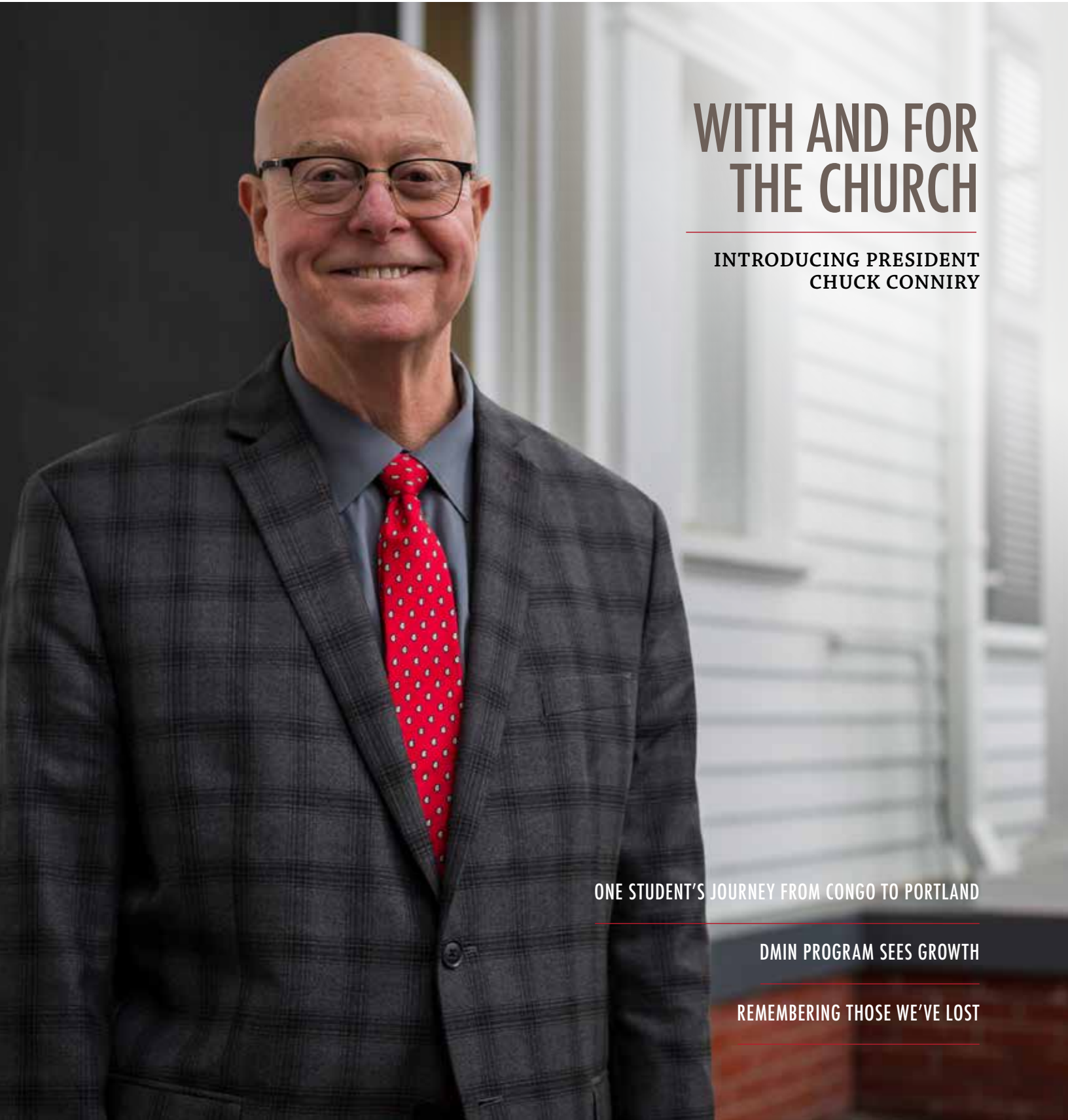


# TRANSFORM

THE MAGAZINE OF WESTERN SEMINARY | *Spring 2021*



## WITH AND FOR THE CHURCH

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INTRODUCING PRESIDENT  
CHUCK CONNIRY

ONE STUDENT'S JOURNEY FROM CONGO TO PORTLAND

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DMIN PROGRAM SEES GROWTH

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REMEMBERING THOSE WE'VE LOST

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## A Story of God’s Faithfulness



Chuck Conniry, President

“The purpose of Western Seminary is to promote gospel-centered transformation by helping the church be the church.”

In this issue of Transform, we introduce you to an amazing sister in Christ: Esther Lubemba, a Western Seminary counseling student whose story poignantly demonstrates God’s unfailing love and faithfulness. Esther shows that pursuing God’s will does not insulate us from confronting challenges and seeming setbacks. In fact, such difficulties sensitize us to God’s presence and enable us to see God’s leading in ways that we otherwise could not have seen.

Esther’s story also highlights the reason why Western prioritizes a nationally accredited counseling program. The purpose of Western Seminary is to promote gospel-centered transformation by helping the church be the church. Our mission is to serve as a catalyst and resource for spiritual transformation by providing, with and for the church, advanced education for strategic ministry roles. The mission of the school is fulfilled as effectively

by well-educated counseling graduates as it is by well-prepared ministry graduates.

Esther herself expresses this point with crystal clarity: “My professors challenge me to have critical thinking so that we can integrate counseling theories with theology. Techniques are helpful, but they aren’t the ultimate answer.” Esther said she wants to use counseling “to serve the people [of the Democratic Republic of the Congo] in the most strategic ways.”

Put simply, Esther’s mission is our mission!



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We care about what you think. If interested in sharing what thoughts, ideas, comments, or questions came to mind when reading this issue of the magazine, please reach out to us!

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### TRANSFORM Magazine

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Curious what's been going on lately at Western Seminary? These exciting snippets provide just a few snapshots of how the seminary is making a difference in our communities and around the world.



### CENTER FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT NOW OFFERS CONTINUING EDUCATION CREDIT FOR ACSI

The Center for Leadership Development (CLD) at Western Seminary is now an approved provider of continuing education units for the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), an accreditor of K-12 Christian schools. With this new partnership in place, CLD can offer its courses in Bible, theology, and apologetics to Christian educators looking to strengthen their biblical worldview while earning continuing education credit.

