



Volume 42 ♦ Issue 3 ♦ 17 October 2007

- **Duane Kelderman discusses Fredy Chen**
- **More on the Candidacy Committee Meeting**
 - Thoughts on communication breakdowns
 - A response from Duane Kelderman
 - First year student perspectives on psychological screenings
- **Group Life: The Ancient Future Community**
A review of the Willow Creek Conference
- **Are We For the Professors?**
- **Alcohol: Used, Abused, and Confused**
Previewing the upcoming town hall meeting
- **Prayer and Brokenness**
Confronting the recent run of tragedies in our community
- **902...**
...One oh-so-intriguing new addition to the curriculum
- **Plus a poetry, a new SemEye, and more!**

Duane Kelderman Discusses Fredy Chen

by Michael De Witt, Editor-in-Chief

Over the last two weeks Calvin Seminary has been rocked by the confusing events surrounding the arrest of one of its students. As rumors swirl through the hallways and student center hard facts are quickly mixed and molded into tales of fiction. *Kerux* invited Dr. Duane Kelderman, Vice President for Administration at CTS, to respond via an email interview.

Kerux: Good afternoon, Dr. Kelderman. The recent events involving seminary student Fredy Chen have prompted a lot of curiosity and a few concerns within the CTS community. As often happens in the case of an information vacuum there has been a lot of talk, much of it contradictory, among students about what exactly happened over on Batchawana. Would you like to take this opportunity to expand at all on the seminary's email of last week or to set the record straight on what, exactly, occurred on October 2 and 3?

Kelderman: Over the weekend of September 29-30, we as seminary leaders learned that Fredy Chen had made some statements that raised concerns for Fredy's own safety and the safety of others. Over the course of several days, seminary officials and other professionals had conversations with Fredy that led to the confiscation of an unregistered firearm and illegal drugs. The police presence at Batchawana on October 2 was to confiscate the gun. The police presence On October 3 was to bring Fredy into protective custody where he remained until October 16 when Fredy was transferred to the custody of the Grand Rapids Police Department for alleged violations of Michigan state law.

Kerux: The Calvin College Chimes has reported that the search of Mr. Chen's residence was initiated after a student employee tipped the seminary off, a claim that some dispute. Can you clarify what specifically prompted to police to visit the apartment in the first place?

Kelderman: The Chimes report was quoting a Grand Rapids Press account that was incorrect. We were not tipped off by a student employee or by any student. As stated above, we as seminary leaders learned that Fredy Chen had made some statements that raised concerns for Fredy's own safety and the safety of others. I can't be any more specific about the context in which Fredy made these statements and the way we learned of them.

Kerux: Mr. Chen is reportedly still in protective custody, both "for the student's and the community's safety." Meanwhile he has been banned from the campus indefinitely. Is there hope for Mr. Chen to return to CTS down the road? If so, and especially in light of recent events at places like Virginia Tech, what kind of requirements/safeguards might be

put in place to protect all parties involved? Is there any precedent to this situation in the seminary's history?

Kelderman: There is no precedent for this in CTS history. At this point Fredy has been suspended but not expelled from CTS. But I think it's safe to say that Fredy will not be a student at CTS in the future. The Virginia Tech killings are the immediate national context in which we have had to make dozens of decisions for the past two weeks. The Cleveland school gunfire and the undisclosed murder at Eastern Michigan University are additional examples of the need for the seminary to take very seriously any potential threat to the safety of students and the broader community. For the most part we have not had to choose between helping Fredy and protecting the campus and broader community. We have done both. But we have clearly understood that our first responsibility is to ensure the safety of the campus and broader community.

Kerux: Are these events a sign that the seminary's student screening policies work? Will anything be changed as a result of this case?

Kelderman: To date our current policies have served us well in dealing with this problem. Incidents of this magnitude automatically lead to a review of policies and practices to incorporate any additional things we have learned. One of the things with which we have been particularly pleased is the excellent cooperation between the college and seminary in dealing with this matter and the excellent service of Campus Safety.

Kerux: Cases like this have a tendency to attract a certain degree of public scrutiny. There is a lot of potential here for a juicy story with an intriguing cast of characters on the local news: The troubled youth, the staid religious institution, police interventions, etc. Throughout everything, however, the seminary has remained very tight-lipped about this matter, both with the external media and with its own students. How much of this is for Mr. Chen's protection and how much is for the seminary's? When will more information be available?

