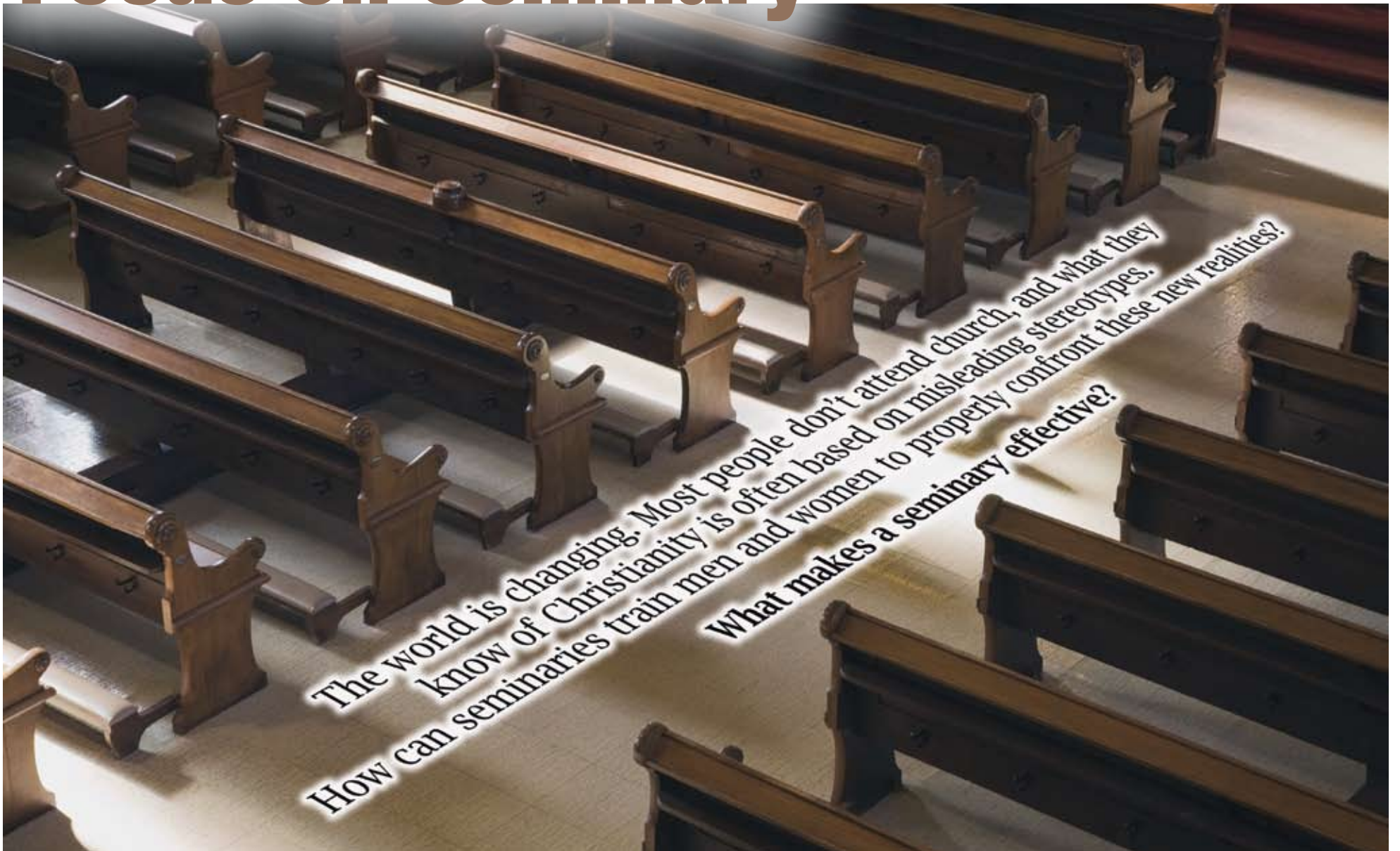


# Focus on Seminary



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## Wrong time. Wrong place. Wrong courses.

*A professor of world Christianity discusses some dangers of the unconverted seminary.*

*Scott W. Sunquist  
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

I am caught in a dilemma. I am an active participant in the decline of Christianity in the West.

I teach in a seminary, preparing pastors, priests and preachers who leave our sacred halls and try (among other things) to reverse the trends of western Christendom.

Frankly, we are not doing very well.

What strikes me most about Protestant theological education is not that it follows the academy in terms of method, medium and mood. I am not overwhelmed even by those occasions when I encounter the lack of genuine faith, ignorance of basic Christian doctrine, or lack of honest submission to the text (all of which would be good to have).