Currently, the CLD has 23 courses approved as continuing education units for ACSI, including core courses like *The Bible*, *Connecting the Pieces*, *How to Study Your Bible*, *Foundations in Biblical Worldview*, and *What Is the Gospel?*, as well as special interest courses like *Orphan Care*, *Theology of Work*, and *The Mere Christian Life: The Resilience of C.S. Lewis in Today's World*.

The CLD is passionate about equipping God's people for growth and service. ACSI teachers and administrators can find out more about partnering with the CLD by contacting Greg Moon at [gmoon@westernseminary.edu](mailto:gmoon@westernseminary.edu) or visiting us online at [cldwestern.com/acsi](http://cldwestern.com/acsi).

### LIVING ROOM LUNCH OFFERS NEW ENCOURAGEMENT TO WOMEN IN MINISTRY

In 2021, the Women's Center for Ministry (WCM) launched a new ministry called Living Room Lunch, a one-hour virtual discussion on topics aimed to touch on real-heart issues for women. The event takes place on the fourth Friday of every month via Zoom.

So far, the meetings have covered a wide range of topics. In January, Julie Tadema and Jody Mayhew spoke about how to discover one's calling. February featured speakers Sandy Snaveley and Connie McClellan encouraging women towards real, age-defying, culture-crushing attractiveness that goes more than skin deep.

A panel discussion in March featured a number of young moms sharing how the COVID-19 pandemic has helped

them foster family togetherness with a new-found desire to realign family values. April offered Bible exposition with IGNITE speakers Ashley Bell and Joy Roberts gleaning insight from Luke 1:26-38, and May features IGNITE keynote Kari Patterson expounding on Christ's call to go the second mile.

WCM continues to find new ways to minister to women amid the pandemic, while looking forward to a time when REVIVE conferences can once again be held in person. Mark your calendars for REVIVE 2021, coming Nov. 5 (Portland) and Nov. 12 (Vancouver), and IGNITE in March 2022 (exact date TBD).

For more information, visit [wcm.westernseminary.edu](http://wcm.westernseminary.edu).

### COACHING PROGRAM DOUBLES ENROLLMENT AS TRAINING MOVES ONLINE

Western Seminary's Coaching Program has experienced significant growth over the past year. For the Spring 2021 semester, Western has 139 coaching students, more than twice the enrollment from the previous year. Director Jerry Essary, DMin, PCC, credits the program moving online in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as a key factor.

"Students no longer have to travel to Portland and take three or four days off work to do a class," says Essary. "We now have students from Israel, Greece, Canada, The Bahamas, and all over the U.S., so going online has opened up things completely for us."

Since many of the students in Western's coaching program are working pro-

fessionals, the convenience of online learning provides a significant advantage. Essary also believes that moving online actually better simulates the type of coaching most professional coaches will offer in their business.

"In our program, we do all of our training synchronously. It's not just watching videos; it's live training where students interact with each other and practice their coaching skills. Coaching works very well through Zoom."

Western's coaching program is approved and credentialed by the International Coaching Federation, a leading authority in the coaching industry. For more information, visit [westernseminary.edu/coaching](http://westernseminary.edu/coaching).



## DMin Program Adding New Cohort for Biblical Languages

The Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program at Western Seminary is expanding its options for advanced pastoral training with the addition of a new cohort—Biblical Languages in Ministry. The cohort launches in spring 2022 with an emphasis on exegeting specific portions of Scripture in Greek and Hebrew. This adds to the regularly offered cohorts in Christ-Centered Preaching, Pastoral and Ministry Leadership, and Theology in Ministry.

"This new cohort will engage ministry leaders in both Hebrew and Greek at whatever level they may find themselves," says Steve Mathewson, DMin program director.

The cohort is one of several recent updates to Western's DMin program. Eligibility for the program was recently changed so that a Master of Divinity (MDiv) is no longer required for admission. Moving forward, any ministry-oriented MA degree, together with requisite ministry experience, will allow an applicant to be considered.

In August, John Kwak joined the program as the assistant director. He holds several master's degrees, including an MA in New Testament from Biola University and an MA in Philosophy from the University of Southern California. He is also a candidate for a PhD at the University of Rochester and is on track to graduate

this year. Kwak has served in several ministry roles, including the associate pastor of adult education, life groups and Asian-American ministry at Village Church in Beaverton, Ore.

"Praise God for his faithfulness in bringing the perfect person for this unique position," said President Chuck Conniry, PhD. "John emerged as the search committee's first choice after a rigorous national search and will help us both with teaching and administration."

Kwak's arrival to Western comes at a time when enrollment in the DMin program has increased 30 percent over the past year, despite COVID-19 challenges. Current courses this spring feature faculty Kevin Vanhoozer, Daniel Doriani, and Steve Mathewson.

To learn more about Western's DMin program, visit [westernseminary.edu/dmin](http://westernseminary.edu/dmin).



Left: Steve Mathewson, Director

Right: John Kwak, Assistant Director

Over the past year, several longtime faculty and staff have retired after many years of faithful service to the Western Seminary community:



**JOHN JOHNSON**  
Professor of Theology

John Johnson, PhD, officially retired from his role as professor of theology last fall, though he continues to teach in an adjunct capacity at Western and assumed the title of writer in residence through 2021. He has been a professor at Western for 20 years, while serving for more than three decades as a pastor both locally and abroad.

Johnson has taught and written extensively on the topic of pastoral leadership. His first book, *Under an Open Heaven*, was published in 2017. His most recent book, *Missing Voices*, explores what godly leadership looks like in a global context. He is working on a third book, *Reframing Leadership*, set to be released in 2022.

Johnson and his wife split their time between Portland and a cabin on the Pend Oreille River in NE Washington. He continues to blog at [drjohnjohnson.org](http://drjohnjohnson.org).