Kelderman: Every night during the week of October 1 to 5 I went home and said to my wife Jeannette, "The price of liberty is very high. It's worth it, but it's very high." I was referring to all the very important protections that citizens in this nation have. Privacy protections. Student confidentiality protections. Protections from illegal searches and seizures. To whatever extent we've been "tight-lipped," we haven't chosen that strategy as much as we have been constrained by so many rights and protections that Fredy and every other CTS student have. These rights are precious and we are grateful to live in a nation that offers its citizens these rights.

The only reason we've been able to say as much as we have said is that these rights are not absolute but exist in tension with the safety rights of the public. As a seminary, we only have interest in giving additional information if it serves to increase public safety. Hence our campus wide notification this week (Oct. 16) of Fredy's transfer to the custody of the Grand Rapids Police Department. We can't predict what additional information, if any, will be forthcoming. But we will do whatever is necessary

and possible to protect the campus and broader community.

Kerux: Is Calvin Theological Seminary in regular contact with Mr. Chen at this time? Is there any way for students and friends to get in touch with him?

Kelderman: We are in regular contact with Fredy through various parties who are deeply committed to Fredy's healing. It would not be appropriate or wise for students to be in touch with Fredy.

Kerux: How can members of the CTS community support Mr. Chen during this period?

Kelderman: We have communicated to Fredy that CTS is deeply grieved by all that has happened and that CTS is praying for Fredy's safety and healing. Most students did not know Fredy. He had only been with us for a month. For some of the students who were getting to know Fredy, this has been a traumatic experience. Fredy knows all of this. He knows that people at CTS deeply care for him, even if they don't know him! The best way for the CTS community to support Fredy is to care for him, to grieve this whole sad episode, and to pray for Fredy.

Kerux: Thanks again for your time and good luck dealing with this difficult situation in the coming weeks and months.

Communication Breakdown

by Nate Van Denend, Contributing Editor

This article is the first of a series of pieces meant to continue the conversation that began on the 13th of September regarding the candidacy process. While confidential matters should remain confidential, it is my estimation that there are several issues common to many students regarding the candidacy process. This article is written with respect to these common concerns. Let it also be said that this conversation is not a conversation among equals. We, as students, are in submission to this institution, trusting that it has the best interest of the church in mind. We are thankful for the committee's decision to be open and to hear our input into this process as students.

It is appropriate to begin by looking more carefully at the discussion during the September 13th meeting. It is my contention, and the contention of several students I spoke with after the meeting, that the committee and student body were failing to communicate effectively with one another. This failure to communicate effectively occurred not only at the town hall meeting but also in other conversations with the committee.

First, there was the question about the letters which students receive on an annual basis regarding their candidacy status. The questioner wanted the annual letters to read more like progress reports, stating what had been completed, what the student was intending to complete and what still needed to be completed. This was taken to mean that the letters should be more encouraging and perhaps less blunt. That was not, however, the point of the question at all, (I asked). Here we witnessed a breakdown in communication regarding the very means of communication!

The second issue of miscommunication is the technical definition of the term "recommend." In colloquial usage the term is weak. For example, dentists recommend Colgate toothpaste, 4 out of 5 doctors recommend Bayer Aspirin, and the psychologist recommends CPE. In each case the word used is the same, yet in the context of the psychological evaluation the meaning is much stronger. Failure to fulfill a "recommendation," to use the language of my candidacy letter, may be "an impediment" to the candidacy process. Hardly the stuff of a health-and-beauty guideline.

Instead, as laid out on the 13th of September, a refusal to follow a recommendation will be taken "as data" by the candidacy committee. In short, the use of the term recommend is the cause of some confusion. To this end, I recommend (in the colloquial sense) that the committee adopt the term "requirement" instead. There are several reasons for this: We live in an academic institution where fulfilling requirements is part of the air we breathe. The term requirement connotes the seriousness that the committee considers these psych report recommendations to have. The term requirement would also shift the dialogue in

the direction the committee intends, namely toward self reflection. While the term requirement communicates the seriousness with which the psychologist's report is taken, it also does not render its content absolute. Indeed, all of us are familiar with having requirements waived under extraordinary circumstances.

