

# THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

## Graduation 2011 by Rev. Alan D. Strange



*Graduates (left to right): Brian Blummer, Erik Stolte, Steve Williamson, and Matt Van Dyken*

Mid-America Reformed Seminary at recent commencement exercises graduated four men with Master of Divinity degrees. The graduates—Brian Blummer, Erik Stolte, Matt Van Dyken, and Steve Williamson—are from the United States, New Zealand, and Canada, respectively. They are committed to serving in the churches both here and abroad, with Erik returning home for service in the Reformed Church in New Zealand, Brian stateside, and Steve and Matt interested in home and foreign missions.

The graduation ceremony was a fit ending to the seminary training of these men and the beginning of a new phase of service. The ceremony was both dignified and joyful. Many family members and friends gathered at Lynwood URC to celebrate the occasion. After a stately processional and hymn, President Venema opened the proceedings with prayer and introduction of our speaker, the Rev. Jacques Roets. Rev. Roets is a 2001 graduate of Mid-America, pastoring first Cornerstone URC in Sanborn, Iowa, and now Redeemer URC in Dyer, Indiana. He gave an excellent address on “Godliness,” from I Timothy 4:6-16. Rev. Roets reminded the graduates of the utter necessity of godliness in the whole of their lives. Such godliness is indispensable to a lifetime of ministry among God’s covenant people.

Following that stirring address, President Venema and Board President, the Rev. Richard Kuiken, conferred the degrees on the graduates. Dr. Venema had earlier recognized the wives, mother, and fiancée of the graduates and the role that each had played in their accomplishments. It is customary for a faculty member to give the new graduates a charge. That task fell to Old Testament Professor Mark Vander Hart. Rev. Vander Hart ably charged the graduates to follow the Lord courageously and to remain life-long students of the Word of God.

The concluding elements of the service included a responsive litany, led by Dr. J. Mark Beach, the recitation of the Nicene Creed, led by our newest faculty member, the Rev. Marcus Mininger, and a prayer for God’s blessing upon the new alumni, led by the Rev. Alan D. Strange. After the recessional hymn and postlude (all played beautifully by Nancy Venema), the graduates went to the fellowship hall of the church to receive congratulations and to enjoy a time of refreshments and fellowship.



*Graduates and faculty*

## Graduation Charge

by Rev. Mark D. Vander Hart

It was my privilege, as a faculty member, to bring the charge to the 2011 graduates. I reminded the men that in the Bible we can hear several times the echoes of what the Lord told Joshua in Joshua 1:5-9. This leader of God’s people, anticipating the perfect Joshua later on in redemptive-history (the Lord Jesus Christ), is told to be strong and courageous.

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The task ahead is always intimidating from a human point of view. But God’s church and her leaders have the unfailing promise of our Lord that He will never leave us or forsake us. What stands out so strikingly about God’s words to that first Joshua is that God does not describe the particulars of military strategy at all! Nothing is said about how many men will be needed for this battle or that military campaign. The reason is that “first things come first.” The battle—also in the ministry—is not against flesh and blood, but it is against principalities and spiritual powers.

The chief weapon is the “sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” The minister in God’s church therefore must never give in to the temptation to use human gimmicks or to exert power-plays in his office. The Word of God is driven home by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Word and Spirit together is a Biblical and Reformed accent. That Word must always abide in the mouth and in the heart of God’s servant, and he must always grow in his knowledge of and skill in that Word. In that sense, one never graduates from the “school of Christ.”

## Are you Giving Efficiently?

by Keith Le Mahieu



As Christians we desire to be faithful with the resources God has provided. Our devotion to Christ includes a proper view of good stewardship. Such a view is essential to our spiritual well-being – “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” While we don’t give for what it gets us, there are certain incentives to charitable giving that can help us with our stewardship.

I will briefly mention a few areas where you might be able to maximize your giving efficiency. First, the United States Congress passed legislation last December that impacts charitable giving in several important ways.