**CLIFF STEIN**  
Physical Plant Director

Cliff Stein retired in January as the physical plant director at the Portland Campus after 15 years of service. Under his leadership, Western's historic campus received many updates over the years, including recent major updates to Armstrong, Bueerman Hall, and the Security House.

"I always thought that my job description here at Western was to be a servant to those faculty and staff who are serving and those students who will serve others around the world," Stein said.

Stein and his wife of 50 years are looking forward to rural living, a slower pace of life, and more time for grandkids and travel.



**JIM STEWART**  
Executive Dean,  
Online Campus

Jim Stewart retired as Western's executive dean of the online campus in April 2020. He served Western for over 26 years, providing leadership to the distance education program for two decades.

When he started at the online program, distance education involved mailing students boxes of VHS tapes. The technology advanced along with student growth, with enrollment going from 200 credit hours per semester to over 1,700 credit hours during his tenure. Despite that growth, Stewart always kept the online program focused on building relationships between faculty, students, and staff members.

His post-COVID retirement plans include travel, including seeing more of Virginia where he lives, photography, and writing several books that he has been considering for a long time.



**VIVIAN WOO**  
Access Services Coordinator

Vivian Woo retired last July after serving faithfully in the Portland Campus Library for 32 years. She has served countless students, teaching them how to use the Dewey system and assisting with circulation needs. Woo has seen many changes in the library, from card catalogs to OPACs, journal stacks to databases, and most recently, print books to e-books.

"She has served our students and staff by providing a faithful and steady presence at our circulation desk for many years," said Matthew Thiesen, director of library and information services. "We will miss her presence on our team."

Woo is now enjoying a quiet and slow-paced life of reading, connecting with friends through technology, watching NBA basketball, and spending time with family.



**JOSH MATHEWS, PhD**

**New Title:** Dean of Faculty, Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Associate Professor of Biblical Studies

**Hometown:** Gresham, Ore.

**Family Info:** My wife, Stacy, and I just celebrated our 15th anniversary. We have four kids. Hallel is 12, Simeon is 11, Lita is 9, and Silas is 7. And we have a dog named Emma.

**Q: Tell us a little bit about your new role at Western.**

**A:** As faculty dean it is my privilege to lead and support our wonderful faculty. The role of vice president of academic affairs also includes oversight of things like the curriculum, academic policies, Global Campus, and auxiliary ministries and centers. It is a joy to work with such a great team of people who love Jesus and serve Western well.

**Q: How did you get started in theological education?**

**A:** The Bible had a central place in my family growing up. When I was in my twenties, John Sailhamer, an Old Testament professor who used to teach at Western, came and taught a class on the Pentateuch at my church. Those few months stirred my interest in God's Word and it was not long after that I began my undergraduate studies in Bible, Theology, and biblical languages. Later I would go on to do my doctoral studies in Old Testament under Dr. Sailhamer's supervision.

**Q: What do you do for fun?**

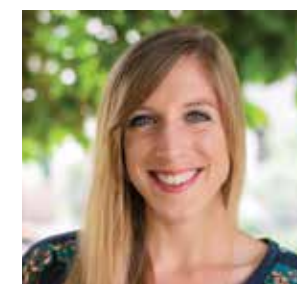
**A:** Our family spends a lot of time doing outside activities. We go on hikes in the gorge, trips to the beach, and all kinds of outings around the Portland area. I also like to play golf when I have a chance and enjoy reading on a wide range of topics in a variety of genres. I'm also always up for a good cup of coffee.

**Q: What's your church involvement/ministry experience?**

**A:** We go to Gresham Bible Church and I am an elder there. Our whole family is quite involved, and we love our church family.

**Q: As we look towards the future, what's your hope for Western Seminary?**

**A:** The Lord has been gracious to Western Seminary, and I am thankful for the opportunity to help continue the legacy of faithfulness the school has experienced under previous leadership. Chuck brings a perspective and energy to the president's office that will keep us grounded in our healthy historic convictions while also leading us forward into the future. My hope for Western is that we would proceed with the gospel at the center of our mission and grow in the creative ways we serve the church and prepare its leaders.



**JULIA MAYO, ThM**

**New Title:** Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Accreditation Liaison Officer

**Hometown:** Boring, Ore.

**Family Info:** Married to Ryan for almost 6 years, mother to James (3 years old) and Clara (1 year old)

**Q: Tell us a little bit about your new role at Western.**

**A:** As the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, I will continue to support the faculty and academic programs of the school. COVID has introduced many opportunities and challenges to how Western delivers our courses, and it's exciting to bring the classroom back to our students, whether that be in our online asynchronous courses, online LIVE courses, or in the classroom via our Flex course offerings.

I also began teaching through the Global Campus. Currently I'm teaching TH502 (Theology II) and it's been wonderful to facilitate forum discussions and interact with our students who are engaging so well with complex theological topics.

As the Accreditation Liaison Officer, I am responsible to maintain Western's good standing with our regional and professional accreditors through completing various reports and hosting evaluation visits.

**Q: You recently completed a ThM here at Western. Tell us a little about your experience with that.**

**A:** I absolutely loved working through the ThM program at Western. These classes provided an excellent space for me to personally work through topics such as the authority of Scripture and the role of women in church. Through the program I came to value the role of biblical and theological scholarship in aiding the church. Western exists not for itself, but to raise students who will serve in their local churches. This program has given me the confidence, ability, and framework to wrestle well with whatever biblical and/or theological issues cross my path.

**Q: Tell us about what's next for you.**

**A:** In fall 2021 I will begin my doctoral studies at the University of Edinburgh, pursuing a PhD in New Testament and Christian Origins. My dissertation will explore how female characters are portrayed in the New Testament.

**Q: What do you do for fun?**

**A:** In addition to going for walks and playing at the local playground with my kids, I love baking and exploring the many hiking trails of the great Pacific Northwest.

**Q: What's your current church involvement/ministry experience?**

**A:** I'm a member at Christ Church Sellwood here in Portland. I serve on the worship team and lead Bible studies as needed.



# God Makes a Way

COUNSELING STUDENT ESTHER LUBEMBA DESCRIBES HER REMARKABLE JOURNEY FROM CENTRAL AFRICA TO WESTERN SEMINARY

“I grew up surrounded by so much desperation in my family and community. I wanted to use counseling so that I could serve people in the most strategic ways.”