The third issue ties directly into this idea that a refusal to follow a recommendation will be taken "as data." What does "as data" mean? Well, according to the *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*... oops, there is no entry for the term "data"...(although our example from 901 has to do with a client expressing erotic love for a counselor---not exactly what is going on here). I am not sure what the statement "a refusal to follow a recommendation will be taken 'as data'" means to the speaker. To many students, however, the phrase is disconcerting. It leads the student to suspect that their thoughts, opinions, arguments and discussions of a given matter will not be understood as the student expects them to be understood. In fact, it appears that their words will be analyzed on two levels. On one level they will be taken on their own merit. On the other they will be understood psychologically, "as data." This second level is completely mysterious and nebulous to the average student. Arguments, discussions, thoughts, opinions, all these are fair game and familiar territory for most of us. However, being evaluated on this "as data" level is completely foreign. The student wonders, "can I be angry or visibly upset... should I show any emotion or none at all... can I talk about this...with whom...what is my recourse...perhaps for fear of being psychologized and placed in a box I should just remain silent..." And silence is what the committee gets. No one wants to have what they say about something as significant as the results of a psychological evaluation taken "as data" in any sense of the term.

With these illustrations of miscommunication in hand, we continue the conversational process in the hope of clearing up some contradictory understandings. I propose that we think as a community about the role of psychology in relation to the many spiritual, academic and moral issues in the candidacy process, especially as it seems that much of the miscommunication at CTS these days revolves around our psychological evaluations and recommendations. Meanwhile, *Kerux* welcomes the reflections of both the candidacy committee and students on the candidacy process (letters@kerux.org).

Addressing Student Concerns

A letter of response from Candidacy Committee Chair Duane Kelderman

Nathaniel,

Thanks for your Kerux article in which you point out some of the areas where we need improved communication between the Candidacy Committee and students. I'd like to respond to each of the areas of miscommunication you mention. I hope my responses will be encouraging.

Regarding the need for clearer and more accurate letters from the Candidacy Committee, I think the new process we have in place will significantly address the concerns raised by the particular speaker you cite and many others. In the new process the FFM leader will work closely with the Candidacy Committee in composing this letter and will have the most accurate and up to date information on the student's progress. We think this closer connection between the FFM leader and the Candidacy Committee will be a great improvement and will provide the kind of progress report that students seek.

Regarding the confusion created by the Candidacy Committee's use of the word "recommend" when, for all practical purposes, it means "require," I think you're right that we have to take a hard look at this as a committee. We have explained why we use "recommend" but that explanation isn't carrying the day. If it walks like a duck, sounds like a duck, smells like a duck, quacks like a duck, maybe we need to call it a duck, er, a requirement. I pledge to take this up with the Candidacy Committee. I can't promise what the committee will do, but we gotta deal with the duck.

Regarding the "as data" comment, I'm not sure what comment from the meeting you're referring to, so it makes it a bit difficult for me to respond. Obviously it struck a chord with you and presumably others. Let me try to explain how we might use the term in candidacy committee discussions (and what I think Professor Nydam means by the term as he uses it in pastoral care courses). When a psych eval recommends a particular course of action for a student, and the student is highly defensive and resistant, that defensiveness and resistance is itself important information (data) that we as a Candidacy Committee invariably take into account as we're trying to understand the whole situation. Most students are genuinely open to growth and are more than willing to give the psych eval "the benefit of the doubt" because they want to learn as much as possible from it.

Maybe a playful example from another area of ministry will help clarify what we mean by "data." In a few short years, seminarians will stand as pastors at the door of the church after the worship service, shaking hands with people who just heard your sermon. Once every few years, when you least expect it, some congregant will come out of nowhere, do

everything short of grab you by the neck, and accuse you of all kinds of terrible things that you said your sermon. The congregant's blood will be boiling and you will be the direct object of his wrath, all for a sermon you didn't even preach! You will have no idea where the congregant is coming from or what he is talking about!

When this happens in the first years of your ministry you will go home and writhe in pain. You will second guess yourself. You will doubt your calling. That congregant's comments will devastate you. But as the years pass, you will realize that such people are saying more about themselves than about you and your sermon. Their blood pressure and sharp tongue is "data." It won't make you care for them any less. And it will still hurt. But you'll be able to enjoy the rest of the day and sleep that night because you will learn that any strong reaction (actually, positive or negative) is usually "data" about the person doing the reacting more than it is data about you.

I'm sorry if the person who used the phrase "as data" was unclear or said it in a way that was unhelpful. But I think the idea that strong reactions usually say more about the reactor than the reactee (is that a word?) is one with which we'd all agree.

I can't tell you how helpful this ongoing dialogue between students and Candidacy Committee is. I'm eager to take this "recommendation" terminology matter to the committee. I'll keep you posted.

