POLITEIA

This August, Professor Amy Patterson made a trip to Zambia to interview people there about the role of churches in shaping AIDS policy.

The trip coincided with a conference at Justo Mwale Theological College in Lusaka, Zambia examining the church and how it addresses HIV/AIDS and poverty. Patterson was accompanied by Kyla Vander Hart, a Calvin senior who assisted in the research, and Professor Corwin Smidt who also attended and spoke at the conference, which was co-sponsored by The Paul Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics.

After the conference, Patterson and Vander Hart conducted interviews with church leaders, activists, donors and churches about how churches can help and hinder the shaping of AIDS policies.

“One thing that was pretty apparent was that, at least in Zambia, the church has played a pretty big role in key political movements, but they’ve been very hesitant on this issue,” said Patterson.

She said one of the reasons for this was a lack of knowledge — without skills and understanding of the issue, they don’t want to do more harm by giving out wrong information.

Another theme of the interviews was that the church was unwilling to address the complexity of the issue by addressing more fully the risk factors for AIDS.

“What does it mean that some people are more vulnerable [to AIDS] and how do we address that inequality?” said Patterson.

The research that Patterson completed is part of a larger sabbatical project, which will incorporate research from her upcoming semester in Ghana with Calvin’s off campus program.

“I walked away feeling that the church could do more— not just the church in Zambia, but that churches everywhere — could do more to talk about these difficult issues.

“Why aren’t we talking about these life and death things that are at the forefront in Zambia and test people’s faith every day?” said Patterson.

Patterson, Smidt and Vander Hart visited Victoria Falls this summer while in Zambia for a conference on the church, AIDS and poverty.

Koopman runs for Michigan House

Douglas Koopman is running for political office in Michigan.

Political Science professor Douglas Koopman recently announced he is running the 72nd district seat of the Michigan House of Representatives.

Koopman said he felt it was time to offer his skills to try to solve some of the problems facing Michigan and hopes to bring his experience in economic policy, among other things, to the legislature.

“I’m sad about what’s going on in Lansing and sad about what’s going on in Michigan,” he said. “I think I need to step into the arena and see if I can do something about it.”

Koopman’s political experience before arriving at Calvin is extensive. He spent 15 years in Washington, DC where he served on the staffs of various members of the U.S. House of Representatives including Michigan representatives Fred Upton, Paul Henry and Pete Hoekstra as well as serving as a major political and legislative advisor to then U.S. House Majority Leader Richard K. Armey.

He also served on the Joint Economic Committee, where he wrote congressional publications on economic issues for the U.S. House and Senate.

This is not the first time that a Political Science faculty member from Calvin has run for office. Paul Henry was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives and the Michigan Senate, before his
This June, Professor Simona Goi climbed the highest peak in North America: the 20,320 ft. high summit of Denali, also known as Mt. McKinley.

It took Goi and her group, consisting of six climbers and two guides, 23 days to climb the mountain, located in Alaska. Although Everest has a higher altitude than Denali, because its base is at a higher altitude the trek to the top of Denali is actually longer at 13,000 ft. Goi said this, combined with the extreme cold, makes Denali a very challenging mountain to climb.

"During the day, it was around 35 degrees, which isn’t that bad," she said, but added that while the sun never goes down, it would sometimes go behind the horizon and when that happened, within 20 minutes the temperature would drop 40 degrees.

As part of her preparation for the climb, Goi did progressively harder cardio workouts—some as long as six hours—and carried an increasingly heavier load. She could be seen this summer walking around Reed’s Lake with a 65 lb pack on her back.

"It was worth it once I got there," said Goi, saying she felt like she was in good physical shape for the mountain’s challenges.

In order to transport all the supplies the group needed for their almost three-week-long trek, the members of Goi’s team each carried a 60-65 pack on their backs along with a sled attached to their waists weighing an additional 65 lbs. Thankfully, they only carried the full load for the first few days. After that, they would do carries: when they would get to a camp, for instance, the camp at 9,000 ft, they would leave some supplies, then hike for about four hours to the camp at 11,000 ft, bury the remainder of their things in the snow, and then hike back to the original camp.

Once they reached the camp at 17,000 ft, they were ready to make the climb to the summit, which ended up being quite the experience. The weather said that there would be a storm the next day, but it came in sooner than expected.

"We reached the summit and were standing above the clouds, but saw this huge thunderhead that was higher than we were," said Goi. The team found themselves in a whiteout, an especially dangerous situation because they couldn’t see where they were going, and if they had fallen into one of the chutes in the rock that surrounded them, they could have slid down and died.

