

THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

Students Benefit from Four Adjunct Professors by Glenda Mathes



Dr. Venema with adjunct professors, Rev. Ipema (left) and Rev. Troxel (right).

Four adjunct professors are teaching at Mid-America this semester: Dr. Richard B. Gaffin, Rev. Paul R. Ipema, Mr. Nicholas Piotrowski, and Dr. A. Craig Troxel.

Dr. Richard Gaffin, Charles Krahe Professor Emeritus of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia), led a Fall Lecture in 2002, and will teach an intensive course of New Testament Exegesis (Epistles) from April 25-29 (see sidebar for more information).

Rev. Paul Ipema is a Mid-America graduate (1992) and served two URNCA congregations before his current ministry at Community URC (Schererville, IN). He often shares from his pastoral experience while teaching Occasional Sermon.

“My class lectures cover various aspects of preaching during the course of the church calendar,” he says. “I also instruct the students about preaching in connection with the sacraments, and preaching on occasions such as weddings, funerals, and special prayer services. During the last weeks of the course, each student will deliver an assigned sermon for a specific pastoral situation.”

Dr. Troxel pastors Bethel OPC in Wheaton, IL, and is an Adjunct Professor at Westminster Theological Seminary. He teaches the “pastoral theology” side of Pastoral Care and Counseling by focusing on the pastor as disciple (personal godliness), ambassador (preaching and teaching), intercessory steward (prayer and sacraments), and shepherd (diverse forms of care for the flock).

“My goals are to equip the students with an overall grid by which they can organize and conceive of the work of the pastor at large,” says Dr. Troxel. “But I also seek to give them plenty of practical and specific real-life examples and counsel, to ‘flesh out’ the theological outlines of the discipline.”

Mr. Piotrowski is a doctrinal candidate at Wheaton College and is on the Adjunct Faculty of Grand Canyon University. He is a member of Christ the King Church in Batavia, IL, and heads up the Fox Valley Theological Society. He teaches Advanced Greek to seven first year students, combining translation and diagram assignments with in-class quizzes, readings, sight translations, and discussions.

He says, “My goal is to prepare them to take New Testament classes and be proficient and comfortable with the Greek text of the New Testament.”



Professor Nicholas Piotrowski

Westminster's Dr. Gaffin Retires after 45 years

by Glenda Mathes

Although Dr. Richard B. Gaffin officially “retired” from his position as Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology in July of 2007, this is the first academic year since 1964-1965 that he has not taught at Westminster Theological Seminary.

“I can’t imagine anything that I would have rather done with my life for the Lord than the years He granted me at WTS,” says Dr. Gaffin. “I marveled at the many top-quality people the Lord sent to study with us year after year. It has been a privilege, great beyond my ability to express adequately, to have had a hand in forming so many for the gospel ministry and other forms of service to the church.”

His lectures in April build “significantly on the work of Herman Ridderbos and especially G. Vos.”

“Rather than undertake a letter-by-letter survey, I will deal with the unified teaching of the Pauline corpus” explains Dr. Gaffin. “My hope is that students come away with a holistic understanding of the teaching of Paul’s letters, in order that they may preach and teach from these Scriptures more effectively.”

In his retirement, Dr. Gaffin still serves as a teaching elder on the session of Cornerstone OPC in Ambler, PA.

“I’m enjoying a more relaxed pace from having my life largely determined by the schedule of teaching and faculty responsibilities,” he says. “I spend time in writing and related research. I welcome occasional opportunities to preach and speak at conferences.”

Dr. Gaffin says about seminarians, “With all the cultural changes and the passing of time, students are still essentially the same in terms of devotion to the Lord and abilities.”

Is Mid-America Irrelevant?

by Keith Le Mahieu



I recently attended a conference of member schools of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). The conference is an annual event for development professionals and is designed to provide education, ideas and encouragement.

One of this year's workshops was entitled "Fresh Water in the Dead Sea: New Dimensions in Strategic Thinking." The objective of the workshop was to identify ways to engage in effective strategic planning. The presenter offered numerous helpful ideas on how to approach the planning process and reasons why institutional plans often fail. How he integrated these ideas was less helpful, however. His thesis was that an effective plan envisions a new future and articulates transformative change that embraces this future.

He gave an example of how this thesis is worked out by describing a plan oriented toward the kind of transformative change he thought was essential. It was obvious to me that his view of transformative change involved a very pragmatic, business-like approach. He talked about developing strategic alliances with other theological schools to share capital and human resources (in this case an evangelical and a Jewish seminary!); he spoke of creative ways to attract students, and he regarded students as customers who would buy their product. He talked about competing in existing "market space." He talked about the need to maintain "relevance."

