

THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

Rev. Vic Bernales: God's Calling Confirmed by Glenda Mathes



Rev. Vic Bernales at his ordination service.

Although Rev. Vic Bernales was ordained less than a year after his denomination's organization, this confirmation of God's calling came after years of his personal journey.

Rev. Bernales (M.Div, 2008) was ordained on September 19, 2010, in the United Covenant Reformed Church in Davao City, Philippines. The ordination was only about six months after the congregation's denomination, the United Covenant Reformed Church in the Philippines (UCRCP), held its first classis meeting on March 5, 2010.

But Rev. Bernales' journey to ordination has a much longer history. Vic majored in accountancy and obtained a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of the East in Manila before working as a Christian bookstore manager and as an accountant. Feeling increasingly drawn toward ministry, he worked for a church and with Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship for five years.

After Vic and his wife, Cathy, discovered the Reformed faith in 1999, he helped found the Davao City church in 2000. He served the congregation as a Sunday school teacher, exhorter, elder, and finally as a pastor. He studied at Mid-America for a year from 2001-2002, and was able to return in 2006 and graduate in 2008.

In addition to his regular preaching and pastoral duties, Rev. Bernales leads Bible studies for various groups (including some disabled persons). He teaches a membership class and conducts premarital counseling. He and Cathy translate Reformed literature into the local language. Cathy teaches classes for women and children.

After much prayer regarding a radio ministry, Rev. Bernales recently began a Saturday morning program, *My Redeemer*, in which he and co-host Aljun Guilaran (a church member) discuss Reformed truths. The program can be heard via the internet from 9:00-11:00 am (Philippine time) at www.mangoradio.net. Supporters may be interested in the "United Covenant Reformed Church in the Philippines Supporters' Group" on Facebook.

"The Lord providentially led me to pursue the ordained ministry as I grew in my knowledge of Him and in my desire for the congregation here to have an ordained minister," Rev. Bernales says. "Ten years seems to be long, but it's worth the wait. I'm so grateful to the Lord for His grace throughout this experience."

California Visit

Since Rev. Vic Bernales served First United Reformed Church of Chino, CA, as a summer intern in 2007, it makes sense that the church supports his ministry and invited him to speak during its Mission Emphasis Week.

The church's 36th annual Mission Emphasis Week was themed "Declaring God's Glory to All People" (Psalm 96:3) and was held from January 22-30, 2011.

The week of festivities began with a Saturday evening prayer meeting. On Sunday morning, Rev. Bernales spoke to adults during the church education hour on "Office Bearers' Training: A Key to Sustain Reformed Mission Work."

Prior to morning worship, the congregation's Cadets presented flags of the countries where church-supported missionaries serve. Rev. Bernales preached a sermon titled "Make Known His Deeds Among the Peoples" that morning from Isaiah 12:1-6.

At the evening service, Rev. Bernales spoke from Acts 17:1-9 on "The Message That Turns the World Upside Down." Following the evening service, he spoke during a time of fellowship on "Prayer and Gospel Preaching."

Rev. Bernales gave a presentation on Wednesday evening about "United Covenant Reformed Church: Challenges and Opportunities."

The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) has been instrumental in supporting the work of Vic Bernales in the Philippines. He also was scheduled to preach in Covenant Reformed Church in Sacramento on Sunday, January 30.

An Exhibition of Generosity

by Keith Le Mahieu



Over the past several issues of *the Messenger* I have written a series of articles on generosity. We explored the question of what generosity is (the art of sacrifice), we looked at the impact of generosity (freedom and contentment), and we explored ways to excel in the grace of giving (examining the heart, giving in love, being deliberate, and following through). My hope is that these articles have encouraged you to consider the blessings that flow from a spirit of generosity. Preparing these articles encouraged me to think about my own level of generosity.

When I began my career it never occurred to me that God might lead me to the type of work I do. What a blessing it has been to meet generous people from all walks of life who excel in the grace of giving. They are young and old, male and female, white collar and blue collar, wealthy and not so much, city folk and rural folk. The common denominator for all these people is they love Christ and are aware of the grace they have received in Him. They also love the church, they are passionate about the proclamation of the gospel, and they are characterized by a



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happy countenance. They love being generous and I frequently hear, "I wish we could do more." I am often humbled and left speechless by the generosity of God's people when I see their sacrifice, given in love, and with little apparent concern for personal financial implications. They are excited to have the opportunity to be part of building an eternal kingdom.

We reported in the last issue that Mid-America started the 2010 calendar year with a reserve fund deficit of approximately \$70,000 (equal to about 30% of our total reserve). We asked you to consider how you might help us reach our goal of replenishing the reserve fund and starting the new calendar year with a surplus in the general fund. I am thrilled to report that once again our God has been faithful! We did indeed erase the deficit in the reserve fund and started the new year with a small surplus in the general fund. We give thanks for all of you who so graciously made this possible through your generous giving. We especially want to acknowledge our friends in Canada who significantly increased their giving in 2010. This increase, combined with a more favorable Canadian exchange rate, played a significant part in helping us achieve a more firm financial footing.

