

## Report of New Brunswick Theological Seminary

According to well-regarded leadership expert Bob Buford,<sup>1</sup> the states of success and significance are very similar when one considers what is required to achieve either. Buford astutely asserts that when an individual or organization seeks success, the focus is typically on using one's gifts and abilities to obtain material gain or rewards, such as wealth and notoriety. Conversely, when an individual or organization seeks significance, the focus centers more so on using the available gifts and abilities to serve, or in the case of New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS), in the service of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is this intentional and strategic focus on significance that propels us at NBTS to develop leaders with a heart for God's cities who think critically, act justly, and lead faithfully.

As we focus on our significance to the kingdom of God, the church, and modern society, we are reminded of the Scripture 1 Corinthians 14:10: "There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance" (NKJV). From this text, we realize that there are many seminaries and many agencies focused on preparing believers for Christian service and leadership. Thus, we have concluded that how we communicate our mission is critical. For no matter how sincere we are as a seminary, if we are not understood and if we do not understand the language of those we seek to serve, we will become much like sounding brass and clanging cymbals (1 Corinthians 13:1, NKJV) who are incapable of properly communicating, educating, and serving those in our communion.<sup>2</sup>

### PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

#### In Trust Center's Wise Stewards Initiative

During the 2019–2020 academic year, our board of trustees participated in the In Trust Center's Wise Stewards Initiative ([www.intrust.org/programs/wise-stewards-initiative](http://www.intrust.org/programs/wise-stewards-initiative)), which is designed to develop strong boards for theological schools. The initiative has helped our board focus on better institutional governance. A leadership team of board members (Barbara Felker, Evans Spagner, Gregory Dunlap, and Denise Kingdom Grier) was organized to lead this effort.

From our participation in the Wise Stewards program, we have gleaned practical insights, tools, and strategies that have helped us develop a four-part improvement plan. Our plan consists of:

- Board orientation and development
- Presidential evaluation and leadership development
- Shared governance
- Future planning

#### Reformed Church Center at NBTS

An exciting new development this year is the Undergraduate Faith and Justice Fellowship—a partnership with Rutgers and NBTS. Beginning in late January, three undergraduate Rutgers students became NBTS fellows and began investigating the issues of interfaith practices,

---

<sup>1</sup> Buford, Bob P. (2004). *Finishing Well: The Adventure of Life Beyond Halftime* (p. 25). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 613). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

interpersonal violence, and racial justice. This program is supported by the Van Bunschootsen (NJ) Fund, which was established in 1814 with donor-specified requirements that involve engaging Rutgers undergraduate students.

Directed by the Rev. James Brumm, the Reformed Church Center (RCC) at N BTS held many relationship-building programs at the seminary:

1. Right after our last meeting, we held the colloquy: “Demanding a King? An Inquiry into the Permanence of General Synod.” Matthew van Maastricht presented, with responses from Allan J. Janssen, Daniel J. Meeter, Kathy Smith, and Douglas Banks. We had a nice turnout and a nice dinner.
2. Just after the world went into quarantine due to the pandemic declared in March 2020, and after we changed the way we would host it—twice—we held Women’s Stories Day 2020: The Courage to Be Honest as our first all-Zoom program. There were about 45 in virtual attendance for presentations by Rev. Lynn Japinga, Rev. Pamela Pater-Ennis, and Irma Williams, and devotions were led by Damaris Whittaker. Rev. Liz Testa brought greetings from RCA Women’s Transformation and Leadership. Things were not perfect, but we did a decent job with a very steep learning curve.

We also introduced an evaluation form for RCC events that Amanda Bruehl helped develop. It was sent to all participants and yielded seven responses. The results are on file. Among the recommendations was the suggestion to make an outline for each presentation available to participants of future online programs. While the abbreviated prep time for this initial event made that impossible, it is an idea we will incorporate into future programming.