No, what strikes me as odd here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that our seminaries are still teaching as if the Reformation were the pivotal point of all of Protestant Christianity. It isn't.

In fact, the Reformation was an in-house argument—Christians arguing with other Christians about what it means to be the true, or a truer church. That was the context and

for 500 years we have been preparing people to defend why they and their church got the Reformation correct.

As one student asked in a history class: "Professor, you mean to tell me that churches were splitting over the exact words to use to describe what happens in communion?" I confidently responded, "Absolutely. People were dying and killing each other over these important matters." And that was his point. "I can't imagine that," he told me. "That was a whole different world, and frankly, I have a much bigger vision of the Christian church today."

### Dramatic changes

The entire world is changing dramatically in many ways. But a key transformation we need to consider is that Christianity is actually a foreign religion to most North Americans today. Most people on our continent do not attend church. And what

*Please see Changes on page 10*

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## Who will pastor and teach the next generation of Christians?

*Shelley Campagnola is deeply concerned about ministry training for the contemporary situation in Canada*

Doug Koop  
ChristianWeek Staff

When Shelley Campagnola was finishing high school she was uncertain about the next stage of her life. Like many students with higher education ambitions, she was broke. And while she'd been praying about how she might serve God, she hadn't told many people about her situation. The idea of Bible college wasn't even on her radar screen.

However, at that very time the president of a Bible school visited her church to speak at a Sunday evening service. Campagnola recalls that she'd been praying about her future, and "the next day in church the president was there." She remembers trying to get past him, but "he grabbed me and said 'I'll see you at college this fall.'"

And indeed, she did go to that school. She earned a degree at London Bible College and then went on to further secular and ministry training.

Campagnola tells this story to highlight her passion—the need for Christians to transfer the faith to a new generation that is properly trained and nurtured, and then released to continue the



Many new leaders are unprepared for what awaits them in their congregations, says Shelley Campagnola.

task of mission.

While much of her expertise and experience is in children's and women's ministries, the mother of three teenagers has put together a wide-ranging career that involves working on staff at a church, running her own consulting business, teaching, writing, presenting seminars, conducting leadership studies and academic research.

She currently serves as adjunct professor of Church Ministries at Heritage College and Seminary in Cambridge, Ontario. And she chairs the "Child in Church and Culture Partnership" in conjunction with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC).

### Leadership issues

Campagnola's research is delivering some sobering results. She is deeply concerned that evangeli-

cally aligned churches in Canada will soon be facing a leadership dearth. And a key factor is the indifference of churches and many leaders towards biblical training and vocational ministry.

She points to an Ipsos-Reid survey conducted for the Christian Higher Education Canada (CHEC) in 2007. Campagnola crunched the numbers. She reports that only 10 per cent of "dedicated evangelical youth" (youth who attend church weekly) are attending CHEC institutions (35 schools with a total of 17,100 students). And only 12 per cent of the students at CHEC are training for ministry of any kind.

If roughly half of those 2,100 students are training specifically for church ministry, that means just over 1,000 students are currently in the process of learning to

equip people for mature Christian worship, service, community and witness.

What does this bode for the leadership of congregations in Canada? "If we only consider the 6,000 churches affiliated with the EFC, there is one student training for vocational ministry for every six of those churches. But, there are approximately 20,000 churches in Canada that are evangelically aligned, which means there is one student currently in training for every 20 churches."

Campagnola is happy to see leaders being raised up within churches. "But if they're not getting theological training—if that aspect stays entirely in house—it tends to get watered down. And if we're not replacing educated leaders, we need better partnerships between the church and other



Shelley Campagnola.

training environments to renew a passion for training."

### What needs to change?

Several things need to change. One is the value that congregations attach to pastoral ministry. Many young people—including serious and dedicated Christians—are opting for the kind of education that leads to better jobs and better pay. "This doesn't mean they've lost the desire for ministry," says Campagnola.

"But church work often pays poorly. Kids want to minister, but they want better resources and they don't see that happening by working in a church." The antidote, she says, isn't to pooh-pooh secular education but to promote the value of biblical training and to encourage young people to take gateway programs at Christian institutions to provide solid biblical training before their professional training.

Some of the types of schooling also need to change. "Much training has become very academic," says Campagnola. Ministry preparation needs to involve an increasing emphasis on relational development and spiritual formation. "Courses on spiritual disciplines and formation

courses is one thing," she says, "but we need them connected with a mentor for the entire time they're here. There's a new call for that.

"Leaders across the country are unprepared spiritually for what hits them in congregations. We teach them to run programs and preach a message, but they don't know how to deal with people. How do we equip them to do the people work, not just the technical work?"