Growing up in the Congolese city of Goma, Esther Lubemba is no stranger to trauma. She was 11 years old when rebels came to her home and shot her father, brother, and sister. Her father and brother survived their injuries, but her sister did not. Not long after that, her father married another woman and abandoned the family, leaving Esther’s mother and her four children to face an uncertain future in a region of the world ravaged by war, poverty, and disease.

And yet, surrounded by so much suffering and sorrow, Esther did not give up hope.

“I praise God, because in all of those situations, He was always with us,” she insists. “I learned that God could give me joy and peace which didn’t depend on what I was going through.”

It is that unshakeable faith in the midst of trials that has led Esther all the way from the eastern edge of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the counseling program at Western Seminary’s Portland campus. It’s a journey marked by God’s continuing faithfulness to open doors along the way.



Above: Esther, second from the left, celebrating her graduation from Christian Bilingual University of Congo.  
Right: Esther and her mom.

Esther knew from an early age that she wanted to help others who had experienced similar difficulties in life. After finishing secondary school, she did her undergraduate studies at Christian Bilingual University of Congo, focusing on biblical counseling and psychology. She began working as a chaplain towards the end of her degree and moved into a full-time position with the school once she graduated.

While grateful for her education, Esther felt that she still did not have the expertise she needed to truly help those who had suffered so much trauma. She wanted to understand the issues deeply so that she could integrate good counseling techniques with theology.

“I grew up surrounded by so much desperation in my family and community. I wanted to use counseling so that I could serve people in the most strategic ways.”

That’s when Esther took a giant leap of faith. She decided to apply to the counseling program at Wheaton College, even though she had no money to pay for tuition, living expenses, or travel.

“Anyone could have told me, ‘Are you crazy, do you think this would really happen?’” she admits. “But I remembered the verse in the Bible that says the world and everything in it belongs to the Lord.”

Esther was accepted by Wheaton, but she didn’t receive any scholarship money. She wondered if other opportunities might be available, and decided to send an email to a friend at Mending the Soul, a non-profit organization in Oregon that ministers around the world to those who have experienced abuse. Esther had attended a Mending the Soul conference in Rwanda and was hopeful they might know of counseling programs at other schools. That’s when she was put in touch with Western professor Gerry Breshears, who had also been at the same conference. Breshears remembered meeting Esther at his table during the event.

“She stood out in the crowd for sure,” Breshears recalls. “I remembered her leading worship and being amazed at how this woman who had experienced so much suffering could sing about God’s goodness.”

He encouraged Esther to apply to Western, though he had no idea whether there would be any scholarship funds available for her. Esther decided to apply, asking God to make a way.

“I began praying that God would bless me with a scholarship by the end of April,” she says. “I had no promise of a scholarship, but I had peace.”



“It was amazing how the Lord opened up that short period of time for me to get my visa and travel. It’s really a miracle that I am here.”

Around the time that Esther’s application was submitted, Robert Jones, Western’s Senior Vice President of Advancement, took a call from a donor with a very specific request. The donor wanted to know if there was any way to provide scholarship money to a student from Congo. Jones was amazed, as the admissions team had just been discussing Esther’s application and wondering how they might be able to help her with a scholarship. Thanks to the generosity of that donor, Esther’s entire tuition and living expenses would be fully covered for the duration of her degree. Esther received word from the admissions team on the final day of the month that she would be given a full scholarship.

“My heart was full of joy that I couldn’t contain,” says Esther, beaming. “I quickly called my mother, my siblings and my friends to tell them about what the Lord had done for me.”

Esther was accepted for the fall semester, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced her to start her first semester online from Congo. Despite beginning the program as a remote student, she immediately felt cared for by the Western community.

“So many people reached out to me to tell me they were praying for me. I could experience their love and service even when I was still in Congo.”

She applied for a student visa in May, but as the months went by and the pandemic dragged on, there was no sign of the U.S. embassy reopening in Kinshasa. Esther was told that since her need wasn’t an emergency, she would have to keep waiting until the lockdown in Congo was lifted.

In October, the Congolese government decided to lift the lockdown restrictions, and Esther immediately called the embassy to find out if any appointments were available. She was



told they had just one appointment left. Esther immediately reserved a meeting and traveled to Kinshasa to get her visa approved later that month. She arrived in Portland in January just in time for the start of the spring semester. The timing was providential, as Congo went back into lockdown just two days after she left the country.

“It was amazing how the Lord opened up that short period of time for me to get my visa and travel,” she says. “It’s really a miracle that I am here.”

Esther’s transition to Portland hasn’t been easy, as she had had to navigate extreme differences in culture, weather, and food. But she remains hopeful and sees the challenges as simply another way for God to prove himself faithful.

“I am ready to learn and be challenged,” she says. “Sometimes it can feel overwhelming being here and I think to myself ‘It’s all just so big!’ But then I express that to God and ask Him to help me.”

Esther is pursuing her counseling degree with the goal of returning to Congo when she is done to provide hope and healing to others who have faced trauma, especially the younger generation. She has a vision to help Congolese youth rise up

to fill the void of leadership in her country. But to do that she knows that she needs more than techniques. She needs to see people the way that God sees them, body, soul, and spirit.

“This is something that I have noticed in all my classes at Western. My professors challenge me to have critical thinking so that we can integrate counseling theories with theology. Techniques are helpful, but they aren’t the ultimate answer.”

Esther realizes that she also has healing that she still needs to experience herself. That’s what excites her about being in a place that prioritizes the gospel to bring true spiritual transformation.

“I want to experience transformation personally at Western,” she says. “And I want to not only be equipped so that I can go back to Congo. I am asking God what ministry I can do here, that He might use me in my host family, in my church and in our community.”

## John Ebenezer

### COUNSELING STUDENT TALKS SUICIDAL YOUTH OFF BRIDGE

**Current City:** Sacramento, Calif.

**Degree:** M.A. Counseling

In his time as a mental health specialist at a group home in Placerville, Calif., John Ebenezer has experienced both the highs and lows that accompany working with troubled youth. He found himself in the middle of a mental health emergency a couple years ago when a client fled from the facility in a panic. Ebenezer knew the youth had been struggling and was the first to run after him. When he finally caught up with him, he found the client standing on the edge of the bridge, threatening to jump.

