

# The Commons

A PUBLICATION OF WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
MARCH 2005 VOL. 8 NO. 2

## Intercultural Immersion: Oman

On January 3, Dr. David Stubbs and nine WTS students departed for the Middle Eastern country of Oman. Under the direction of RCA missionary Michael Bos, we were privileged to spend nine days studying, exploring, and engaging the culture of this unique Muslim land.

A country of vivid contrasts, Oman is a fascinating interplay of old world heritage and up-to-the-minute modernity. While the Bedouin families of the interior live the simple, centuries-old existence of Arabian nomads, Oman's coastal regions boast the latest in 21st century technology. Women dressed in traditional Muslim garb chat freely on satellite-equipped cellular phones. The gender-segregated prayer rooms of the Grand Mosque are outfitted with twin plasma-screen televisions. Even the wash-rooms for required ritual ablutions feature motion-detecting sensors on the spigots.

Our treks into Oman's rugged inlands revealed a breathtaking landscape of rocky crags and majestic sand dunes dotted by occasional oases and small lagoons. Our outdoor camps, fireside conversations, and camel rides transported us into the Old Testament world. Those of us who took the camel challenge have a newfound respect for our biblical forbearer; how Abraham made it 15 minutes out of Ur on one of those mounts is beyond me.

The Omani population is a friendly community of native Arabs, expatriate Indians and Africans, and foreign guests. This ethnic eclect-



(From L to R) Kamren Zorgdrager, Andy Dragt, Rebekah Zorgdrager, Dr. David Stubbs, Rylan Kahly, Jeff Petersen, Jamie Schmelting, Tim Breen, Cody Statema, and Mary Climer

icism lends itself to a religious plurality that both intrigued and challenged Americans accustomed to a comfortable Christian majority.

We dialogued with people of many faith-persuasions, but most of our interfaith conversations were with Omani Muslims. Through a personal friend of Rev. Bos we learned more about Islamic theology. We observed Islamic education at the Institute of Sharia Science and Sultan Qaboos University. In a memorable day trip to the modest estate of a good-

natured architect and cucumber farmer, we were treated to a layman's perspective on Muslim-Christian relations, Arab-American foreign policy, and the very latest in hydroponic growing methods.

The most memorable moments for me, though, were opportunities to

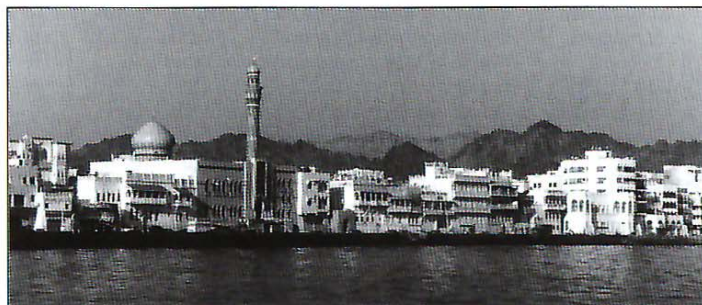
worship among Christians in Oman. These shared experiences of intercontinental koinonia reinforced our vision that Christ's church is unbound by place or culture.



Mary, Jamie, and Bekah wearing head coverings out of respect for the culture

Sincere thanks to Rev. Michael Bos and the Al-Amana Centre for their great kindness in hosting us, to the government of Oman for their hospitality, and to the many generous friends of the seminary who underwrote the cost of our excursion. Thank you.

— Tim Breen  
WTS Middler



The shoreline of Muttrah, the city where the WTS group lodged