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The Internship Program at the Seminary – An Overview

You must have seen them on the pulpit – theological students leading the worship service. Perhaps your church has even had a student doing an internship under the supervision of your local minister. The summer internship program for theological students has become a much appreciated part of the training for the ministry. What is not so well-known is the fact our students are expected to complete *four internships* during their four years of study at the seminary in Hamilton. In this article we provide an overview.

First internship

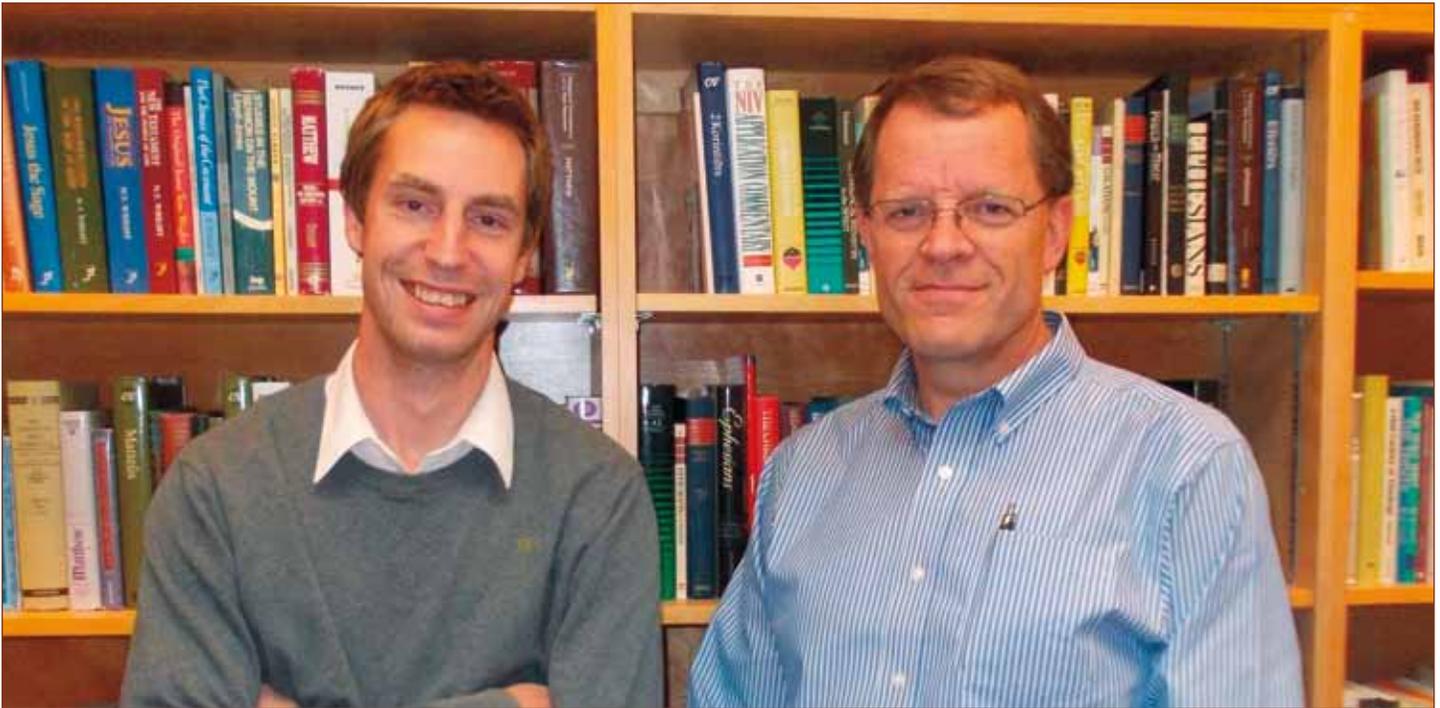
The first internship comes right after completing the first year of studies. It is a one- or two-week internship, called *Orientation Week*, which is designed to give the student a first taste of what the ministry is all about.

During this week the student “shadows” a minister and participates in his activities where this is possible. The student will work with the minister on his sermon for the next Sunday and accompany him on home visits. The student will also attend a council meeting and spend time with the minister asking questions about the ministry.

After the internship both the minister and the student submit a report. The students are usually very thankful for the experience. A quote from a student who recently finished his orientation week: “All in all, the entire orientation period with Pastor X was an amazing opportunity to get a glimpse into the life and work of a Canadian Reformed minister. The time I spent in the church of Y has whetted my appetite to continue moving forward with my studies at the seminary.”