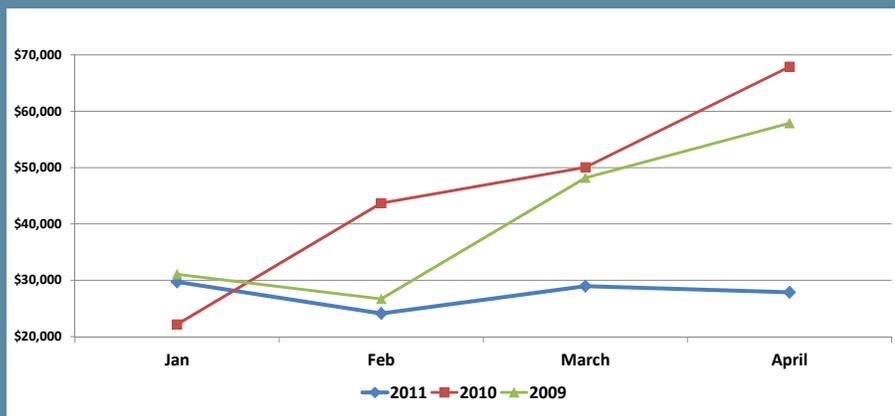
First, it postponed a change to the estate tax exemption from \$5 million back to \$1 million, and it maintained the maximum estate tax rate of 35% instead of 55%. This change may make funding a Charitable Gift Annuity or Charitable Remainder Trust very attractive. A second provision is the extension of the IRA charitable rollover provision which permits tax-free distributions from IRAs up to \$100,000, direct to charities, for individuals who are 70 ½ or older. This makes it possible to provide tax-free charitable gifts while meeting IRA minimum distribution requirements.

Another way you may be able to give more efficiently is in the area of long-term appreciated assets. By gifting a long-term appreciated asset to charity you can avoid tax on the gain while receiving a tax deduction for the value of the gifted property. Examples of long-term appreciated assets are stocks, mutual funds, or real estate.

A donation of property that is subject to ordinary income treatment is another option for giving efficiently. For example, a gift of farm commodities is often more advantageous than cash for farmers. Because many farmers do not have enough itemized deductions they must take the standard deduction. If a farmer takes the standard deduction, there is no tax benefit from a charitable contribution of cash. A donation of commodities reduces the farmer’s income, thus reducing federal, state and self-employment taxes, and the farmer may deduct the cost of production on the amount of commodities that were gifted.

Before making any major gift decisions, make sure you consult your tax professional.

We Need Your Help! Summer is here and that usually means a decline in charitable giving. While we ended 2010 on better financial terms than the previous year, donations for 2011 are falling below 2010. The following chart shows giving for this period over the past three years.



Please don’t forget us. The new school year will begin in just a few short weeks. Your help is needed now more than ever.

## Seminary Sunday

For many years Mid-America has organized what is known as “Seminary Sunday.” On a given Sunday each spring, Mid-America personnel travel to a particular geographic locale to provide pulpit supply for churches in that region. This pulpit supply is provided by both seminary faculty and students.

Seminary Sunday has a number of benefits. First, it gives our students the opportunity to exhort in churches where they may not have exhorted before. Second, it gives Mid-America students and faculty the chance to get to know churches in a particular region, and it gives these churches the opportunity to see the work being done to prepare men for the gospel ministry. Finally, Mid-America’s Ministerial Apprenticeship Program requires students to exhort a particular number of times during the school year, and Seminary Sunday helps these students fulfill that requirement.

Seminary Sunday 2011 occurred in Wisconsin on April 10. Faculty and students filled pulpits at Providence Presbyterian in Madison, Christ Presbyterian in Janesville, Grace Reformed in Reedsburg, Covenant Presbyterian in New Berlin, Bethel Presbyterian in Oostburg, Reformation Presbyterian in Sheboygan, Salem Ebenezer Reformed in Manitowoc, Gibbsville Reformed in Gibbsville, and Grace Reformed in Waupun. The thought of a seminary unleashing a group of students on the churches might sound a bit unnerving, but the students came well-prepared, and the response was most positive.

Mid-America continues to do Seminary Sundays each year because they have been such a blessing to both the students and the churches. Planning for Seminary Sunday begins late in the year, so if you are interested in participating in Seminary Sunday 2012, please contact Mid-America’s Director of Development or the Director of the Ministerial Apprenticeship Program.

### Upcoming Events

For information about our upcoming events, check out our website at [www.midamerica.edu](http://www.midamerica.edu).

## Board of Trustees Report

Rev. Richard Kuiken, President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary's Board of Trustees, opened our May 12, 2011, meeting with Scripture and prayer. This prayerful beginning set the stage for our spring Board meeting, which included several important items on its agenda.

Following extensive interviews conducted by Board members with opportunity for questions from the entire Board, Dr. J. Mark Beach was reappointed to a four-year term as Professor of Ministerial and Doctrinal Studies, Mrs. Florence Kooiman was reappointed to a two-year term as Business Manager, Mr. Bart Voskuil was reappointed to a two-year term as Associate Librarian, and Mr. Keith LeMahieu was granted an extension of his appointment as Director of Development and Recruiting for another year. Discussion regarding the possible separation of development and recruiting responsibilities led to the formation of an ad hoc committee to explore this issue. That committee will present its recommendations at the Board's fall meeting.