3. “Exploring the Heidelberg Catechism,” an online continuing education course taught by Matthew van Maastricht, has been meeting weekly since January 27, 2020. There are 11 registered students in the course, which means we received \$750 more than it cost to operate.
4. In the midst of the world shutting down, and in response to many discussions about how congregations might celebrate the Lord’s Supper or if they should at all, we were able to quickly organize an online conference called “Social Distancing and the Supper: Thoughts for Reformed Congregations,” which we held on March 12, 2020. It was the first event jointly hosted with Western Theological Seminary (WTS), the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship (CICW), and the Reformed Church Center (RCC); we interpreted “Reformed” in the broadest possible sense to include the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA), the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the United Church of Christ (UCC) in our invitations with the RCA. Mashona Walston (pastor of First Church in Albany), Matthew van Maastricht (fellow with the RCC), John Witvliet (director of CICW), and Ron Rienstra (faculty at WTS) each delivered presentations. About 145 people from across North America—and one from Indonesia—participated in the online program. The recording is available on [nbts.edu](http://nbts.edu) as well as on the CICW and WTS websites and, potentially, on the COVID-19 response page on [rca.org](http://rca.org).
5. Discussions took place about hosting a small program in late April that would have featured Henk van den Belt, from the faculty of VU University in Amsterdam, sharing his work on his twenty-first century examination of God’s providence. However, his scheduled visit to New York did not take place. This event would have allowed us to try

out some new technology and livestream the talk from the Apse in Sage Library, where a much smaller group could look like a crowd.

6. Two of the three students in the Higher Faith-Higher Calling Fellowship program began their studies at the beginning of the semester. Destiny Morales was working with Dina's Dwellings through us, and Lauren Supplice was working with the New Jersey Congregational Center for Cancer Care (NJCCCC), and both of them were meeting with President McCreary regularly for background and integrative learning until the virus happened. Destiny worked at Dina's Dwellings until they had to close to all outsiders, and Lauren has continued doing offsite work for NJCCCC. They both attended Women's Stories Day and have met with President McCreary once since then. It should be noted that none of their fellowship time is spent working for the RCC or the Seminary Archives.
7. The Reformed Church Center's 20th anniversary dinner is scheduled for Thursday, October 15, 2020, at 6:00 p.m. It will coincide with the fall board of trustees meeting (assuming we are having meetings), and the keynote speaker will be Dr. Leslie Copeland-Tune, an NBTS grad and the chief operating officer of the National Council of Churches. Richard Mouw was not available that evening to come speak to us, but said that he has been following the work of the RCC with interest and he would really like to be part of a program here sometime.
8. We have two other RCC events on the fall schedule: the rescheduled John Bell event on November 12, 2020, and Bill Howard, former executive of the RCA African American Black Council, who will come just after Thanksgiving to discuss his new book, *Black Not Dutch*, about the RCA's response to the Black Manifesto.
9. Before General Synod 2020 was postponed, we had six students signed up for the Seminarian Seminar. Thomas Giglio and Patricia Johnson would have been our corresponding delegates.
10. At the dean's request, the center will run a webinar on Saturday, May 16, 2020. "Come, Let Us Worship: Thoughts for ALL (not just Reformed) Congregations" will help congregations think about what they might need to do before re-opening after physical distancing.

### **Gardner Sage Library**

1. The director and assistant professor of theological research and bibliography collaborated with the Sage Library staff and library committee of the faculty to evaluate digital resources and ensure that we are meeting the needs of online learning. Together the director, library staff, and library committee proposed joining the Digital Theological Library (an ever-expanding, online consortium library), and the faculty council voted in favor. NBTS is now a co-owner of this vast collection of theological ebooks, journals, and dissertations. Dr. Milas (library director) taught two courses: "Devotional Faith in Diaspora and Today" in the master's program and "Doctoral Research Methods" for all DMin cohorts. He authored "Faith in the Research Process," an article featured in the current issue of the *Journal of Religious and Theological Information*.
2. The public services librarian created a virtual reference desk, enhanced the library's website to support distance learning initiatives, re-purposed library spaces to support library programming, and promoted user engagement. The collection services librarian

continued to catalog a backlog of print books of general interest and NBTS theses so they are accessible to DMin students and other researchers via the online catalog. The archivist began two projects: identifying and organizing digitized photos of alumni who served in the RCA mission field to create an interactive digital display, and creating a digital archive of memos, releases, minutes, and other documents related to the seminary's response to the coronavirus.