"I’ve never prayed so fervently in my life," said Goi. The team also had to cross a snow-laden slope in their descent and the possibility of an avalanche seemed too close for comfort. They eventually made it back down, and Goi says that even with the scary descent, it was a very worthwhile experience.

"I felt like I learned a great deal about climbing as well as about safety," she said, though she added that she could have done without the danger.

Goi is definitely not done climbing big mountains. While she doesn’t currently have plans, she said she hopes to go to the Himalayas in the near future.
Alumni Update: De Jong works for justice and diplomacy

Albert De Jong is a Political Science alumnus working to create justice, implement grace, and facilitate diplomacy through his work in the U.S. Department of State.

After graduating from Calvin College in 1983 with a major in Political Science and minors in History and German, De Jong enrolled in The American University in Washington, DC where he received a Masters Degree in International Affairs with concentrations in U.S. Foreign Police and Economic Development.

De Jong was hired by the Department of Defense as an investigator in 1988, and in 1991 accepted a job with the Department of State as a federal law enforcement officer in the Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS).

In the course of his work with DS, De Jong has spent several years enforcing passport and visa laws, traveling as a protective escort of Secretary of States Warren Christopher and Madeline Albright, and his current position, managing security programs at U.S. Embassies as a Regional Security Officer (RSO). He and his family have served in India (1997-1999), Niger (1999-2001), Uganda (2001-2004), and the Bahamas from 2006 to the present.

RSOs serve as the primary advisor to the U.S. Ambassador for law enforcement matters and have three main responsibilities in the facilitation of diplomacy: the physical security of Embassy related buildings, the security of information and information systems, and the safety and security of U.S. diplomats and their families.

De Jong said the responsibilities, variety and pace of work make it impossible for him to become complacent or bored. De Jong’s work has taken him around the world and into a variety of unique situations.

“I’ve been privileged to benefit from the loyalty of Gurkas, the majesty of Touregs, the hospitality of missionaries, the wealth of sheiks and princes, the generosity of tribal chiefs, and the perspectives of refugees. I’ve eaten with gold tableware with princes, drank from a common bowl of fermented milk in a desert village, and shared tea with prisoners in cold Indian jails. I’ve seen the effects of sorcery, visited leprosy hospitals, and coped with the impact of malaria on my employees. I’ve witnessed the work of the Sisters of Charity in Calcutta, seen evil manifested in almost unimaginable ways, and walked the horrible wasteland of a Saharan gold field.

“Indian weddings, Muslim funerals, Thanksgiving with missionaries in the desert, tribal dances and diplomatic receptions. Years without ice cream. Year-round, candy-like pineapple, mangos, bananas and passion fruit. Stampeding giraffes, charging elephants, lounging lions, scary barracudas, colorful tropical fish, lazy warthogs, meandering monkeys, domestic lizards.

“Schools without books, children without limbs, HIV orphans, bodies on roads and in rivers, people without food or clothing or the means to achieve either. Sporadic electricity, burning garbage, open sewers, questionable water supply. Corrupt officials, mob justice, missionary friends and diplomatic privilege. All these and more have been parts of our lives. The fantastic and mundane, the modern and the medieval.”

De Jong observed that grace is not only something to be received. Rather, grace can, and should be conducted, he said, “that is, special grace empowers implementation of constructive spread of common grace (benefiting human life), which in turn opens doors for special grace to flourish.

De Jong finds the emphasis in some places on comparing end-times prophecy to current events to be distracting. “There are many different people in the world,” he observed, “what makes us think God cares any less for those who are not yet part of the kingdom?”

He added that he enjoys encountering other Calvin alumni elsewhere in the world. He said, “Imagine being a newly arrived diplomat in Uganda and finding a school for your children with a Calvin trained principal.”

“There is much to do,” he said. “More fun and adventure to be experienced, more evil to be restrained, more lives to be positively impacted, more of the kingdom to be advanced. Much is possible today.”

What is the role of religion in fostering civic responsibility? Calvin professors Corwin Smidt, Douglas Koopman and James Penning, along with Steven Monsma and Professor Kevin den Dulk, a Calvin alumni and professor of political science at Grand Valley State University are writing a book in response to that question.

The project is funded by a grant that the Paul B. Henry Institute received from the Bradley Foundation. Tentatively titled “Pews, Prayers and Participation: The Role of Religion in Fostering Civic Responsibility,” the book draws on national data surveys from the past 15 years.

In looking at civic responsibility, the authors considered three aspects: behaviors, capacities, and virtues. In looking at behaviors, they looked at to what extent religious people are more likely to do things like make charitable contributions or volunteer.