Campagnola also observes that few churches and ministry groups are handling leadership transitions very well. "We need to recognize that leaders don't just show up on the scene; they're people you've been investing in for some time, like the minor leagues of baseball. Ideally we've been grooming them so they're ready when it's time to go."

Alas, the church draft doesn't have a minor league system to draw on. However, there are lots of potential leaders begging to be mentored, taken under wing. But senior leaders are unequipped or don't have the time. "Churches don't give senior leaders time," says Campagnola. "The corporate approach to church has robbed us of this capacity.

"It has to be churches and schools together," she continues. Which brings us back to Campagnola's story of the Bible college president who came to her church and invited her to his school. "Many churches never have these kinds of people in, leaders who encourage people to go get some training; people who will ask pastors if they are sending anyone for us to train."

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# Focus on Seminary

## Talking to presidents

**ChristianWeek** connected with several Canadian seminary presidents and asked them a single, straightforward question: **What makes your seminary effective? Here's what they had to say:**

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What makes ACTS effective? At the risk of sounding “preacher-esque,” at least three factors come to mind.

First, God has given us quality people. ACTS is blessed with gifted, competent, committed faculty and an excellent staff team. We are also privileged to work with keen, motivated, mature students who provide a rich peer learning environment.

A second key ingredient is partnership. ACTS is a consortium of seminaries that partner together in theological education. We value cooperation as a practical resource, and as a Christian virtue. This mindset has resulted in strong working relationships within TWU and with our denominations, churches and other ministry agencies.

Finally, it is impossible to talk about ministry effectiveness without reference to prayer—and all the dimensions of faith and obedience that prayer represents. This is not a cliché for us. We are conscious of our need for God's transforming, enabling grace, and we appreciate the prayers of many who support us.

*Ken Radant*

*Principal and Academic Dean, ACTS Seminaries (Trinity Western University)  
Langley, B.C.*

### Briercrest Seminary

Briercrest Seminary is unique in the Canadian seminary landscape in that most of our courses for our Master's programs are offered either in one-week modular classes or through independent distance learning.

This allows many people in ministry or professional positions to pursue an accredited, graduate-level theological education without having to leave their current employment. It also ensures that most classes are made up of students who have seasoned experience. In fact, many students testify to the richness of learning not only from their professors and course work, but also from their peers.

Finally, for those who do choose to come to Briercrest Seminary for full-time study, Caronport offers a family-friendly community with Christian education in walking distance for every member of the family, including Caronport Elementary School (K-8), Caronport High School (9-12) and Briercrest College (offering 11 BA degrees).

*Dwayne Uglen*

*President, Briercrest Seminary  
Caronport, SK*

### Canadian Mennonite University

Canadian Mennonite University graduate programs in Theological Studies and Christian Ministry are church-related, broadly based and student-centred.

Faculty members bring extraordinary dedication, wisdom and experience to the classroom context. They are dedicated to scholarship, yet most have been involved in pastoral leadership or service assignments at home or overseas. They regularly serve in churches across Canada, engaging with conference leaders, pastors and congregations. An advisory council of church representatives ensures that the needs of the church are addressed.

Further breadth and depth is provided to the programs by offering them in collaboration with other universities and seminaries. Visiting professors from across Canada and the United States contribute from their own strengths to the program.

Our programs are flexible with student needs and challenges in mind. Students come with a variety of objectives, life situations and experiences. I think we do exceptionally well in keeping our programs student-centred.

*Gerald Gerbrandt*

*President, Canadian Mennonite University  
Winnipeg, MB*

### Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary

We purpose to train God-called men and women for 21<sup>st</sup> century leadership in tough places. We strive to be both biblically accurate and relevant to our context. We equip students to go into difficult places, and to courageously face challenges that confront us there. We enable them to equip others for leadership in local churches.

Students learn in an intimate community, with instructors committed to experiencing the journey of life with them. Faculty members have significant ministry experience as international missionaries and as pastors leading churches in pioneer regions of North America. Their experience combines with their walk with God and zeal for His Word, which is a distinguishing mark on their teaching style.

Through on-site lectures and on-line classes we train students who will help people understand God's Word and how to apply God's Word in the midst of complex circumstances and issues of both local and global concern.

*Robert D. Blackaby*

*President, Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary and College  
Cochrane, AB*

### McMaster Divinity College

I believe that the most effective seminaries strive to have an impact in all areas of life.