Duane Kelderman

Wrestling With Self

First year student reflections on psychological screening

by Rodolfo Galindo, Contributing Editor

As a first year student I have loved my experience at Calvin Seminary so far. The professors are knowledgeable and the environment is generally a culture of spiritual growth. There have been moments of silence where I feel the presence and hear the whisper of God. Yet, from several talks I have had with first, second and third years, there is one question that stirs within us all that causes us to question what we think or feel about anything at all.

As first year students we all take a battery of psychological assessment tests and then schedule two sessions with a psychological counselor. After the initial barrage of questions we come to our final session with our counselor, where we confront the already and the not yet within ourselves. We have our faults highlighted, and certain things we have always considered to be positive character traits are identified as either too positive, or else as a positive that should be more negative. We are told to lessen this character trait because it is too strong or to strengthen that one because it is too weak.

In the aftermath of serving as a psychological punching bag, we are expected to receive our assessments with humility and carry out their accompanying recommendations.

I believe that everyone can benefit from group counseling or clinical pastoral education and that it would be a great addition to the Ministry Formation program if one or the other were simply made mandatory. My concern is not with the recommendations themselves but with the process of wrestling with what the psychological evaluation portrays about ourselves as individuals who identify with Christ and as community members of the body of Christ.

I spoke with students in their first, second, and third years, and the frustration is similar, the tension palpable. Who am I in Christ as both a *psychological* and a *spiritual* being? What part do I play in the community of believers? The psychological evaluation says we are one way, but our family, friends and peers tell us we are something else, and all the while the Holy Spirit is tugging at our hearts, pulling us onward towards a life of ministry. We meet with the counselor once and we take the test once and on the second session they seem to tell us that in the brief period that they have known us they have seen us for who we truly are. They know you far better than yourself or your friends, family, and peers.

There is a small assumption that if you disagree with some part of the assessment you are simply naive or in denial. At what point, though, do we say that we believe in a sovereign

God, being created in His image, and although depraved with sin in some sense still who God has disposed us to be? This is no mere exercise in systematic or practical theology, but an inseparable, intimate theology of relationship and faith.

In class we often struggle with theological concepts that are objective and highly disengaged from our immediate self. We listen to lectures on the differences between *infra* and *supra-lapsarianism*. The psychological assessment hits close to home as it surveys us with a superficial glance at some of our most intimate areas, appraising them as if they were just something in the way of our preparation for ministry. We are reduced to a number, just another such-and-such label scribbled on a psychologist's notepad.

I know I am not the only one struggling with this. How have *you* dealt with this psychological-spiritual tension? Let us know: letters@kerux.org.

Group Life: The Ancient Future Community

A report from the Willow Creek conference

by Allen Kleine Deters, Guest Writer



Ancient Future is quickly becoming *the* hip new Christian catch phrase, especially in the emergent church community. Robert Webber, of “Ancient Future” writing fame, and other modern pastors and authors are addressing the need to strip away all that hinders in the church. They seek a return to the church’s earlier Acts 2 roots, as well as its theology of community, in order to foster an environment of spiritual formation reminiscent of Prof. Rylaarsdam’s IDIS 901 course.

Being somewhat sympathetic to these emergent ideas, I was immediately drawn to a Willow Creek advertisement for their Ancient Future Community small group conference, September 27-29 at their Chicago campus. I serve as the Director of Adult Ministries in a local CRC and am in charge of small groups, so I am always looking for good leadership training, and the student fee was a minimal \$135. Thankfully, my church was willing to pay for registration and lodging for me and John, one of the small group leaders that I coach.

Scot McNight, Professor of Biblical Studies at North Park University in Chicago, author, and blogger (jesuscreed.com), kicked off the three-day event with a powerful message of encouragement and a challenge to develop table fellowship as the hope of the church, and ultimately the world. “Table fellowship is more than a technique,” Scot acknowledged, “more than a holy huddle of Christians gathering together to talk about their favorite sports teams or their favorite Bible passages.” He continued, “If we are going to be like Jesus at the table, we’re going to have to open up the windows; hear the sounds of the neighborhood and look out and see them, and reach into those neighborhoods.” Doing

this requires us to understand how to move strangers and people who are not normally part of our circles into our group, because that's what Jesus did. As such, small groups become the heart and life of the church's mission to the world, and in particular our neighborhoods.

Inspired by Scot and the WCA team, the breakout sessions took the overarching theme of ancient future community down to something more tangible and practical for leadership. No one was pushing a model that had to be adopted in order to grow your groups. Rather, there was a common philosophy floating around the rooms: refocus and make sure key biblical elements are in place, then let the groups develop more organically to fit their context. Having been a developer, leader and participant in small groups for the past twenty years, I was thrilled to hear something that echoed what had been in my heart for a long time.

