

MESSENGER

Professors' Fifth Teaching Trip to Latvia by Glenda Mathes



L-R: Rev. Algimantas Kvedaravicius (Vilnius), Rev. Vander Hart, Mr. Artis Celmins (director of BRTS in Riga), Rev. Alvis Sauka (Riga)

Dr. Cornel Venema and Rev. Mark Vander Hart each made a fifth trip to Latvia this year, teaching at the Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary (BRTS) in Riga. Supported by ITEM (International Theological Education Ministries, Inc.), the Seminary trains leaders for the few Reformed churches in Latvia and Lithuania, countries along the Baltic Sea between Poland and Russia.

Dr. Venema traveled to Latvia on February 11 and returned on February 19. He preached one Sunday and taught an eschatology course at BRTS. "My first two stints in Riga were for

two weeks each," he says, "but I have determined not to be away for more than a week at a time, certainly during the school year."

Rev. Vander Hart left on June 3 and returned on July 13, teaching at BRTS for five and a half weeks. "I taught Biblical Greek the whole time. I also taught an Old Testament course on the post-exilic history and prophets," he says. "It was my longest time there and I enjoyed it very much."

Videos of professors' lectures were recorded and sent to Vilnius, Lithuania (four hours distance), where additional students viewed them that evening.

Rev. Vander Hart preached on four Sundays; once at Riga Reformed Church and three times at the Reformed Bible Church, which broadcasts its services each Sunday to the nation of Latvia. He also spoke at a church camp during the traditional Latvian festival, Jani, which celebrates the summer solstice.

BRTS rents two rooms on the third floor of a Methodist church in Riga. One of the two Reformed congregations in Latvia worships in the same building. The other congregation worships in a Baptist church building (see article to the right).

Rev. Alvis Sauka pastors the Riga Reformed Bible Church. Artis Celmins is an elder in the Riga Reformed Church and serves as the Seminary administrator. Rev. Algimantas Kvedaravicius (Vilnius) heads up the Reformed church in Lithuania, where he is so well-known that he is often considered "Mr. Protestant."

"Though the work in Riga is small and meager by any objective standard," says Dr. Venema, "Mark and I have grown to know and love the Reformed brothers and sisters there who have a special place in our hearts."



Buildings in Old Riga

The Reformed Church in the Baltics

by Glenda Mathes

On the wall of the Reformers Church in Riga hangs a list of pastors from 1722 to 1952. A Reformed congregation worshiped in that building for 230 years, until the Soviets made it a recording studio. When Latvia emerged from the ruins of the Soviet Empire, no trace of the congregation existed.

Dr. Gerard Van Groningen, who initially visited Riga in 1998 for ITEM (formerly "Christ for Russia"), envisioned a Reformed seminary to train leaders for churches in the Baltic states and Russia. Two Reformed churches now exist in Latvia.

"Since my first visit in 1999," relates Dr. Venema, "the two Reformed churches in Riga have matured and grown, and are in contact with the Lithuanian Reformed Church, whose roots date back to the Reformation. Unfortunately, these churches were decimated under communism and have been infected with theological liberalism. But there are small signs of reformation and renewed interest in an evangelical and Reformed testimony and church life."

"I would have to say that the seminary and the work in the Baltics is very much a 'day of small things' (Zechariah 4:10)," he adds. "But, when you consider that the Reformed church never had a significant presence in Latvia, the existence of this small seminary is reason for thanksgiving. Though we don't often view seminary training as a missionary endeavor, it seems to me that is exactly what it is. If we "pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth workers into the harvest field" (Matthew 9:37-38), that surely happens as men are trained and equipped to go with the good message of Jesus Christ. Training even a few pastors may, if the Lord prospers their labors, prove to be a great blessing for many years of future ministry among the churches."

Pray Earnestly by Keith Le Mahieu



And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to his disciples, “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few, therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” Matthew 9:35-38

Have you ever contemplated what Matthew is referring to when he says Jesus had compassion on the crowds “because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd?” Who were these people that made up the crowds that followed Jesus? Were they the first century equivalent of the jobless and the homeless or the lower ethnic or social class? Did they lack the skills, education or resources to cope in first-century society?

It is important to remember that Jesus always views things through eyes of sinless perfection which understands man’s helpless condition due to his fall into sin. Jesus fully understands the perfection of the estate into which man was created and the magnitude of corruption into which mankind was plunged. One can only imagine the grief Jesus feels when He sees man’s spiritual blindness in comparison to riches we lost in Adam and regain in Him. Jesus understands that we are blind to the spiritual dangers we face and are in need of a shepherd who, by the work of the Holy Spirit, will lead us out of our spiritual wilderness.