Because Mid-America recently updated her long-range plan, this material was thought-provoking. We work to be good stewards of the resources God gives us, we desire to train as many men as possible for gospel ministry, and we certainly want to be relevant. As I listened I wondered – is Mid-America Reformed Seminary still relevant? My mind wandered to the prophet Elijah who felt utterly alone in his ministry and in despair cried out to God that he was the only one left who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

Many today would consider Mid-America's mode of seminary training to be quaint – mired in a past that no longer exists. The workshop presenter argued that to survive, seminaries must recreate and differentiate themselves in a crowded "marketplace." As I thought about the question of relevance, I was reminded that we are most relevant because God uses the preached Word to accomplish His work of calling His elect to salvation by faith in His Son – and that will never be irrelevant. It also occurred to me there is irony in the fact that being committed to our mission of preparing faithful preachers differentiates us in a crowded seminary "marketplace." A century ago, Mid-America's mode of seminary training was considered mainstream. Today, giving a man the fundamental tools and training to shepherd God's people and faithfully preach the good news of salvation seems increasingly unique (I am not arguing that Mid-America should not seek ways to more effectively fulfill her mission).

Thank you for supporting this unique endeavor we call Mid-America Reformed Seminary. Your prayer and financial support is crucial. Without it we would end up as a footnote in "A Brief History of North American Seminaries." Please don't forget to give generously as we approach the especially difficult summer months. Remaining relevant requires a strong financial foundation.

Staff Changes

On February 28, Abby Schaaf left Mid-America to join her husband Daniel, who began employment with Gulfstream Aerospace in Savannah, Georgia. Abby came to Mid-America in June, 2007, to assume the position of Secretary to the Faculty. Abby took on a variety of important responsibilities and quickly distinguished herself.

When you see Mid-America's website, or new print advertising, or catalog, or the new Mid-America brochure, or the layout of the Messenger – think Abby. Additionally, Abby played a vital role in the publication of the *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, several faculty publications, and in several accreditation self-study reports. In short, Abby was clearly influential in helping improve Mid-America's public image. We wish Abby and Daniel God's richest blessing – she will be missed.

We are thankful that Rachel De Jong, a recent graduate of Dordt College, has assumed the position vacated by Abby. Rachel earned a degree in graphic design and worked in Dordt's admissions office. She also interned at a local business doing graphic design work. Rachel is engaged to be married to Josiah Luttjeboer on June 4.

We are grateful for the stability Rachel brings to this important position, and we pray she will find fulfillment in her work as she assists in the training of men for gospel ministry.



Upcoming Events

For information about our upcoming events, check out our website at www.midamerica.edu.

Seniors Poised for Global Service

by Glenda Mathes

As the seniors prepare for final exams and graduation, they also prepare to leave the sheltered harbor of the Seminary and embark on God's calling into unknown ministry seas. Brian Blummer, Erik Stolte, Matt Van Dyken, and Steve Williamson will graduate from Mid-America in a commencement service on May 12, 2011.

Brian Blummer is a local student. He was born and raised in South Holland, Illinois, and now lives in Lansing with his younger brother and mother.

"I saw the benefits of my training most clearly during the recent hospitalization and death of my father," Brian shared. "We have a gloriously loving Savior who has offered us this tremendous way of grace, and Mid-America has taught me so wonderfully how to minister that grace and Savior to others; and for that, I am very thankful."

An aspect of seminary Brian appreciates has been the time "to connect with others' joy in the Reformed faith." He adds, "And now I have the incredible opportunity to encourage others to find that same delight."

After concluding his denomination's ordination process, Brian hopes for a call to serve within the Reformed Church in America (RCA).

"My heart connects and resonates with many different people and their stories," he says. "Whatever pastoral ministry comes my way, my passion is to see vitality, challenges, and people incorporated under the great truth of the gospel."

Erik Stolte and his family traveled to Dyer, Indiana, from Masterton, New Zealand, after his pastor (Rev. Peter Kloosterman) and church encouraged him to consider the ministry.

Having worked for years in agriculture, the academic rigor of his first year was "brutal."

"That first year reminded me of my

inability," he says. "God had placed me on this path and His grace equipped me, not my own native abilities or prowess. I didn't do it; it was God's work and so it is in His ability that I am here today."

"Mid-America connects the classroom to the life of the churches. I benefitted immensely from my internships, preaching assignments in many different churches (sometimes I felt more profitable for me than the people of the churches); and my pastor-mentor, Rev. J. Roets (Redeemer URC, Dyer)."

Erik plans to return with his family to New Zealand, where he hopes to take up a one-year vicariate, after which he will undergo a presbytery exam before becoming available for a pastoral or church planting call within the Reformed Church of New Zealand.

Matt Van Dyken plans to marry Anne-Marie Van Popta on May 28, 2011, and assist Rev. Ernest Langendoen in Honduras this summer. Matt interned last summer in Mexico and hopes for a URCNA call to Latin America.