“He told me, ‘I am ready to end it, there’s nothing in life to look forward do,’” remembers Ebenezer. “In that moment I knew I needed to help him find a glimpse of hope in his life.”

Ebenezer’s earlier training at an emergency management class kicked in, and he reminded the teen about the people in his life who would miss him. The two of them had just spent time the previous day talking about his closest friends, and Ebenezer mentioned them all by name.

“You have these side conversations, and you don’t know if they mean anything. But in that moment, it helped me give him a sense of focus.”

With several cars stopped on the street below them, Ebenezer continued to remind him of all the people in the world who did care about him and wanted to make sure he would be OK. The teen eventually came down from the bridge on his own, and Ebenezer was later commended by his employer for helping to de-escalate the situation.

That experience helped fuel Ebenezer’s desire to continue his counseling training. As someone who



struggled with low self-esteem at times in his own life, he has come to see that his own authenticity is often the key to breakthrough with his clients.

“Everyone wants you to be real with them,” he says. “It gives you the opportunity to give them hope.”

With a year to go in his degree program at Western, he continues to seek out new opportunities to grow in his current job. He was recently promoted to the role of therapeutic day program specialist, where he facilitates group sessions. He focuses on building relationships with kids struggling with a range of mental health issues, including bipolar disorder, autism, anxiety disorders, and aggressive behaviors.

“I really want to build these kids up and be Jesus to them,” he says. “One of the things I’ve learned at Western is that it’s OK to struggle. Just don’t give up on people. Give them the benefit of the doubt as much as you can and meet them where they’re at.”

## Pamela Konstant

### MISSIONARY BRINGS THE GOSPEL TO THE FRENCH ALPS

**Current Location:** Camp des Cimes, France

**Degree:** Master of Divinity

Pamela Konstant serves at Camp des Cimes (“Camp of the Peaks”), an organization that runs evangelism and discipleship ministries through family camps in the French Alps. The French-speaking missionary assists with administration, discipleship, mentorship, teaching, and music at the camp, and is also involved in ministry at a nearby church in Grenoble.

“Our camp is uniquely positioned to be a catalyst for reaching France with the gospel,” she says.

Being a long-term missionary in France is the result of a very bold prayer that she prayed while living in Wyoming. Earlier in life, she had served for a decade as a church planter in Belgium but had returned to the States due to a traumatic event. She was enjoying her job and her community in Wyoming, but she wondered if there might be an opportunity to return to Europe someday. After a sightseeing trip to Belgium with her adult daughter, she returned home and began praying about whether God was calling her back to missionary service. She decided to call her former mission board and found out there was a camp in France looking for a French-speaking missionary with her specific skills.

“It was an amazing combination of God working on both sides,” she insists. “And there is no doubt that this is where I am supposed to be.”

Konstant is a Western Seminary student at the Global Campus, which allows her to earn a theology degree from France without having to leave her ministry. Her training at Western has made it possible to get theology and ministry training in a country where many pastors lack a formal seminary education.

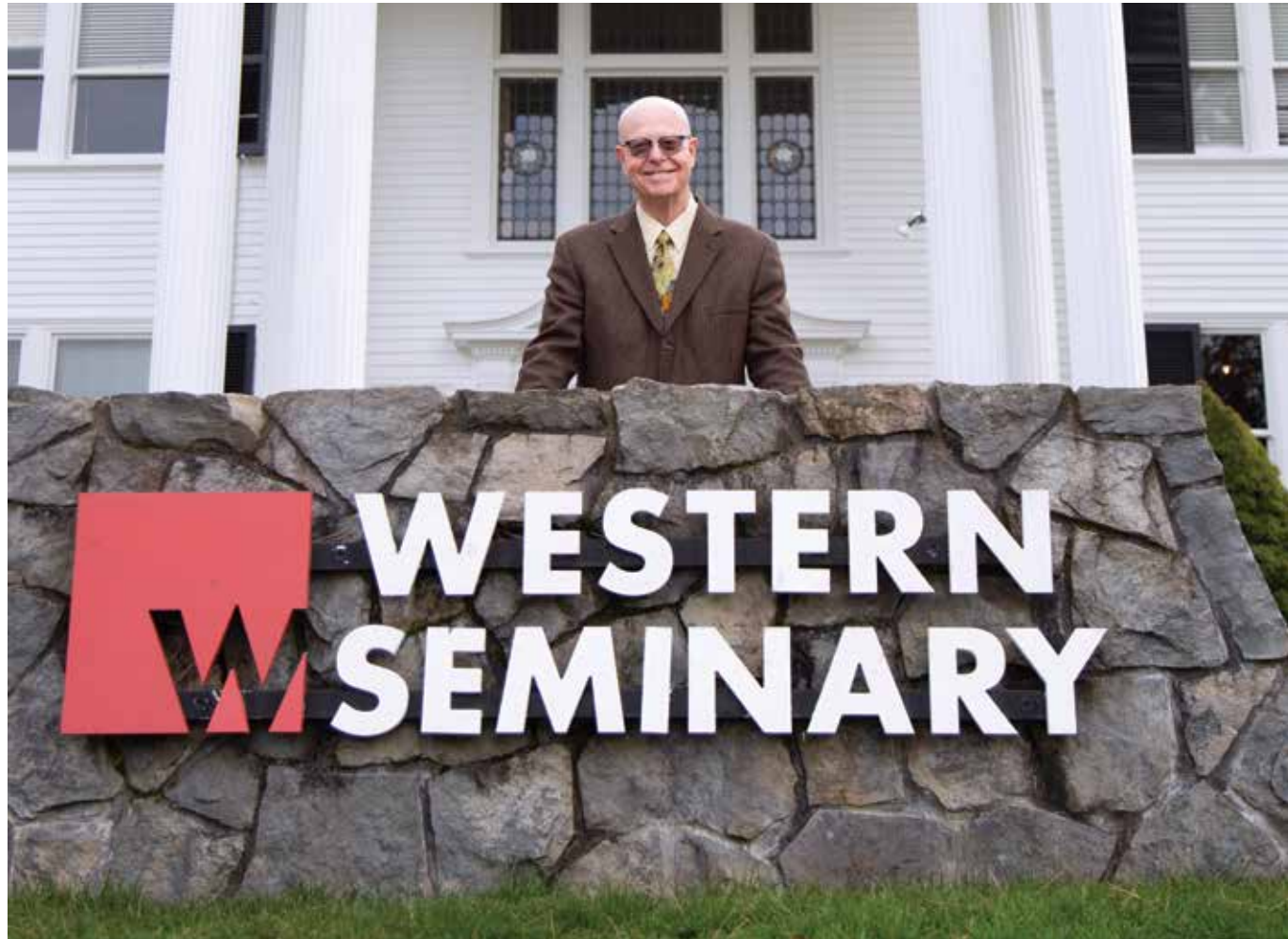
“It’s been such a blessing to be able to attend seminary online,” says Konstant. “This kind of program just