“He knows His father’s plan for us involves the sending of men to labor as under-shepherds of the Great Shepherd of the Sheep.”

So as Jesus surveys the crowd and grieves over their helpless condition He turns to His disciples and says, “The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few, therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His harvest.” I would have expected Jesus to say something like, “The harvest is plentiful and the laborers are few, go, therefore, and have compassion, be generous with what you have and bring the good news of salvation to them.” Instead He instructs His disciples to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send out laborers into the harvest. He knows His father’s plan for us involves the sending of men to labor as under-shepherds of the Great Shepherd of the Sheep.

Sending men to labor involves preparation and training for that labor. My work involves finding the resources (primarily financial) to make this preparation and training possible. Preparing laborers for the harvest takes money – lots of it, actually. When I present myself in my official capacity as the Director of Development for Mid-America, folks often become nervous. I understand that. We worry that the “development guy” is going to ask us to do something we’re not ready to do.

The new school year is starting soon, and Mid-America once again needs significant financial resources to fulfill its mission of training laborers for the harvest. I’m going to use the column in this Messenger not only to appeal for money, but also to appeal that you would pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers. Our sovereign Lord knows what is needed to make that happen. Through your earnest prayers God will provide all we need to fulfill that mission.

Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

In 1981 a group of courageous and visionary believers met at O’Hare International Airport to consider founding a new seminary to train faithful men for the pastoral ministry. That meeting resulted in the founding of Mid-America Reformed Seminary. For 30 years Mid-America has sought, by God’s grace, to keep this vision alive. Today men are laboring around the world for the cause of bringing the good news of salvation in many ways.

On September 29, Mid-America will celebrate these 30 years with an on-campus event entitled “Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.” You are invited to reflect on 30 years of God’s blessing and contemplate the task of keeping the vision alive for the next generation.

We are planning a number of events in which you may be involved. Have you ever wondered what seminary is like? You may spend time with students in one or more classes as a “seminarian-for-a-day.” Next, enjoy lunch at the seminary and explore the facilities and grounds.

Finally, after lunch you may join a discussion that reviews the history of the seminary, shows how the vision is being maintained, and explores plans to preserve that vision in the future. This program will include the first Board president, Rev. Thomas Vanden Heuvel, and current Board president, Rev. Richard Kuiken. You will also hear from Seminary president, Dr. Cornel Venema, and a representative of the Barnabas Foundation.

On Friday the 30th, you may join seminary personnel for an optional field trip to the beautiful city of Chicago. Seating is limited so early registration is recommended. The registration deadline is September 8. For more information call the seminary or go to the Mid-America website at www.midamerica.edu.

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VBS Children Raise Funds for International Students



Oak Glen United Reformed Church in Lansing, IL, implemented a unique method for motivating children to support nearby Mid-America Reformed Seminary while teaching them about the Seminary's global impact.

The church designated Mid-America's International Student Aid Fund as the mission cause for student offerings during its Vacation Bible School (VBS) from June 20-24, which was structured around the theme: "Gold Rush: Discovering the Rock of Ages." Over 100 children mined biblical gold as they discovered how Old Testament prophecies about Christ are fulfilled in the New Testament.

To stimulate giving, organizers divided the children into two sides, the "Magnificent

Miners" and the "Pretty Cool Prospectors" who competed to see which team could raise the most money for Mid-America.

Each morning, Mrs. Kathy West welcomed students and introduced a "prospector" called "Calico Pete" (aka Rev. John Vermeer) who appeared in denim jeans, flannel shirt, suspenders, and straw hat, sporting a moustache and leaning on his shovel as a crutch.

"Calico Pete" generated increasing excitement until the suspenseful moment when a representative from each team opened an envelope disclosing the team's total from the previous day. A total of \$4,512 was raised during the week.

Brian Zegers (Mid-America student from Bowmanville, ON, serving a summer internship at Oak Glen) spoke to VBS students on two days, informing them about Mid-America from a student's perspective. After a Friday evening dinner, Pablo Landázuri (Mid-America student from Quito, Ecuador) spoke at the closing program, helping VBS students and their parents understand the importance of the International Student Aid Fund for bringing the gospel to all nations.