As a native of Jordan Station, Ontario, with a background in engineering physics, Matt changed direction after working with his church's outreach to Hispanic migrant workers.

"The Lord used that to open my eyes to the need and opportunity in Latin America," Matt says, "and so I trust that He is calling me to that work."

Three primary reasons drew Matt to Mid-America: "First of all, their commitment to the Reformed, Biblical faith; secondly, their strength in training pastors and preachers; and thirdly, their involvement in the local church."

Matt notes the benefits of a versatile faculty, "God gifts people differently, and sitting under each of the professors has been a delight."



Seniors (left to right) Brian Blummer, Erik Stolte, Steve Williamson, and Matt Van Dyken.

"The most important thing that I have learned at seminary has been a love for God (and thus His Word)," he says, "and a love for His people."

Steve Williamson (from Woodbridge, Ontario) and family will serve Cornerstone URC of London, Ontario, this summer. Steve attended seminary because the Spirit generated two strong loves in his heart: "Love for God's Word and love for God's people."

"Mid-America provided many opportunities for students to preach," he adds, "enabling us to watch the Word of God move past our papers and into the hearts of God's precious people."

Steve says the Seminary "worked hard to develop my confidence in my heavenly Father, in Christ's redemptive work in history, and in the Spirit's power to penetrate our hearts by the preached Word."

"My goal is to serve Christ wherever he calls me," Steve says. "May God be praised for the URC churches who have prayed, supported and blessed my family to this point."

"We long to see the glories of Christ our Savior and the depths of our confessional faith spread to the many nations who find their home in North America," Steve says. "We promise that we will pray, work, preach and pastor to that end."

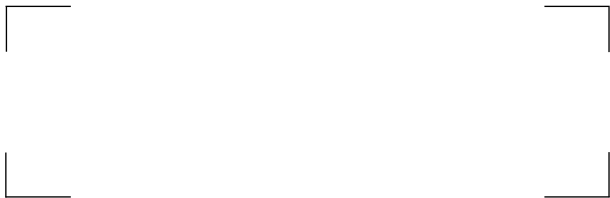
Dr. Venema Visits Riga, Latvia

Recently, Dr. Cornelis P. Venema made his fifth trip to the beautiful old city of Riga, Latvia, in order to teach a course at the Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary. After the end of the cold war, new opportunities for the preaching and teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ were available throughout Eastern Europe. Among the countries where I.T.E.M. (International Theological Education Ministries, formerly "Christ for Russia") became involved in the training of pastors and workers for the churches of Eastern Europe, Latvia and Lithuania, two of the Baltic states, were included. The Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary is a small institution supported by I.T.E.M. that focuses upon training future pastors for the Reformed churches in Latvia and Lithuania.

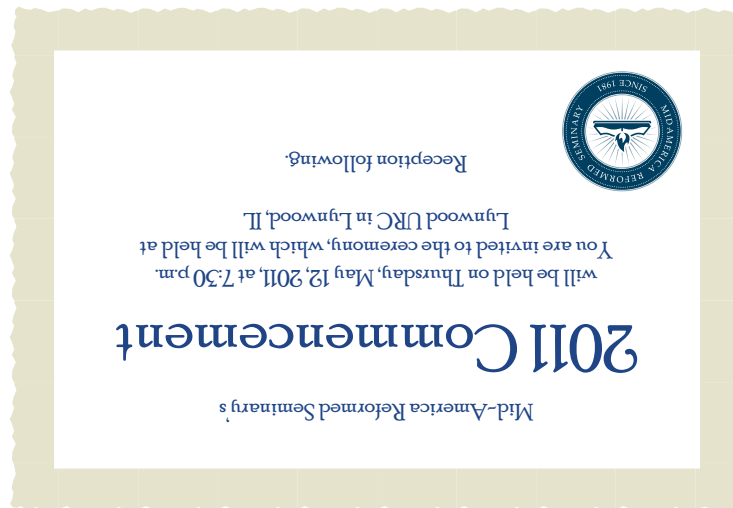
During his time in Riga, Dr. Venema preached at one of the two Reformed churches in Riga that were born in the post-Soviet era. Dr. Venema also taught a course in eschatology, or the doctrine of the last things, at the Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary, and a more popular version of the course for a Bible Institute that has been established for the training and enrichment of believers in Riga. The seminary students who took the eschatology course consisted of two groups, one in Riga and the other in the capital city of Lithuania, Vilnius. Each day the seminary class was taught from 10 am to 1 pm in Riga, and a recording of that day's class was then watched by the students in Vilnius in the evening from 6-9 pm.



Even though the number of Reformed churches and believers in Latvia and Lithuania is small, it is exciting to see new churches and believers committed to the biblical gospel and the historic Reformed faith. And it is a privilege that Mid-America's faculty have the opportunity to contribute to the training of future pastors for these churches.



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