isn’t available here and I am seeing the benefits of bringing what I am learning to my teaching and discipleship ministries.”

Despite the time zone difference, Konstant has even participated in a recent Online LIVE course, where discussions with faculty and students happen in real time on Zoom. She would log in at 1:30 a.m. her time to participate. It’s a sacrifice, but one she believes is worth making.

“I don’t know all the ways God is going to use my seminary training, but I would love to be a part of seeing theological education grow in this country.”



# With and for the Church

CHUCK CONNIRY TAKES THE HELM AT WESTERN SEMINARY WITH A HEART TO FURTHER ITS MISSION TO SERVE THE CHURCH

“I wept as I listened to graduates sharing how their seminary experience had deepened their relationship with Jesus Christ and clarified their call to serve.”

Chuck Conniry has been working in theological education for nearly three decades, but it wasn't until he arrived at Western Seminary in 2018 that he experienced the most poignant moment of his seminary career. On the same day that he found out Western's board of trustees had approved his appointment as vice president of academic affairs, he was invited to attend the commencement banquet to hear testimonies from Western's recent graduates.

What he heard that night brought him to tears.

“I wept as I listened to graduates sharing how their seminary experience had deepened their relationship with Jesus Christ and clarified their call to serve,” Conniry said. “I knew right then that Western's mission of being ‘with and for the church,’ wasn't just a catchy slogan. It was reality.”

To Conniry, that first day on the job felt like coming home. Three years later, he takes the helm as Western's 13th president with a commitment to keep the seminary on mission to serve the church.

“At Western, it's hard to distinguish where the seminary ends and the church begins. That's my heartbeat—I want to advance that mission, helping our students live out a desire to serve Jesus Christ, with a high view of Scripture and a deep commitment to the life and well-being of the church.”

Conniry was unanimously appointed as president at the start of this year, replacing outgoing president Randy Roberts. Roberts decided to step down after 12 years as president and nearly 40 years of faithful service to Western. Conniry is grateful to be stepping into the role at time when the school is increasing kingdom impact around the world.

“I am coming into a system where we are already doing wonderful things for Jesus and the Kingdom,” He acknowledges. “My job now is to take that to the next level.”

## A REBELLIOUS ROCK MUSICIAN TURNS TO GOD

The journey to becoming president of an evangelical seminary is a testament to the transformative power of the gospel in Conniry's life. Raised in a loving Irish Catholic home in Southern California, he recalls his mother instilling in him an understanding of the bigness of God at an early age. But as a teen he rebelled against both God and his family, eventually turning to music, drugs, and parties for meaning.

By the time he was 20, his life was spinning out of control. He was grappling with the drug-related deaths of two friends and realized that he was headed down that same road. But he knew he didn't have the solution for getting his life back on track.

That's when a decision to take piano lessons reunited him with his childhood piano teacher, a meeting that would change his life forever.

“I hadn't seen her in years, and right away I realized that there was something different about her,” he recalls. “She proceeded to



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“We want to help students engage with culture rather than being conformed to it, so that they can respond with the love of Jesus.”

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present the gospel to me in a way that I had never heard it before—that Jesus loves me and wants me to experience the fullness of his salvation and unconditional love.”

The piano teacher gave him a Bible, which she signed and dated. On his way home, Conniry realized how God had orchestrated the events of his life to bring him to that precise moment. He surrendered his life to Christ that day.

As he began to read the Bible with a new understanding of the gospel, God kindled within him a desire for ministry. A few years later, he met and married his wife, Dianne, and they began serving in evangelistic ministry through their church where he served as associate pastor. He went on to earn his Master of Divinity at Bethel Seminary, and eventually helped plant a church in San Diego, Calif.

### LEARNING TO LOVE THE CHURCH

Conniry served as a pastor at several churches for over a decade, experiencing both the highs and lows of ministry. While leading a vibrant church body through a series of challenging growing pains, he started to face burnout. Unrealistic expectations from both his elder board and himself left him feeling disenchanted with ministry.

“I would put my head on the pillow at night feeling like I hadn’t done an adequate job as a pastor,” he remembers. “My tank was empty.”

He ended up transitioning out of pastoral ministry and joined Bethel Theological Seminary as an assistant professor. He continued to serve in ministry but he couldn’t seem to let go of his lingering disappointment with the church.

That disappointment bubbled up unexpectedly one Sunday morning while he was visiting a new church with his family.

Conniry remembers that church being unfriendly in every sense of the word.

“Nobody would talk to me, the gym still smelled like sweat, the speakers didn’t work. And as the service started, I remember asking God in that moment ‘Why did you come up with the idea of the church?’”

As the communion plates were being passed unceremoniously, he began to recount the myriad failures of the church throughout its history. He slowly chewed on the capsule-like cracker meant to represent the body of Christ. With the feeling of gritty paste in his teeth, he was struck in that moment by the similarity of that cracker to the church.

“I felt as if God was saying, ‘Yes, sometimes church is gritty, abrasive, tasteless, just like this cracker. But this is my body. And when you love the church, you love my body just the way that I love you.’”