Mid-America's New Look

Recent visitors to the campus of Mid-America Reformed Seminary have enjoyed the new landscaping around the front of the building. After occupying the building for more than sixteen years, the shrubbery and flowers were beginning to look a little tattered and worn. Now that the old has been replaced by the new, the Seminary has a fresh and inviting look, with a profusion of brightly colored annuals and flowering bushes. All of the flowers and bushes for the new landscaping were generously donated by Woldhuis Farms of Grant Park, Illinois.



Mid-America's new landscaping. Thanks to Woldhuis Farms of Grant Park, IL.

Summer Greek



Professor Richard Cunningham with his wife Melissa

The summer's heat and humidity may be intense for new students, but it likely doesn't match the intensity of Summer Greek, when students compress the learning of an academic year into only six weeks.

Mid-America Reformed Seminary has a new instructor teaching two summer semesters of Greek. Richard Cunningham is a graduate student at the University of Chicago, pursuing a Master of Arts in Divinity degree. He already has obtained an M.Div. from Westminster Seminary California, where he took Greek and helped edit Steve Baugh's Greek textbook, *A New Testament Greek Primer*. Mr. Cunningham's current coursework includes a wide range of reading both classical and Hellenistic Greek texts, as well as the New Testament.

"For a young scholar," says Rev. Marcus Mininger, instructor in New Testament studies, "Richard has spent an extensive amount of time working in the Greek language, and so his knowledge-base for Greek instruction is very clear. The students taking his class have reported good things about his teaching so far."

Mr. Cunningham is a member of Bethel OPC in Wheaton, IL, and is working toward licensure under the care of the Presbytery of the Midwest.

Upcoming Events

September 10: 7th Annual Mid-America Reformed Seminary Golf Outing. Please plan to join friends of Mid-America Reformed Seminary for a morning of fun and fellowship at the 7th Annual Mid-America Golf Outing on Saturday, September 10, 2011, at White Hawk Country Club in Crown Point, Indiana. Brochures have been sent out. For more information or to register online, visit our website.

September 29: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow. Mid-America will be hosting a vision casting and estate planning seminar on campus. This will include sitting in on classes, a program, and a field trip to Chicago. (See article on page 2 for more information.)

October 4: Visiting Geneva College.

October 5: Visiting Grove City College; Moody Bible Institute Seminary Fair.

October 6-7: Board Meeting.

October 11: Michigan Promotional Dinner. Michigan friends are invited to join us at the The Bluff in Grandville, MI. Look for registration online and a postcard as the dinner approaches.

October 19: Calvin College Seminary Fair.

October 20: Hope College Seminary Fair.

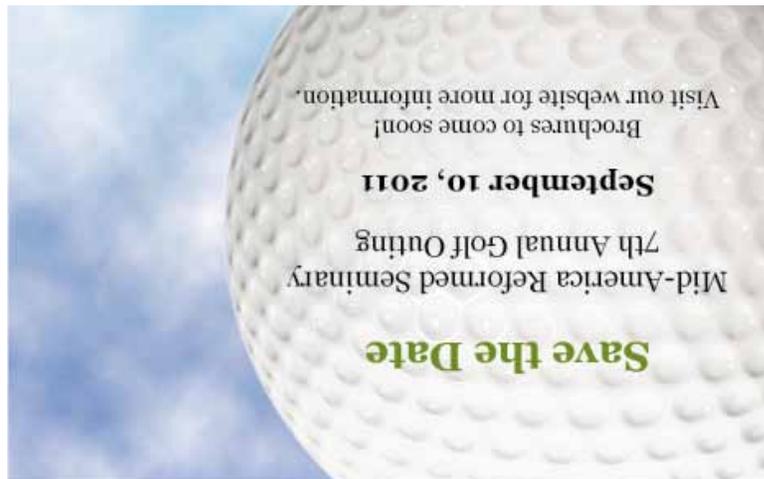
October 20: Illiana Promotional Dinner. Illiana friends are invited to join us at the Serbian Social Center in Lansing, IL. Look for registration online and a postcard as the dinner approaches.

Book Donation Benefits Library

Mid-America's library is pleased to note a substantial acquisition from the estate of Howard Beach, late father of our own Professor Beach. Of the more than 650 volumes, there are many valuable additions in the main divisions of theology, especially in biblical and ecclesiastical studies. We are glad to be able to enhance our collection with this addition.



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EXPERIENCE THE HARVEST.



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