Not long ago, seminaries focused primarily, and some even exclusively, on the preparation of pastors and church workers. At MacDiv, we are seeking intentionally to

prepare not only effective evangelical leaders for the church but also Christian leaders who stand out within the academy of society.

Imagine the impact laypeople can have on the world around them, and within their work, as they develop biblical literacy and theological understanding. Or what about the impact well-trained evangelical scholars can have on thinking within the academy today? What makes MacDiv so effective today is its intentional focus on training Christian leaders for the church, academy and society.

*Stanley E. Porter*

*President and Dean, McMaster Divinity College  
Hamilton, ON*

### Regent College

While institutional effectiveness can easily focus activities, at Regent College—an international graduate school of Christian studies—we prefer to see our strength as being related to whom God brings to us.

With only 35 per cent of our students coming from Canada, we are very blessed every year with a diverse and international student body. As a school that has taken the whole people of God seriously for over 40 years, we believe that no occupation is outside the realm of “ministry,” and thus every career requires biblical and theological training.

When students come to Regent, they join a competent collegium of faculty and a dedicated staff team, and together we form a community of faith. Ultimately, our effectiveness may have more to do with the equality of our students, staff and faculty than anything that any of us do.

*Rod Wilson*

*President, Regent College  
Vancouver, B.C.*

*Please see Presidents on page 11*

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McMaster Divinity College - Hamilton, Ontario

# Focus on Seminary

## Changes

Continued from page 7

they do know of Christians and Christianity is often based on misleading stereotypes. Today's seminary students must prepare more precisely to be effective within a culture that opposes Christianity. This is more important than taking on the Baptists or the Catholics.

Alas, despite the massive changes most of our seminaries still use a curriculum that assumes most people are Christians living in a Christian culture. We are preparing priests and pastors for a church and a society that no longer exist: chaplains for vanishing Christendom. We assume that a pastor's job is to preach, lead good worship for the people who come on Sundays and visit the sick.

This is just not enough. We need to prepare evangelists who can convert the people who will come to church. The fact is, many of the younger people who visit our churches don't know any of the basic Bible stories. They arrive in our sanctuaries like a person who enters a Chinese restaurant and picks up a menu he cannot read.

So although our students go out to serve in a world where Christians are more and more a minority struggling against an increasingly pagan and hedonistic culture, most of the church history and theology we teach them prepares them to be a certain type of Christian in a Christian world.

### Theological heroes

When I was in seminary, we each found our theological heroes and they were, generally speaking, people



we liked from our church tradition. Being Reformed, I had friends who were fanatical about Calvin, Edwards, Niebuhr or Barth. Today's students find their heroes in a wide range of places—the Cappadocian Fathers, Wesley, Wilberforce, Bonhoeffer, Matteo Ricci, St. Francis, Martin Luther King and Mother Teresa.

Why do they choose these people as their theological heroes? I suspect it is because most of them sense that these were people who as Christians resisted a largely unchristian movement or an overly contextualized church.

Seminary students accurately sense something that many faculty have not yet admitted: We need a theology of social and religious engagement more than a systematic and philosophical theology that comes out of Western Christendom. Students today need to bear the death of Christ to the world, the very world that crucified Him.

The problem for the next 15 or 20 years is that we still have professors (like myself) who were trained by Christendom scholars, but we are serving in a post-Christendom world.

Lesslie Newbigin predicted this situation upon his return from India in the 1970s. He understood that the pastoral approach needed in the West now was that of the missionary, challenging the minds, habits and structures of a post-Christian society. Today we should admit that he was correct, and we have done very little about it. We need to do something quite drastic, and we need to start about 30 years ago. We need a conversion.

Here I offer some preliminary suggestions as to what needs to be done to begin to construct theological education that would be appropriate for our Western context.

#### 1) Emphasize the Bible.

Seminaries should put away their preoccupation with higher critical questions about the text and focus more on the internal logic and message of the Christian's Holy Book. We need to teach and learn the Bible, recognizing how we will be presenting it to our Western audience—as a foreign book that needs to be understood by outsiders. We need students who can preach with solid knowledge and basic confidence in the text.

#### 2) Analyze and engage society.

It is not enough for a contemporary pastor to learn only “congregational analysis.” She or he needs to know how to read neighborhoods, school systems and economics. Seminary students need to get out of the classroom. Thinking as a missionary, we need to help students ask newer questions that speak to the community and to the society—not just “how can we get more people in church.” Pastors in the 21st century need to be prophetic in speaking about sinful structures and dehumanizing realities, but at the same time serve as evangelists with “local knowledge.” At present we do not teach our future pastors to be comfortable out in the world, on the streets, in the coffee shops, at sporting events, meeting people in the park and in the shopping malls. Pastors need to be engaging people in the world every week.