The nomination slate for prospective Board members was finalized (see insert). Rev. Alan

Lutz was not able to stand for re-election due to family and church commitments. On behalf of the Board, the president thanked Rev. Lutz for his past three years of service and wished him God's blessing on his future endeavors. The Board also acquiesced to the letter of resignation from Dr. John R. Sittema. He has accepted the Presidency of WorldServe Mission in addition to his current responsibilities as Senior Pastor of Christ Church in Jacksonville, Florida. The Board has appreciated his insight and service for the past five years and wishes him God's blessing on this new responsibility of leadership in church planting around the globe.

The Board of Trustees received several reports from standing committees that were informative and helpful in demonstrating the ongoing work of the Seminary. The Long Range Planning Committee in particular will be considering important issues in the near future as they assess the long range goals for the Seminary.

A highlight for the Board of Trustees was the opportunity for the entire Board to attend the Seminary's commencement service on



*Mid-America's Board of Trustees at Commencement*

Thursday evening. We were challenged by the commencement speaker, Rev. Jacques Roets, and afterward enjoyed a time of fellowship with many from the Seminary community.

The Board of Trustees meeting concluded with a time of discussion in executive session on Friday. We expressed our appreciation for the professors, and staff for their valuable contributions to the work of training young men to become pastors for the sake of Christ Jesus, our Lord of the church.

Paul Anema  
Secretary, Board of Trustees

## Student Conference: Dr. Paul Munson



*Dr. Paul Munson*

On March 29th the student body held its annual Spring Conference. This year's topic was Aesthetics: The Study of Beauty. The speaker was Dr. Paul Munson, Professor of Music at Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania. Dr. Munson teaches classes on music history, musicology, and music and art appreciation.

His first lecture, "Doctrines of Beauty," offered a definition of beauty, combating both the classical view of beauty (beauty is a measure of measurements and symmetry) and

the postmodern view ("beauty is in the eye of the beholder"). Rather, Munson taught that as Christians we see that beauty has its foundation in our beautiful God. Beauty, then, is that which puts truth and goodness (which are rooted in God) on display.

In his second lecture, Dr. Munson applied this high view of beauty to our everyday lives, especially to how we spend our leisure time. The title of this lecture, "Let Heaven and Nature Sing: General Revelation and Christian Joy," summarizes Munson's main argument that "the essence of recreation is the leisurely contemplation of general revelation [which is] an essential part of Christian joy." Our leisure time should be spent seeking to enjoy God, not "enjoying ourselves." This is

best accomplished by contemplating general revelation "in art, in nature, and in history."

The final lecture, "Why We Fight over Church Music," addressed the nature of singing in church. Using Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, Munson argued that the most important aspect of congregational singing is what we are communicating - the words of Christ. For that reason, our emotion in worship should result from what we are singing, not being an end to itself. Our singing should conform to biblical principles.

The seminary was greatly blessed by Dr. Munson. His visit has sparked many lively conversations about beauty and how to best enjoy it in our Christian life.

## Summer Assignments

Andrew DeYoung: Trinity Lutheran Church (LC-MS) in Tinley Park, Illinois

Yevgeni Kogay: Reformation Presbyterian Church in Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Nathan Tomlinson: Jaffery Presbyterian (OPC) in Jaffery, New Hampshire

Robert Van der Woerd: Orthodox Reformed (URC) in Edmonton, Alberta

David Franks: Christ Covenant OPC in Sheridan, Indiana

Geoffrey Grissom: Covenant Presbyterian (OPC) in Hammond, Wisconsin

Pablo Landázuri: El Pacto de Gracias (URC) in Chicago Heights, Illinois

James Oord: Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Sanborn, Iowa

Roberto Rossi: United Reformed Church in Phoenix, Arizona

Paul S.: Presbyterian Church in America in Grand Forks, North Dakota

Tim Scheuers: First United Reformed Church in Chino, California

Jeffrey Scott: Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Momence, Illinois

Caleb Smith: New Covenant Community (OPC) in New Lenox, Illinois

Brian Zegers: Oak Glen United Reformed Church in Lansing, Illinois

## Graduate Awards

Every spring the faculty selects from among the graduates those who have distinguished themselves academically. This year, Erik Stolte and Matt Van Dyken each received awards. Erik Stolte received the award in Ministerial and Doctrinal Studies. Matt Van Dyken was given the Biblical Studies, Ecclesiastical Studies, and Doctrinal Studies awards.



(L to R) Seniors Erik Stolte and Matt Van Dyken



SPREAD THE WORD.  
CULTIVATE THE HEART.  
EXPERIENCE THE HARVEST.



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