Suddenly his eyes were opened to what it truly meant to love Christ’s body. By loving the church, he was loving Christ.

“I realized that the church consists of broken, imperfect people, with no reason to come together except that we’re all trying to follow Jesus. But to the extent that we can love and forgive each other, we are being the church.”

That profound moment in Conniry’s life revived his passion for the church. As he has moved through a number of roles in higher education, including professor of theology, Doctor of Ministry director, faculty dean, vice-president, provost, and president, he



Chuck and Dianne Conniry and family.

has not lost sight of the reality that seminaries ultimately exist to serve the church.

He begins his presidency at Western with that same focus.

“Discipleship can’t happen outside the church. As our mission statement says, Western can be a ‘catalyst and resource for spiritual transformation’, but we are not the end-all. Strengthening the collaboration with the seminary and the church is the key.”

### STAYING FAITHFULLY GROUNDED TO THE ROCK

Conniry steps into his role as president at a time when Western is seeing record enrollment. Despite the challenges and uncertainty brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, more and more men and women are choosing to continue their graduate education at Western. Conniry sees this as a testament to the growing demand for graduate-level education that is faithfully grounded in the gospel.

“We are anchored to the rock of historic orthodoxy, but also geared for the changing times,” he says. “Students want to sit at the feet of professors who not only walk them through the complex matrix

of theological education, but also bring them to a place where we can still be fully committed to Christ.”

Conniry laments that many seminaries today are more interested in deconstructing their students’ faith rather than building it up. He is aware of the potential for students to enter a seminary with a great enthusiasm to serve the Lord, but then leave with their faith in pieces.

“Our agenda should not be set by popular culture, but by the God who does not change like shifting shadows. We want to help students engage with culture rather than being conformed to it, so that they can respond with the love of Jesus.”

As Western moves ahead into the future, he believes that it is the seminary’s commitment to the church and to the gospel that will help it deal with whatever challenges and opportunities may be waiting around the corner.

“Our students can be prepared to handle the challenges of the 21st century as long as we continue to partner with the church, rather than our being an island to ourselves as an educational institution. This is what will advance the mission of Western.”



**FRANK LEDNICKY** (MDiv, 1984)

Frank Lednický served faithfully as a pastor for over 30 years in the Pacific Northwest. His ministry career included planting Harvest Community Church (Camas, Wash.) where he served as lead pastor for 18 years, as well as serving at Grace Baptist Church (Newberg, Ore.), and Journey Community Church in (Camas, Wash.). Today, he serves as the special projects coordinator at the Clark County Food Bank and is a part of New Heights Church in Vancouver, Wash.

Growing up outside of Portland, Lednický originally came to Western Seminary with the hopes of transferring to Dallas Theological Seminary.

“When I was considering a seminary, I had huge respect for DTS. I planned to knock my languages out at Western because it was close by, and then transfer to Dallas,” says Lednický.

But as he started his program, he quickly changed his mind and found his home at Western.

“My professors were so captivating that there were times I forgot to take notes!” he remembers. “I was enthralled by Ron Allen’s command of the Hebrew language and his love of the Bible.”

Although he graduated in 1984, Lednický continues to be a life-long learner, taking advantage of Western’s free audit benefits for alumni.



**SARA HALL** (MAC, 2007)

Sara Hall runs a part-time counseling business, Sara Hall Counseling, in Oregon City, Ore. After spending 14 years working with college students, she now focuses on young professional women, helping them navigate relationships, parenting, life transitions, and mental health issues.

In addition to counseling, she spends much of her time home-schooling her three children with her husband. When her kids are older, she hopes to return to collegiate work.



**DEMETRIUS ROGERS** (MABTS, 2011; ThM, 2014)

Demetrius Rogers serves as the lead pastor of Generations Church in Gresham, Ore. and is an online instructor at Western Seminary’s Global Campus. Rogers recently completed the coursework for his D.Min. degree from Western and is now setting his sights on completing the dissertation phase. His research topic centers on the practice of expository preaching in the Pentecostal context.

Driven by his love for people and his passion for Scripture, he is committed to building healthy communities that center around the Word. He loves spending time with Audrey, his wife of 20 years, and his three teenage children.



**TAYLOR TURKINGTON**

(MABTS, 2010; DMin, 2018)

Taylor Turkington recently helped launch a new organization called BibleEquipping, which provides a host of training opportunities for women to study and teach the Bible. BibleEquipping primarily partners with local churches for virtual events, consulting, and Bible teacher cohorts.

“The heart behind this ministry is to equip women to teach the Bible wherever they are at,” says Turkington. “All women are called to speak the truth of the Bible, no matter their audience or stage of life.”

Turkington was previously the co-director of The Verity Fellowship as well as the director of the Women’s Training Network at The Gospel Coalition. She lives with her family in Portland, Ore.



**MATT ZRUST** (MABTS, 2019)

Matt Zrust recently accepted the role of lead pastor at The Gathering Church in Portland, Ore. Zrust and his wife helped plant the church in 2009, where he first served as a deacon focusing on mercy ministries in the community, and later as an elder.

In 2015, his church encouraged him to acquire biblical and theological training, with an emphasis on pastoral counseling. His search for practical and sound theology led him to Western Seminary. While at Western, he also worked as assistant director of the physical plant at Western’s Portland Campus.

“The impact of my time at Western is difficult to overstate. The example and influence of godly men and women has given me a more mature vision of faithful ministry,” reflects Zrust. “God made it clear that this church role is where I’m to serve next. I’m excited to see what the Lord will do through this opportunity.”

Zrust has a heart to see a lasting gospel legacy established in Portland, perhaps through a Christian school for low-income communities.



**ABBY WILHELM** (MDiv, 2018)

Abby Wilhelm is commissioned as an activity duty chaplain in the United States Navy. She is serving as the deputy command chaplain for a Naval Air Station providing counseling, spiritual care, suicide intervention, and prevention training in a diverse, pluralistic environment of service members and their families. She also preaches and leads the protestant worship services regularly at the base chapel.