I used to think that small groups were about developing relationships, but over the years my heart has yearned for a better framework. I believed we were barking up the wrong tree by implementing model after model. Ministry is about transforming lives. The conference affirmed my suspicions and pointed toward spiritual formation as the goal of any small group. Relationships are simply one part of the process of developing true community in order to bring about deeper transformation. Is it anything new? Not really. But it is very worth revisiting and being reminded of time and again.

Refrigerator rights are a gauge to help determine the depth of relationships within our communities. This was Will Miller's premise as he brought his humorous style to the stage. A professional comedian (he hosted Nick-at-Nite), psychologist, pastor, author, and currently campus chaplain at Purdue University, Will confronted us with ourselves and the nature of our culture in regard to the lack of depth in our relationships. "Belonging is the crisis of the American heart," he stated. "There has never been a time when the work of the Church, the body of Christ, especially in small groups, has more sociological, psychological, social science support and urgency than now." People in our culture, according to Will's research, are more isolated than ever. Community is crumbling to a point where few people, if any, have the right to snoop through our refrigerators at any time or help themselves to an Advil from our medicine cabinets.

The conference was refreshing and challenging as we rethought small groups in our church's context. The pendulum is swinging back towards simplicity and truth. I was impressed to hear a mega-church like Willow Creek stand up and say, "I think we had it wrong – at least partially anyway." They didn't push models for ministry, just a biblical philosophy from which to develop healthy small groups, growing toward authentic community, and ultimately creating a genuine culture wherein spiritual formation can take place and even thrive. For that I'm truly thankful and encouraged for the future of small groups in local congregations.

I brought a lot of wonderful, tangible ideas back to my church that I pray will help continue the development of healthy small groups and transformed lives.

In the aftermath of the conference I got to thinking about the place of small group ministry here at CTS and within its curriculum. I hope, as students heading into ministry, that we seriously consider the importance of small groups. It's one of those put-your-money-where-your-mouth-is opportunities to develop as leaders. If small groups are to be the heart of the church's ministry to reach its neighborhood, shouldn't we be part of that heart even now? I tend to believe that if we we're not doing it now because we're "too busy" we're probably not going to do it once we get into our churches. In fact, I guarantee you that if you're too busy now, you'll still be "too busy" preaching and pastoring to do it down the road.

And what about the curriculum at CTS? I don't believe we have any courses specific to small group development, coaching, and leadership. Of course we do touch on models and theory in some practical theology courses, but only enough to graze the surface of the issue. FFM groups, on the other hand, get us together consistently, but are fairly prescribed. A course focusing on group dynamics, and specifically leadership in small groups, could go a long way towards developing us as viable proponents of this ministry in our congregations. I remember taking such a course back in the early '80s at Reformed Bible College, now Kuyper College. That course has been one of the most influential for me in the ministries I have been involved in ever since. Hmmmm, something to think about.

I'm sold on small groups! Just a heads up professors, I'll be gone for three days at the end of September '08. Maybe you should join me.

Are We For the Professors?

by Anne Zaki, Guest Writer

Before coming to CTS, between kindergarten and graduate school, I spent nearly 22 years of my life in educational institutions of some sort. Some were Christian, others Muslim; some were private, others international. Yet during all those years never once did I hear this phrase: “This professor is *for the students*.” I think that we can all understand that phrase to mean that such a professor wants their students to do well, in and out of class. It means that such a professor cares for their students and desires to see them grow and mature. It means that such a professor will do whatever it takes to ensure the success and effectiveness of their students during their seminary training and in the years to come. Such a professor is truly *for the students*.

This little phrase led me to ask the complementary question “Are we, the students, *for the professors*?” Do we genuinely care for our professors and deeply desire their well-being, in and out of class?

We too rarely think about the fact that most of our professors were pastors in congregations here or overseas before coming to teach at the seminary. When we stop to think about the life they left behind, we’ll realize that seminary must, at times, be a very lonely place for our professors. I know that we talk a lot in our classes about the difficulties and challenges that await us out in the real world of ministry. But let’s also keep in perspective the many wonderful ways congregations offer their pastors love and support, things we have to look forward to and that our professors sorely miss. Things like...

