

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS FOR WESTERN REFORMED SEMINARY

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It is hard to believe that it has already been twelve years since I graduated from Western Reformed Seminary. It seems like it was just yesterday that Allister Stone, Joshua Musyoka, Mark Baldwin, and I roamed the hallowed halls at Western Reformed. The countless hours of ping pong with professor Chris Lensch teaching all of us lessons in humility, Dr. Battle's jokes after which he would almost die of laughing at himself, Dr. Backus's counseling classes at the speed of light, and having top ramen every single day for lunch and dinner are still so fresh in my mind. But so are the invaluable lessons that I learned in seminary that have been so helpful to my ministry.

Since graduating from WRS, my ministry has been focused on two fields: pastoring a local church and leading a Christian school. The training I received at Western Reformed equipped me to be faithful to the Lord in both of these fields. For the remainder of this article I am going to focus on the impact that the years at WRS have had on my pastoring a local church because that is my present vocation.

I serve the Lord as the pastor of the Bible Presbyterian Church of Olympia, Washington. My week revolves around seven activities: teaching Sunday school, preaching morning and afternoon sermons on the Lord's Day, leading a college-age group, counseling, leading a teenage boys book study, teaching the Wednesday evening Bible study, and being involved in one of three aspects of denominational life (the presbytery or synod, the Presbyterian Missionary Union, and WRS). Besides these scheduled activities, there are always unexpected needs that pop up each week.

As I look at these areas of ministry, I find it hard to isolate which class helps in which area because each discipline I studied at WRS goes hand in hand with the next as an integrated whole. For example, the counseling classes I took obviously help when I am sitting across the table from a family of the church, but so do the theology classes because there is no good counseling unless we are able to present God in his fullness. Or, one may think of the impact that church history can have on one's preaching. Yet, it doesn't stop there. It also helps me sift through all the aberrant teaching that is currently infesting the church because, somewhere, somebody has already dealt with it. Thus, I am able to stand on the shoulders of greater men than I am in serving Christ's church.

One area on which I can easily see the impact of my seminary education is my love for studying. During the three years it took for me to finish seminary, I was barely able to scratch the surface of learning, and that was frustrating at times. I eventually came to terms with that as I realized that the professors were doorkeepers, as it were, opening up the wonders of theological knowledge. I was introduced to Calvin, Turretin, Hodge, Schaff, Bruce, Metzger, Berkhof,

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Adams—all men that I fell in love with and continue to study to this day. I don't think I would have developed this passion for theological knowledge, nor would I know where to go to get it, if it wasn't for the faculty of WRS.

Another area that had a great impact on me and thusly on my ministry was the seminary faculty's passion for biblical languages. While I was at WRS, several seminaries on the West Coast dropped biblical languages as a requirement for the Master of Divinity program. Not at WRS, and I am thankful for that. I use the biblical language skills I learned in seminary almost on a daily basis (though Hebrew is still very painful for me, sorry Mr. Lensch) and I think my preaching and counseling are better because of it. Thanks to this emphasis at WRS, I don't have to succumb to the tyranny of commercial translations, as Tom Lyon, my Advanced Greek instructor, used to say.

The last area of impact I would like to mention is my homiletics training. Despite having to read Virgil Anderson's book (which cured me of any insomnia problems I might have had), these classes were the most beneficial for me because they stretched me the farthest. Professor Len Pine mandated that we conform to very particular styles as we progressed through the different levels of homiletics. At the time his requirements angered me because I could not see the importance of doing things in ways that seemed so artificial to me. Now when I think back on those classes, I realize that Dr. Pine's requirements actually brought together all the elements of my seminary education, synthesizing thereby the pastor I have become and continue to become.

I truly can say that I would not be able to do what I do on a weekly basis if it wasn't for the training I received at Western Reformed Seminary. May the Lord grant this great institution another 25 years of faithful service in the Bible Presbyterian Church.