Capacities entailed the extent to which involvement in church life translates into civic skills that can then be transferred to the political community. Finally, they examined virtues related to work ethic, honesty and tolerance.

By looking at both the public dimension of religion — in this case participation in church, and the private dimension — in this case prayer, the researchers were able to draw conclusions about religion’s effect on civic responsibility.

Among their findings was evidence that those who exhibit high levels of public and private faith are those who have the most characteristics that tend to be valued in public life. For example, these people are more likely to volunteer, even for secular causes.

Another finding was that those who have a high level of private religion but low levels of church attendance tend to be the least involved in public life. According to the authors, this may implicate that the privatization of religion may undermine democratic participation.

The book is scheduled to come out in the fall of next year.
‘07 Scholarship recipients announced

De Kryger-Monsman Memorial Prize
As a result of a gift to Calvin College by Mrs. Gerald Monsman in memory of her husband, one prize is awarded each year to a junior Political Science or International Relations major for academic achievement.
2007 winner: Philip Jackson

Charles Strikerwa Scholarship
The Charles Strikerwa Scholarship was established by the late John Van Dellen to honor his nephew, long-time Political Science Department faculty member, Charles Strikerwa. The scholarship is awarded to a current Calvin Political Science or International Relations major who is an "all-around good student who contributes significantly to the classroom and campus environment."
2007 winners: Jonathan Hirte and Amanda Stek

Peace and Justice Scholarship
Calvin College alumnus Paul Hoffman established this scholarship fund in June 1987. The fund provides scholarships to Calvin College students who are actively involved with global peace and justice issues, particularly related to the causes of war and conditions for peace in the nuclear age. One or two scholarships are awarded each year.
2007 winners: Dana Poll and John Persenaire

Johan and Wilima Westra Scholarship
Dr. Johan G. Westra was the first full-time Political Science professor at Calvin College. He taught for 27 years in the department and served as the pre-law advisor for more than 20 years. His wife, Wilma, served Calvin College in various positions for many years. The Westras established this scholarship for a student either majoring in Political Science or who is in the pre-law program. Special consideration is given to students active in volunteer work and interested in a career in public service.
2007 winners: Austin Hakes, Sarah Vester

Dr. Bernard Zylstra, S.J.D., Memorial Scholarship
Gerrit and Carol Zylstra have established this scholarship to honor their brother Bernard Zylstra, former Professor of Political Theory and President of the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, Canada. Bernard Zylstra, known for his unusually broad vision and deep commitment to the lordship of Christ in all life, actively promoted the development of Christian political theory. This scholarship is intended to support the continuation of the development of Christian political theory.
2007 winners: Nate Knapper, David Jasperse, Joseph Breems

Professors’ Picks

Blood and Thunder: An Epic of the American West by Hampton Sides
An exciting and informative look at how the United States conquered the Southwest, from St. Louis to San Diego. Politics, war, culture, drama, history, human interest. Don’t miss this one!
– Dr. James Penning

The Lives of Others (2007)
A rich and fascinating character study on the effects of totalitarian government on social life and human relationships, and on the stubborn humanity that shines through even the most determined efforts to distort it.
– Professor Bill Stevenson

Enrique’s Journey by Sonia Nazario
Written by a Los Angeles Times journalist, the book examines Central American children whose mothers have left to go the US to work. These children often spend years away from their mothers, and eventually many decide to travel to the US to meet up with them. The book looks at their very dangerous, long, and uncertain trek by following one Honduran boy. Timely because it deals with immigration issues, and particularly the cost of immigration to families and relationships.
– Dr. Amy Patterson

Spotlight on: Democracy in America by Alexis de Tocqueville

Students in Professor Stevenson’s “Political Thought of Tocqueville” class offer their insights:

Alexis de Tocqueville’s insights into American character, culture, religion and feelings in “Democracy in America” are some of the only objective observations of America available. Read a few pages and you begin to realize that young Alexis’ commentary on democratic life, which was written before the Civil War, has more contemporary relevance than many books written by American authors in the last twenty years. – Tommy Heyboer

I think Tocqueville is extremely important, first because he predicts how this country will pan out and he is correct in many predictions, and second, because his observations help us to understand American thought. I think this is essential to understanding political thought and the will of this country, something that all citizens should be involved in if we want this country to succeed. – Michelle Albertson

Stranger Than Fiction (2006)
Great movie about a character in a novel who actually exists, and is controlled by the novel’s author. A different kind of movie for Will Farrell, and a great discussion starter on some deep religious themes such as free will and fate.
– Dr. Douglas Koopman