#### 3) Evangelize.

Many churches have left evangelism to a few more aggressive denominations. Let's face the obvious: A young pastor leaving seminary to pastor a church with 80 members (actual attendance, 22; average age, 60) had better be either an evangelist or a thief (sheep-stealer, that is). We suggest that seminaries send out students who have a great passion and a natural joy to tell people

about Jesus (not about their church) and bring the presence of Jesus into public places. Every student graduating from seminary should be leading people to Christ each year of their seminary training. You learn preaching by doing it. You learn exegesis by doing it. And so we will learn evangelism. Let justice roll down, and let the word of God flow out.

#### 4) Learn from the early Church.

Church history is valuable and necessary, but not all is equally valuable or relevant. Today we need much less emphasis on internal disputes and much more on the life of Christians in situations of persecution and conflict. Who is teaching about early Arabic and Persian Christianity today? Polite, respectable Christianity that blends into the world is a dying breed. It is of no value. Church leaders need to study how Christians were faithful, and faithfully serving the poor, when it was unpopular and even illegal to do so. Christianity that is so clear and confident brought the Roman Empire to its knees, wore down the Japanese occupiers in Korea and outlived the Maoists in China. By contrast our Christianity often looks pretty anemic. It can barely keep the church alive, forget bring life to others.

#### 5) Make disciples.

At present our seminaries assume that church leaders are developed environmentally. From what I can tell, the nicest people who stay around the longest and complain the least eventually end up as elders. More needs to be done to intentionally disciple leaders. Faculty and pastors need to view their jobs not as teachers but as disciple makers. Disciple is a good biblical word. To this end, we need to teach our future pastors one simple ministry skill: How to lead a small group Bible study, which is one of the most basic ministry skills in a post-Christendom world. Raising up Christians is a matter of helping people pray, study the Bible and obey its precepts. Our Bible departments need to seize this responsibility and send out students who can lead young people in joyous inductive discovery of our sacred book.

#### 6) Teach missional spirituality.

Finally, we need to teach spirituality not only as a religious habit, but also as the rhythm of our lives for the sake of others. Christian spirituality is seldom taught as equally a matter of missional obedience and Christian worship. Yet mission and worship are the two strands of ecclesiology that make for a healthy church, and that will make for strong leaders for the church.

Here is the challenge: Can our seminaries take on a revolutionary change for the Kingdom's sake? If not we will become more and more of a sideshow. The first step is to simply recognize that we are training pastors for an era which is gone (wrong time), we are doing it too much in the academic setting (wrong place) and we are teaching a curriculum which is obsolete (wrong courses).

It may seem dangerous to take such drastic steps, but the far greater danger is to keep doing the same thing over and over even though it is bringing less and less results.

*Scott W. Sunquist is professor of World Christianity at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. A longer version of this article was published in the Presbyterian Outlook. Reprinted here with permission from the author.*

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## Presidents

*Continued from page 7*

### Taylor Seminary and College

Taylor Seminary has invested considerable time and effort in the past five years to a process of listening—listening to pastors and churches describe the changing needs of ministry preparation. As a result we have adjusted our curriculum to meet these needs, but we have also preserved and re-tooled some of the best practices that have made our graduates so effective in long-term ministry.

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*David Williams*

*President, Taylor Seminary and College  
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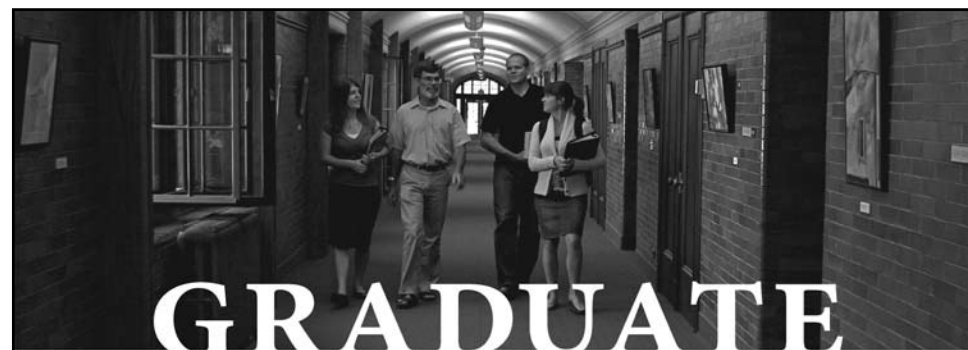
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*Gary V. Nelson*

*President, Tyndale University College and Seminary  
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