theme of the faithfulness and sovereignty of God. The great thing about the Reformed tradition is their big view of God.”



**Alena DeYoung, admissions counselor, hosted our information table where we were able to promote the outstanding degree programs at Calvin Seminary.**

He praised CTS for being a vocation-shaping place which “holds up before people the larger picture of the world and the Bible,” a critical need in contemporary culture which is largely illiterate when it comes to theology and scripture.

“It’s a major worry in my culture, where teachers in primary school tell us that Jesus is only known as a swear word,” Wright lamented. “There is a very deep detachment from the central themes of the Bible. People in my

culture are addressing this on secular grounds: if you are going to understand world of art or music, you really can’t if you don’t somehow understand the biblical story. Yet, the story does remain unknown. But I take some comfort that the world Paul went out into didn’t have a Bible either. The teachers in the early church were basically teaching the sacred books. In the end, people have to be wooed into them—to discover that this story is now our story.”

—Bruce Buursma

## Walking in the Steps of the Apostle Paul

“I’m a first century guy” is Jeff Weima’s simple claim, but he’s also a 21st century scholar and professor of New Testament Studies as Calvin Theological Seminary. So when he led Calvin Seminary students and other adult learners in a Biblical study tour and credit course of Turkey and Greece in January, they got the best of both “Weima worlds.”

Weima’s passion for his seminary students is that they understand more fully the cultural, political, and religious contexts for the earliest years of

the Christian church, especially as Paul and other apostles carried the Gospel good news to the Gentiles living in what is now western Turkey and Greece. As a teacher of Greek with a keen interest in archeological studies, Weima reminded the seminarians again and again that all biblical translation of the early text involves interpretation, and interpretation must be informed by the context of the day. So the more a preacher knows

about that context in which the New Testament was written, the more he or she can explain the text and engage the listeners in its meaning.

Cities known only by name from the book of Acts or the letters to the seven churches of Revelation came alive as students walked the excavated ruins of these former—or still—thriving cities.

Students stood beneath the shadow of the Parthenon, perhaps the very place where

by Jinny DeJong  
Chief Financial and  
Operating Officer





The tour group paused at archeological ruins in Greece.

Paul addressed the Areopagus (Acts 17) and taught them about the one true God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Students sat in the theater at Ephesus (Acts 19) where a riotous crowd, infuriated with the preaching of Paul against idols, gathered in that very place, shouting for hours “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” Students hiked to the Acrocorinth on whose slopes the ancient of the city of Corinth was built, strategically located on the narrow isthmus that separates most of Greece from the Peloponnesus peninsula.

At each ancient site, Professor Weima led the group on “show and tell” walks, even a few heart-thumping hikes. Notes were taken and lots of photos recorded. The imperative was to imagine the ancient bustling city, picturing the place as well as the challenges these cultural centers posed to the earliest churches. Lectures on the bus or back at the nightly hotel site solidified the learning and kept students occupied from early morning until a late dinner—but no one complained.

But learning is more powerful when a student needs to teach

something new, so Weima shared the *bema* (speaker’s platform) with those seminarians taking the course for credit. Several weeks before departure, each was assigned a text from the book of Acts that recounted one of Paul’s “evangelism encounters” for their in-depth research. The assignment was to prepare an exegetical paper (grammatical, literary, historical and theological considerations) that reflected their earliest instruction in Reformed hermeneutics upon arrival at Calvin Seminary. One of the goals emphasized in preparing these presentations was for the students to uncover the exegetical “then and there” of a biblical text so that it can function as the authoritative

foundation for the “here and now” application of the text. How does this 1st century historical narrative speak to our 21st century churches today?

The teaching sessions were presented at an archeological site in the city where their particular Pauline story took place. For example, the paper on Acts 17:16-34 was prepared by Michael Nanninga and then presented to the rest of the tour group on a clear Sunday morning, overlooking the *agora*, now the excavated and reconstructed commercial district of ancient Athens.

The faith of 1st century Christians was counter-cultural to their times, and Paul pastored them with truth and love so that these fledgling Christians would mature, growing up in Christ, bearing fruit in every good work. It was not lost on these traveling seminarians that our own 21st century faith also needs to be counter-cultural and their calling is to be like Paul, equipping and encouraging the flocks God entrusts to them.

There is no doubt they will draw deeply from this once-in-a-lifetime trip led by that 1st century guy from Calvin Seminary.



Michael Nanning led a discussion in Athens.





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