Being invited into someone’s life and looked to for guidance;

Hearing words of appreciation for a good sermon or pastoral visit;

Homes opened up to offer hospitality and rest;

Hopes and prayers for us to do well in every area of ministry, even if it’s for the selfish ambition of showing them off as “their pastors” to their visiting friends and neighbors;

Receiving “Get Well” cards when we are sick, or “Well Done!” when our child achieves, or “We’re Praying” when we seem tired and overworked.

Such loving and thoughtful congregations are real, and they are waiting for us out there. Those congregations *were* real for our professors, but when they signed their contract at CTS those congregations were not replaced by the students. Seminary can be a very lonely place for our professors.

The question now is whether we *can* be that kind of congregation for our professors. Can we care deeply about them and selflessly desire that they do well, whether we benefit from it or not? Can we be sensitive to what's going on in their personal lives, sharing their joys and struggles?

Congregations are good at making the connection between the well-being and effectiveness of their pastor and the well-being and effectiveness of their church and its ministries. Can we make a similar connection between the well-being and effectiveness of our professors and that of the seminary and its ministry? As far as I know, nowhere in the student handbook does it say that it is inappropriate for students to care for their professors through caring notes during life's rough patches, or appreciative emails after a good lecture, or even by inviting them over for a meal. I know that some of you are already uncomfortable simply reading these suggestions, but please let me remind you once again that our professors are also pastors sharing in the pastoral ministries of this seminary community/congregation, and a healthy congregation should be perfectly comfortable doing such things for its pastors!

But even for those of you who don't really want that kind of relationship with your professors, or assume that your professors are not interested in such a relationship anyway, you are still not off the hook. The seminary has actually come up with a wonderful (and comfortable) way to encourage students to be *for* the professors: "Evaluation Forms." I am a firm believer in filling out those forms, not just by marking the tiny circles indicating the "grade" you give to the professor, but by actually taking the time to put down a few thoughtful words of gratitude for what went well and a careful analysis of areas for improvement. So next time that email comes around from Professor DeMoor urging us to fill out more evaluation forms, please show the professors that *you are for them* by taking the time to do it. Meanwhile, I urge you to be creative in helping them fulfill their calling to be pastors by being a caring congregation.

Alcohol: Used, Abused, and Confused

A preview of the upcoming town hall meeting

by Walter Miedema, Contributing Editor

On November 1st Student Senate has planned a town hall meeting to raise and discuss the issue of how we, as members of the Calvin Seminary community, use alcohol. This is a touchy issue and one that must be dealt with in a sensitive manner. As a denomination we are not legalistic about alcohol because we see it as a gift of God to be used and enjoyed in a responsible manner. Student Senate has scheduled this town hall meeting to spur discussion in our community because they feel it is a community issue.

This issue is also being addressed indirectly as a response to a small number of anonymous and individual complaints received by Dean of Students Richard Sytsma during the spring quarter of last year. None of these complaints were aimed at any particular student, and from my understanding were simply a concern regarding the amount of socializing by seminarians in situations where alcohol was present. These complaints were shared with the Student Senate and it was decided that as a community issue they ought to be the ones to address it.

Student Senate has chosen this open discussion method to address the issue because they wish to be holistic in their approach. The town hall meeting is seen as a beginning step in addressing the issue. They seek to create a forum for discussion related to this issue, a means for allowing student input into administrative policies that relate to the issue, and to facilitate the creation of accountability groups for students.

Central to the difficulty of addressing alcohol use is the fact that we, as individuals, have had a wide variety of life experiences that relate to it, whether directly or indirectly. Some of us may abstain entirely because we have seen the pain that alcohol has caused in our lives or our friend's or neighbor's. Others may see no reason to abstain because the alcohol in itself is not evil. Because of these widely different opinions some may claim that a line has been crossed in a certain situation where others see no such problem. There is also the matter that this is a community that trains leaders for the Church.



Cultural sensitivity has a small part to play in this debate as well. When I interviewed Dean Sytsma in relation to this article he explained “Most of our international students come from backgrounds where they don't drink. They've taken over that attitude toward alcohol consumption from the missionaries who went to these countries during the 19th century with an idea that it's not good to drink. They just continue that. To the best of my knowledge most of them don't drink here either.” While this may be true, Dean Systma told me that only one of the complaints he received last year was from an international student. “The subject comes up very little on the part of international students. As far as if that's because it's not a problem at all or if it's because they just don't talk about it, my sense is that it's not a big issue for them.” Said Sytsma, “Even those [international students] who come from places where they feel it's not right to drink, they come knowing our stance on it and they accept that and they're OK with that.”