### **Horace G. Underwood Center for Global Christianity**

1. Students' Pilgrimage Programs: Oman Pilgrimage (December 27, 2019, through January 7, 2020): ten students/faculty/alumni/RCA pastor participated. Every participant said the trip was a "life-changing, perspective-broadening experience." Amanda Bruehl (acting for President McCreary) initiated a meeting with Rev. Justin Meyers and Dr. Jinhong Kim for possible future plans involving NBTS and the Al Amana Center, e.g., a course on Muslim-Christian dialogue or a special lecture when Rev. Meyers visits our area next.
2. On July 5, 2019, NBTS welcomed the president of Yonsei University, Dr. Yong-hak Kim, from Korea. A group of 11 guests made a special visit to NBTS, including Dr. Su-young Kwon, dean of the Divinity School, and Dr. Peter Underwood, dean of Underwood International College. President McCreary and most faculty and staff, as well as a few alumni, joined the welcome event even though it fell during a long holiday weekend (Independence Day). GLOSAN students helped prepare the dinner.
3. On November 1–2, 2019, the Underwood Center participated in the ASM Eastern Fellowship Conference in Maryknolls, New York. Dr. Jinhong Kim, as both a keynote speaker and a member of the conference executive board, organized the conference and gave a talk on "Visualizing Mission in Asian Contexts," which will be published in the ASM proceedings in 2020. Three students and two faculty members/spouses from NBTS participated in the conference.
4. On November 10, 2019, the 15th Annual Underwood Symphony Orchestra (USO) Mission Concert was held at Chodae Community Church in Norwood, New Jersey. President McCreary gave a speech at the concert; his separate greeting was also included in the concert bill. Dr. Kim put together and gave a special video presentation of Underwood Center activities during 2018–2019; GLOSAN members organized a promotion booth for NBTS; Rev. Laurel Underwood, Amanda Bruehl, Joan Marshall, and many NBTS students, alumni, faculty, staff, and RCA pastors joined the event. The Korean Alumni Association once again prepared a special tea ceremony as part of the reception. Following the concert, the USO donated \$3,000 to NBTS for the Underwood Center.
5. A lecture given by Dr. Kim at an event on February 6–7, 2020, titled "Underwood's Christian Korea: Its Significance in Context of the Future of Korea-Japan Relations," will be published through the *International Journal of Christianity and Culture* by IKCC in June 2020.
6. On February 19, 2020, Journey Together in Christ (JTIC) visited NBTS. Twenty high school students and two pastors from South Korea, hosted by JTIC (which visits NBTS roughly every other year), visited the Underwood Memorial/Sage Library (guided by Dr. Milas); Dr. McCreary's welcome address was read by Amanda Bruehl. Dean Tanner and Dr. Cha offered words of encouragement.

7. On February 28, 2020, a meeting occurred with Dr. Jun Cho, from Payab University/McGilbury Seminary in Thailand. Dr. Cho was sent to Thailand as a missionary by Saemunan for many years. The meeting explored the possibility of developing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between NBTS and Payab University/McGilbury Seminary under the CCT (Church of Christ in Thailand, a Reformed denomination). It was discussed how most theology students in Thailand would not have the financial resources to come to NBTS for their study, while NBTS's current financial situation also is such that the seminary cannot offer them global scholarship support. One idea raised for consideration was once there is a MOU between the two institutions, the CCT General Assembly may possibly wish to provide some financial support for their students to come to NBTS.
8. The 13th Underwood International Symposium, scheduled for May 28 to June 4 in Seoul, Korea, with keynote speaker John Coakley (NBTS) was postponed to May 2021 due to COVID-19.

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CELEBRATIONS**

### **Grants**

1. Science grant. This grant provides three gifts to New Brunswick Theological Seminary. The first is to further our core mission of being an anti-racist seminary. This is a long-term commitment, and these additional resources and conversation partners will bring a new and needed infusion of creative thinking about the future. Second, it will demonstrate to students and alumni the ways in which science and theology can be part of the conversation for the transformation and healing of urban communities, in the face of racism and colonialist thinking. This learning will be accomplished in the classroom, at the symposium, and in the accessible resources on the website. Finally, the grant will provide the faculty with multiple ways to engage the conversation over the grant period and beyond as we begin the multi-year process of curriculum revision. The grant consists of the following components:
  - a. Analyzing, understanding, and working to dismantle the sin of racism, sexism, gender discrimination, and classism
  - b. Contextualized ministry and public faith
  - c. Daylong symposium on the science of prejudice, pseudo-science and pseudo-theology—Naming the Past to Claim a Better Future: Learning by Lecture and Group Activities
  - d. Website resources for lifelong learning
  - e. Faculty grants to add science to classrooms
  - f. Faculty development discussions
2. Calvin Institute of Christian Worship grants. New Brunswick Theological Seminary is one of three seminaries in North America selected to participate in the Vital Worship Grants Program offered by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (CICW) in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for the 2019–2020 academic year. NBTS is using the \$15,000 grant to conduct a year-long project to facilitate meaningful, active participation of the whole community in worship by exploring the role of worship in theological education and exploring methods of digital accessibility as a laboratory space within the chapel community. The project has been overseen by a team of faculty, including Dr. Beth Tanner, academic dean and the Norman and Mary Kansfield Professor of Old

Testament Interpretation; Dr. Faye Taylor, director of field education and director of the St. John's campus; and Dr. Andrew Wymer, assistant professor of preaching and worship and the director of the chapel at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. The goal of the project is to create new, supplementary digital worship resources. Other goals include increasing communal knowledge and awareness of the purpose and nature of Christian worship; reflecting together on the institutional vision for worship; exploring and implementing digital accessibility for changing constituencies, such as students, alumni, faculty, staff, and community partners; and collaborating with students and faculty to envision and implement supplementary worship resources and events that are digitally accessible. Such goals will be accomplished through conversations, retreats, gatherings, and community resources.