Wilhelm recently received her ordination credentials from the Evangelical Church Alliance. While at Western, she was honored to serve on staff at a local church in Portland while simultaneously joining the Navy as a chaplain candidate program officer in order to prepare for active duty service. Additionally, she gained clinical pastoral education experience with the VA Health Care System of Portland.



**JOSH JEN** (MDiv, 2019)

Josh Jen is finishing up his second master's degree at Jerusalem University College in Israel, studying biblical history and geography. Once he returns home to California, he plans to serve with his fiancé in a local church where he can use his skills of teaching, speaking, computers, event planning, and music. He has a heart for sparking a passion for God's Word in young men.



**REGINA STOUT** (ACTC, 2020)

Regina Stout runs Anchor and Aim Coaching, a coaching business that focuses on helping people in the workforce navigate work-related stress and interpersonal conflict.

After serving in healthcare for 20 years, Stout sensed it was time for a change. While she enjoyed her work as an emergency room nurse, she found herself increasingly drawn to helping people navigate difficult decisions and find ways

to move forward in their difficulties. After an accident forced her to take time off from work, she decided to test out an introductory-level coaching class at Western Seminary.

The class, taught by program director Jerry Essary, DMin, proved to be a turning point for Stout. She describes the class as a profound experience that resulted in mentoring relationships with Essary and other coaching faculty members.

"As I began to learn more about coaching, and be coached myself, I realized the impact it could have on others," recalls Stout.

Originally, Stout only planned to take a single class, but with each semester, her interest in coaching grew. In 2020, Stout completed her Advanced Certificate of Transformation Coaching from Western, as well as earning credentials through the International Coaching Federation.

"If you want a faith-based approach to coaching, along with support, flexibility, and solid mentoring, Western is a great place to go."



**NADINE ROY** (MAC, 2020)

Nadine Roy's family's involvement with Western Seminary goes back five generations, beginning with her great-great-grandfather, seminary president Albert G. Johnson. Driven by her interest in healing trauma, she discovered a passion for working with people suffering from eating disorders.

She currently works at a residential treatment site for adults with eating disorders. Her work at the residential site includes individual sessions with clients, leading group therapy, supporting clients during meals, and a wide variety of case management.

**WARDIN FAMILY GIFTS MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP TO WESTERN**

Western Seminary is honored to have received a memorial scholarship gift from Ila Wardin in memory of her husband, John K. Wardin.

John passed away January 4, 2021, at age 87. He grew up in Hillsdale, Ore. He and his brother, Ferd Wardin, were partners in many real estate investments and were owners of Newberg Ford. He was a faithful member of Southwest Bible Church in Beaverton, Ore.

The Wardin family has been instrumental in providing leadership at various levels at Western for over the past 60 years, including: trustee, faculty member, auxiliary ministries, two lead gifts for the creation of the Cline-Tunnell Library, and two endowed scholarships.

"We are both humbled and honored to be the recipients of such legacy generosity by the Wardin family," said President Chuck Conniry. "It is difficult to fully express the impact the Wardin family has made in the life of Western Seminary. We are eternally grateful."



**Come with Us to Israel!**

Join other Western Seminary alumni and friends on a tour of Israel with Dr. Carl Laney, March 14-27, 2022. Availability is limited. For more information, contact Bonnie Ekholm at 503-517-1897 or [bekholm@westernseminary.edu](mailto:bekholm@westernseminary.edu).



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# Remembering Those We Lost in 2020 – 2021



**DAVID THOMMEN**  
1970 – 2020

David Thommen contributed to Western Seminary in several roles over the years. He was the associate director of the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program for six years and taught many courses as an adjunct professor. He died suddenly on Jan. 14, 2020. He is survived by his wife Karla; his children Lindsey, Tyler, and Kyle; and three grandchildren.

At the time of his death, Thommen was nearing completion of his dissertation for his DMin degree at Western. His dissertation was approved posthumously, and a degree was presented to his family last year. Thommen also dedicated his life to pastoral ministry, including seven years as the pastor of Estacada Christian Church. He had a heart for shepherding pastors.

“David was an outstanding leader and exemplar of faithfulness,” said President Chuck Conniry. “I considered it a privilege to have worked with David. He was more than a coworker. He was a friend. His colleagues and students at Western Seminary deeply miss him.”



**KRISTEN WILLIAMS**  
1964 – 2020

Kristen Williams was a counseling student at Western’s Sacramento Campus. She died on Dec. 21, 2020, from complications due to a lifelong heart condition. She is survived by her husband David, and her children Garrett and Rachael.

Williams was born with a congenital heart defect and was only given one day to live. She defied the odds, undergoing an experimental operation at age 7 and later giving birth to two children despite the doctors’ belief that childbirth was not possible. She served in many ministries through her church and developed a passion for photography, gardening, and travel. She began working towards a MA in counseling at Western in 2015, persevering in her studies despite enduring a heart failure in 2018.

“What was most memorable about Kristen was her love for Jesus that radiated out to all of us, forming our lasting impression of her,” said Bev Wiens, the director of the counseling program in Sacramento. “Those of us on staff will never forget being greeted by her vivacious smile—always celebrating her abundant life in Jesus.”



Steve’s wife Ruthie painted this watercolor portrait of him around the time of his 70th birthday.

**STEVE KORCH**  
1950 – 2021

Steve Korch served faithfully at Western for many years, most recently as the director of pastoral training at the San Jose Campus. He died on Jan. 17 due to complications from a recent stroke. Korch is survived by Ruth, his wife of 48 years; his three children Jessica, Travers, and Holly; and seven grandchildren.

Korch first came to Western as a student, earning his Master of Divinity in 1978 and later his Doctor of Ministry in 2011. He joined Western as an adjunct faculty member in 1999, and later served as the executive dean in San Jose. In 2011, he joined the faculty as associate professor of pastoral ministry. He taught many courses over the years and wrote on the topics of spiritual formation and pastoral theology.

“I especially admired his passion to serve others, his resilience in the midst of various challenges, and his testimony regarding the transformational power of the biblical gospel,” said President Emeritus Randy Roberts. “He will be greatly missed by colleagues and students alike.”



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