The issue of alcohol has not been a concern in recent memory. When asked, John Lee, student senate president, said that the issue had not been addressed in his four years on senate but that “an awareness of our need to address it has been building over time.” Dean Sytsma confirmed this. “I've been here seven years now and this is my eighth and I haven't heard any complaints at all through those years, except for last spring.”

In actual fact this issue is one small, if touchy, component of how we as seminary students and faculty live together in a Christian community. Our willingness to give and receive loving, constructive criticism about our lifestyles and behaviors is something we should be able to do freely. Our concerns should not be legalistic ones but should be spoken out of concern for one another. This is also part of why the student senate saw fit to address this issue.

In my conversation with Rev. Systma he brought up Matthew 18 more than once. Verses 15 through 18 address how we are to deal with brothers and sisters who we believe are acting in ways that we feel are unhealthy. We need to address them directly first. A large portion of grace is needed to be both the giver and the receiver of this type of action. It is an action that we as individuals in this seminary community should exemplify. There are many texts in the Bible that relate to alcohol that are important to the discussion but they must all be framed in the context of loving concern for our neighbor.

Student Senate's prayer is that the town hall meeting on November 1 will be a safe yet difficult place for our community to begin to listen to each other on this issue. Let us all pray with them so that we may be better able to live together as a community at Calvin Seminary.

As always, responses and further discussion of the question of alcohol use among seminary faculty and students may be sent to letters@kerux.org.

Prayer and Brokenness

Confronting the recent run of tragedies in our community

by KC Vande Streek, Contributing Editor

Praying for our brothers and sisters at the Seminary is something that we should be doing continually. In light of a string of recent incidents, however, this duty seems especially important right now.

For those unaware of all that has gone on in the past few weeks, there have been a number of laptops stolen from the library, an apartment on campus broken into and property stolen, a number of serious illnesses, and one student was seriously assaulted. There have been two miscarriages. And, most recently, we heard about the situation with Fredy Chen. All within our tiny CTS community.

The Scriptures tell us that this world is broken, that pain, sadness and sin are prevalent throughout the earth. The Scriptures also indicate that our fight is not with this world, but with the powers and principalities of darkness. So, in response to the aforementioned list of pain and brokenness, the list which points to our current fight with those powers and principalities of darkness, let us do what the Scriptures say, bearing one another's burdens. Let us intercede for one another to God, just as the Spirit intercedes and speaks for us all.

As an example, here is a copy of an exceptional prayer that was spoken in chapel on Friday, (used with permission, student's name withheld by request). Please pray along, for our world and our community here at the Seminary. And though this prayer ends in "Amen," let's remember to pray without ceasing.

Jesus,

Send your spirit to refine our prayers. Cover us with your grace as we try to search your ways.

For all the good that we see, for all the unity and diversity, we praise you. For all the bad...well...we don't know.

Lord, we look to the world and see unrest at every turn. The most visible gods of today seem to be war and division. And the ravages of war seem only to bow to the almighty dollar, euro and won. Where are you, oh God? Why don't you step into this mess? Our theodicies seem mere vanity against the backdrop of global poverty, oppression and hate.

We hear of corrupt leaders, of distortion, of lies and of utter disdain for human life.

How did your good creation fall so far?

And Lord, this evil is not a new thing. Even as leaders around the world candy coat their corruption, we know that we are happy to candy coat our sin as well.

We celebrate Columbus Day this week. All of our lives are changed by Columbus' journey. And so much good has been shown in this continent, in this country, even. For this reason, we mark days of Thanksgiving.

But God, we know that many new opportunities for evil came from Columbus' so-called discovery. There is too much in our history for which we cannot give thanks. Native people, whole families, whole towns, whole nations were decimated, destroyed or, at best, displaced in this country alone. People were torn from their culture, their people and their place...all in the familiar name of progress. And we know that this is only one small part of your world and one short part of the human story.

God, our human inclination to sin is too much. Your apparent silence is deafening in our ears. Where are you?

God, bring your kingdom quickly! We long for your return. This world is too much for us. The weight of sin and death cuts us down. Our voices grow dry and short. Our eyes are now raw. Our alleluia's seem mere wishful thinking.

We are not you, O God. And your ways are not our ways. Give us hearts to feel the pain of this world. Take away the callus formed by video games and nightly news. Teach us to weep again. Teach us to cry out defiant alleluias though the enemy seem so strong. Guide us, oh Lord, almighty sustainer of this world.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

902...