3. As New Brunswick entered its 235th year of theological education, the seminary hosted a celebration for the entire community. October 25, 2019, marked not only 235 years of theological education, but also five years in the seminary's new academic building. With more than 180 friends at the event, the seminary launched its "A Light in God's Cities" campaign to commemorate its founding year of 1784. This campaign has a goal of raising \$1,784,000. To God's glory, we have already raised more than \$800,000.
4. Student requests for emergency funds. Emergency and scholarship support increase daily due to the COVID-19 crisis, and they will continue to climb. Many students face food insecurity, lost wages, and other financial challenges. New Brunswick has created a Student Emergency Fund to assist seminary students, and the seminary thanks the generous donors who have contributed.
5. Lilly Endowment Foundation PRIM (Partnership for Resiliency in Ministry) grant. The seminary also obtained a Lilly Endowment grant. NBTS received funding to create a project that will help develop and strengthen pastors who are launching new churches and pastors leading congregations that serve communities of color, both in urban environments. We have proposed bringing together three cohorts of pastors over a five-year period (Latino church planters, female pastors working with urban churches, and pastors-of-color and white pastors working with diverse churches). Our project proposes to provide:
  - a. Dedicated care teams to help pastors monitor and process their experiences
  - b. Cross-congregational immersion experiences designed to help pastors launching new urban churches and pastors leading congregations that serve communities of color in urban settings develop personal resilience strategies unique to an urban context, alongside experienced pastors; and
  - c. Conversations with civic, business, and community leaders to provide context for the complexities of ministry in urban settings and obtain resources needed to overcome the complexities that impact the lives of urban residents.

These unique components are intentionally focused on helping pastors launching new and/or leading established churches in urban areas, to help them adjust to and moderate the impact of trauma and develop adaptive coping skills. Additionally, these components will provide crucial insights that can help pastors proactively navigate situational factors unique to urban ministry, while minimizing stress, burnout, and ministry exit. This project

will enhance and inform the seminary's longstanding commitment to support urban ministry and educating its leaders, today and well into the future.

### **Retirements and Resignations of Faculty**

1. Effective December 31, 2019, Dr. Virginia Wiles retired as professor of New Testament. Dr. Wiles has served NBTS for more than 20 years, and we are grateful for her transformative teaching and indefatigable service to the NBTS community.
2. Effective June 29, 2020, the Rev. Dr. Willard W. C. Ashley Sr. will also retire from New Brunswick Theological Seminary. NBTS applauds Dr. Ashley for his many years of faithful and effective teaching, leading, administration, and advocating. We wish Dr. Ashley God's very best in his retirement.
3. Dr. Andrew Wymer will leave New Brunswick for Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. Dr. Wymer served three years as assistant dean of doctoral studies, assistant professor of preaching, and worship and director of Mast Chapel.

### **Residential Faculty and Staff**

1. NBTS has welcomed Amanda Bruehl to a newly created role—chief of staff and executive assistant to President Micah McCreary. She joins NBTS after seven years of development work, most recently focused on pastors and churches in New Jersey and surrounding states, with the Reformed Church in America.
2. Jeanette Carrillo was promoted to interim registrar and executive associate to the vice president and dean of academic affairs. Ms. Carrillo has been with NBTS for nearly 20 years.

### **Heartfelt Farewells**

1. The Rev. Dr. Allan Janssen (March 31, 1948–April 3, 2020). The Rev. Allan Jay Janssen, PhD, affiliate professor emeritus at NBTS and General Synod professor emeritus of the Reformed Church in America, died of complications from the COVID-19 virus on April 3, 2020, at St. Peter's Medical Center in Albany, New York.
2. The Reverend Gregg Alan Mast, PhD, president emeritus of New Brunswick Theological Seminary and General Synod professor emeritus of the Reformed Church in America, died on April 27, 2020, at Albany Medical Center Hospital in Albany, New York, after being ill with the COVID-19 virus for several weeks.