

# Looking Back, Looking Forward: Images for Devotion and Worship

JUNE 2020

On March 6, 2020, as part of a broader communication to the Westmont Community around questions of race, President Beebe announced “we are working to make changes to the prayer chapel window that will allow a richer, more full expression of our Christian faith in hopes that all members of our community will feel welcome and included.”

The window in question is the only devotional representation of Christ on the Westmont campus. It was gifted to the college in 1961 as one element of an architectural whole, a “small, New England-style chapel” given to students as a dedicated space for prayer and small-group devotional gatherings. The occasion of the gift was the untimely death of Nancy Voskuyl, a first-year Westmont student and daughter of college president, Roger Voskuyl. We are grateful to the Voskuyl family for creating this dedicated space, even as it will always, for them, be associated with the tragic loss of a beloved daughter and sister.

Between 1961 and 2020 many things have changed. While Westmont remains rooted in and committed to the worldwide evangelical tradition, our student body is much more racially and ethnically diverse and much more confessionally diverse. The interior of the chapel itself has undergone changes, and was recently renovated to provide more flexibility. All these changes have focused attention on the role of this specific image in the lives of students and in the symbolic articulation our college’s mission and witness. With the blessing of the Voskuyl family, the college will be undertaking a project during the 2020-2021 school year called “Looking back, Looking Forward: Images for Worship and Devotion.” The goal of this project is to engage the college in the discussion of and development of a new range of images better suited to enhance God-glorifying and mission-enhancing worship for a diverse evangelical college community.

“Looking Back, Looking Forward” will, we hope, allow three conversations. First, it will create space to engage the prior image, its origins, its participation in a wider history of Christian representation, and its strengths and weaknesses over time in a changing physical and social context. Second, the project will create space for a community-based discussion aimed at generating new images, images intended to support the worship of a campus significantly richer in both ethnic and religious diversity than it was in 1961. Third, through a final poster session showing the results of study and image development and via chapel presentations, these activities will help engage and equip our entire student, staff and faculty community to appreciate more richly and approach more thoughtfully issues of race and representation, and issues of images and worship—themes crucial for the college’s ability to shape students and fulfill its mission to cultivate thoughtful scholars, grateful servants and faithful leaders for global engagement with the academy, church and world.

President Beebe, Campus Pastor Scott Lisea, and Professor Telford Work and I will introduce “Looking Back/Looking Forward” in chapel at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year.

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# Update on *Looking Back, Looking Forward Project*

JULY 10, 2020

Since providing the initial description for the Looking Back, Looking Forward: Images for Worship and Devotion project in June, additional elements have come into focus that will be of interest for the Westmont community.

## **What's the plan for the old image?**

The 1961 window was removed from the prayer chapel in late June. The former window will be on display in the library for a short time at the beginning of the fall, available for the initial "looking back" portion of our project. The interior of the chapel is a devotional space. The library is an academic space. It is fitting that as we begin this project, we move the window into a space dedicated to study and learning.

After its brief sojourn in the library, the window will go into storage as we begin the process of imagining new devotional imagery. We aim to generate a number of images to be printed on plexiglass, which will be regularly rotated into place as foci for devotion. We will also use this opportunity to further refresh the interior of the chapel.

When the process of imagining, proposing, selecting, rendering and printing the new images is complete, they will be put into use, and the former window will be placed in the prayer chapel's vestibule with a plaque explaining its memorial function and recounting something of its journey from devotional focus to memorial image. The chapel vestibule contains other memorials as well, so this effectively separates the memorial function of the vestibule from the devotional function of the sanctuary.

## **Who's going to come up with the new images?**

The Westmont community! Using the Capax Dei structure, four faculty will host four different groups of up to 12 students, each group using a different book that provides a "thematic spine" for image development. One group will study images of Christ throughout the history of the church and from around the world. A second group will study how God's church worships around the world. Third group will study the seasons of the church year as a way toward developing new images. A fourth group will think through the standard elements of Christian worship as a springboard for imagery. No artistic skill is needed. We're just looking for content ideas. At the end of the project each group will have generated a number of content ideas and from all four groups' ideas, 12 images will be selected for rendering and printing.

Because we hope this project will expand our imaginations and point us toward Westmont's future, first crack at this imaginative task will go to students participating in Westmont's Intercultural Programs. After that, other students who've expressed interest in these questions through their activities on campus and/or their areas of concentration, as, for example, the Catholics and Friends group, ethnic studies minors, global studies fellows, art, history and RS majors, and students who've completed an off-campus program will be invited. Remaining spots will then be opened up to other interested students.

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