...One oh-so-intriguing new addition to the curriculum!

by Meg Jenista, Contributing Editor

As an arguably jaded fourth-year M.Div student, I've learned not to expect too much from the first day of classes. The syllabus may clue me in to how stressful the quarter ahead will be. The introduction of classmates may clue me in to stories from a summer spent in far-away lands, like Canada. But I expect little by way of God's voice speaking to me and the tears that sprang to my eyes on the first day of 902 – Theological Education as Formation for Ministry certainly caught me by surprise.

This tiny, one hour class is new on the course list this fall. Its catalog description goes a little something like this: "A continuation of 901 as taken by students in their final year of residence." Equipped only with this stunningly vague class description and the Empire-State-Building-high expectations buttressed by students' positive experience in Dr. David Rylaarsdam's 901 – Theological Education as Formation for Ministry class, Dr. John Witvliet set about the task of preparing and organizing 902.

902 is the bookend course to Rylaarsdam's 901. As such, it carries the same intentions, namely to learn to speak intentionally about spiritual formation in the context of classroom learning and to learn how to integrate the spiritual with the theological. Last spring, when Dr. Witvliet was assigned the task of teaching 902, he was excited to draw upon recent conversations about seminary pedagogy, within the CTS community as well as in collaboration with other practitioners of theological education. The result of this four-year seminary pedagogy research is a book, due to be published next year.

Always an economist and artist with words, Dr. Witvliet summarized the class in one word: Gratitude. He qualified the word by saying, "occasionally, gratitude is dismissed as mere sentimentality but the Apostle Paul's command to 'give thanks,' may be the most muscular, prophetic and countercultural command in Scripture." With a rueful look at the cane in his hand, he continued, "As with any muscle, gratitude has got to be exercised."

Certainly, what I heard in that classroom on the first day of the course was gratitude. Listening to my cohorts, I heard a gratitude that surprised us all, I think. We learned in that first hour together that we are not the same people we were two or three years ago. Somewhere in the middle of paradigms, patristics and practical theology, God has shown up. We've heard gentle whispers. We've been knocked over the head. God is crazy enough to use theological tomes. God is crazier still to use our professors.

Together in 902, we have reviewed a seminary career's worth of class notes. We've thought about the big picture and we've even prepared to prepare for our Oral

Comprehensive exams. On Tuesdays at 9 am and Fridays at 10:40, students in their last year of the M.Div program invite the voice of every faculty member to participate in our gratitude. However, lest our gratitude slip into “mere sentimentality,” we also honestly name and confront the gaps in our education. Dr. Witvliet is quick to point out, however, that “Even Prof. Nydam would appreciate the way we do it.”

Of course, 902 is, on a practical level, more than the mere exercise of the gratitude muscle. It is also preparation for the oral comprehensive exams looming before students in their final year of seminary. So I had to ask, “What are the most common mistakes students make in their oral comps?”

“Not seeing (oral comps) as one of the best learning opportunities for ministry. They aren’t just a bar to be crossed but they are preparation for the whole picture.” It’s the chance we get to make the whole of our seminary education greater than the sum of all its parts. Practically speaking, though, Dr. Witvliet encourages students to internalize their learning rather than memorizing facts and also not to miss the forest for the details on the leaves.

What has been the greatest surprise for Dr. Witvliet in teaching this class? Without missing a beat, he answered, “How fun it is. I ask questions and I have no idea where they may lead. We have great conversations and I certainly learn more than I teach.”

Dinosaurs

by Walter Miedema, Staff Poet

The dinosaurs
 have not departed.
Undead
 they masquerade
as overpasses,
Sweeping
 sauropodian
 curves
in reptilian highways,
Silently
 snaking their
 way
under our wheels and feet.

They survive
 on hours
and minutes,
 On the transient vegetation
of our travels,
as we unwittingly
 feed them
the gaps and commutes
 of our lives.

Women's Work

SemEye for the Evangelical Guy lets the LA Times do the talking

by No One At All, Contributing Editor

Dear readers, it has finally happened. A prospect for ministry preparation has come along so brilliant that I am left speechless. Really, it has nothing to do with laziness...

Let me thank my dear friend and *Kerux* contributing editor Meg Jenista for turning us here at *SemEye* on to this one.

The topic? The role of the Christian wife. The thesis? "We must fit into this role. Its so much more important than our own personal happiness." Read on and (ahem) enjoy:

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-homemaking11oct11,0,900610.story?page=2>



Each week SemEye strives to bring you the best of the worst in Christian merchandising. Do you have an idea for SemEye? Email us at letters@kerux.org.