Student Tyler Vandergaag with his mentor Rev. John Louwerse (Neerlandia)



Student Jeff Poort with his mentor Rev. Rob Schouten (Aldergrove)

Second internship

The second internship is the *Catechism Teaching Practicum*, which takes place during the second year of studies. Once again a student is placed under the mentorship of a minister. The student begins by observing the minister as he teaches Catechism classes in his congregation. The student then takes over one group of Catechism students from the minister. He will teach this group for a minimum of four weeks. If the student has the time and the guts, he might take on more than one group, or he may continue on for longer than four weeks.

Most theological students do not have teaching experience so they tend to struggle in the beginning. But with the advice and the encouragement of their mentor they usually make good progress in developing their teaching skills. When the student teaches his last class, an evaluator from the seminary will come out to evaluate the student's performance. The seminary has been blessed to be able to use the services of two experienced lecturers of the Teachers College in Hamilton for this purpose, Mr. A. Gunnink and Dr. C. Vanhalen.

Most students show good potential and complete the Catechism Teaching Practicum successfully. Occasionally it does happen that certain concerns need to be addressed. In such a case, an additional internship may be required.

Third internship

The third internship is the *Evangelism Practicum*, which takes place during the summer after the second year of studies. The goal of this internship is that students will learn more about evangelism and mission by being involved in an evangelism project or a church plant. If a student has the time and the money (or if someone donates air miles), he might even go to a mission field overseas. The minimum length of this internship is two weeks.

The evangelism internship was initiated in the summer of 2012. The first group of students went to a variety of places. One student did his internship with Rev. Paul Murphy in the URC church plant in Manhattan, New York. Another student went down to Florida to do an internship with Rev. Eric Watkins, OPC church planter in St. Augustine. The third student went all the way to Recife, Brazil, where he did some teaching at the John Calvin Institute and assisted the missionaries Wieske and VanSpronsen in their mission work. As you can imagine, these were exciting times for the students!

We do not foresee our students always going to exotic places like the ones mentioned in the previous paragraph. This year we have five students in the program and most

of them are staying in Canada. Nevertheless, given the fact that the Canadian Reformed Churches have only a few church plants on the go, we will continue to send some of our students to trustworthy colleagues in other federations. We can learn much from others, especially in the area of evangelism and church planting.

Fourth internship

The flagship of the Pastoral Training Program is the *Summer Internship*. This ten to twelve week internship takes place after the third year of theological studies. It is a kind of co-op program, fully sponsored by the churches through the PTP Funding Committee (Guelph-Emmanuel) which provides hosting churches with the funds they need in order to reimburse the students for their work.

The Summer Internship is the closest the student comes to experiencing what it is to be a minister of the Word. Under the supervision of his mentor he will make a sermon every week and be on the pulpit every Sunday morning. Towards the end of the internship he will probably try his hand at making two sermons and see how that goes. He will be doing pastoral home visits, initially with his mentor, later perhaps with an elder or on his own. The student will also attend council and consistory meetings, and be involved in activities that are still going on during the summer (for example, a new members' course or a pre-marriage counseling group). As a bonus, the student gets lots of time to discuss various aspects of the ministry with his mentor.

The Summer Internship has proved to be very beneficial. Of course, the one who benefits the most is the student. Through the years we have invariably received positive reports from the students. Nobody would have wanted to miss the experience. More than one student suggested that the internship should be longer, or that there should be two summer internships instead of one. The internship usually provides the student with the confidence that "he's got what it takes" to be a minister. In short, as one student said, "the summer internship is the best thing ever."

Another benefit of the Summer Internship is that it strengthens the bond between the seminary and the churches. It is always nice to see how hosting churches receive students and their families with open arms and how quickly the student becomes "their student." Minister, elders, and church members alike provide critique and encouragement along the way. Clearly, the churches cherish the opportunity to assist the seminary in the training for the ministry. Likewise, the seminary appreciates the willingness of ministers and local churches to assist us in preparing our students for the ministry.

This year we have three students in the field: Gerrit Bruintjes in Lincoln (with Rev. Wynia as mentor), Jeff Poort in Aldergrove (Rev. Schouten), and Tyler Vandergaag in Neerlandia (Rev. Louwerse). Next year we will probably need five placements. The year after that we may need eight! Please continue to pray for the seminary and for our students.



*Student
Gerrit Bruintjes
with his mentor
Rev. Dick Wynia
(Lincoln)*