As we begin 2011, we give thanks for God's provision and pray that you will continue to give generously to the task of preparing men for gospel ministry. There are many worthy kingdom causes we can give to, but when the church is weakened, so are all of our other institutions whose mission is based on the service of our Savior. People who are lukewarm to the gospel will not build strong institutions that serve our Lord. We need strong churches that grow God's people in grace if we are going to have strong schools, etc. Strong churches need capable, loving pastors who will bring a spiritual feast from God's Word week by week.

Mid-America Granted Reaffirmation by TRACS

2010 was a busy and productive year for Mid-America Reformed Seminary from the standpoint of accreditation. As we previously reported, in February 2010 Mid-America was approved by the Board of Commissioners for an initial five-year term as a fully accredited member of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). During the final stages of the accreditation process with ATS, Mid-America was also being evaluated by the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS) for a reaffirmation of accredited status for a period of ten years. After submitting a self-study report and welcoming a TRACS evaluation team to campus in June, Dr. Venema represented Mid-America before the TRACS Board of Commissioners at its meeting in Greensboro, NC, on November 9, 2010. We are pleased to report that the TRACS Board of Commissioners approved Mid-America "without conditions" for this reaffirmation.

The faculty and staff at the Seminary are gratified by the recognition granted to the school by these accrediting organizations. A considerable amount of time and effort was expended in the preparation of two separate self-studies and the visits to the Seminary campus by evaluation teams from ATS and TRACS. The positive outcome of these efforts confirms the quality and excellence of the Seminary's educational programs, and will enhance the Seminary's reputation among peer institutions and prospective students.

Upcoming Events

- **Thursday, February 24:** Promotional Dinner in Chino, California.
- **Thursday, March 31:** Promotional Dinner in Wyckoff, New Jersey
- **Sunday, April 10:** Seminary Sunday in Wisconsin
- **Thursday, May 12:** Commencement

For more information about any of these events, contact Mid-America at 219.864.2400 or info@midamerica.edu

Learning to Read: A Difficult, Vital Task for Seminarians by Marcus Mininger

You might think a seminary professor does not need to teach his students how to read. After all, students come to Mid-America with many years of education behind them. Nevertheless, one of my first and most important tasks as Mid-America's new instructor of New Testament Studies is to persuade students that, whatever they may think, reading is actually a very difficult task about which they still have much to learn and that learning to read is itself both a difficult and vital task as they prepare for future ministry in Christ's church.

Reading is a process of receiving personal communication, but experience shows just how bad we often are at listening carefully to others. Assuming that you already know what someone is saying; being distracted and diverted to other concerns; being misled by someone else's view of what a person had said—problems like these plague everyday conversation, but they also disrupt our reading of Scripture.

Beyond these things, the task of reading an ancient text like the Bible is also more difficult than present-day communication because we stand so far removed from the languages, cultures, and time periods of

the Bible. Skillful interpretation requires familiarity with things like local dialect and ways of speaking, an author's personal life-history, and the cultural make-up and experiences of an original audience. Without such information, we might misunderstand an author's point. However, when dealing with an ancient text, such information is very hard to obtain.

It is also crucial to understand that reading Scripture is, in many ways, inherently more difficult than reading other texts because of its divine subject-matter. In Scripture we confront matters so transcendent that they are beyond the innate ability of man to grasp. In fact, in his fallen state man remains at enmity with the things he reads in Scripture, which are foolishness to him (1 Cor 2:14). Even for a Christian, the remaining power of sin seeks to obscure the Bible's meaning for us.

We must understand, then, how learning to read is in fact a difficult and vital task for all seminarians. New seminarians in particular have much to learn in this regard.

To many, the difficulty of this task may seem discouraging or like a regrettable

impediment to "getting on with" their education. But in fact, learning to read is one of the vital purposes of seminary education. More than that, experiencing the sheer difficulty of this task helps force each student to adopt a proper posture before God, that of humble, needy, and dependent little children before a loving Father. The difficult process of learning to read, as a child does, therefore helps remind us of who we are in Christ.

I ask you to pray for me and for the students, then, as they come to realize just how difficult the task before them is. Pray for their success. But pray also that the process of learning would help produce a contrite and receptive heart of childlike faith in each of those who would minister the things of God to God's people.



Library Volunteer: Diane Fisher



Library volunteer Diane Fisher and her husband, Allan, in South Haven, MI.

Two years ago, Diane Fisher contacted Mid-America Reformed Seminary. She wanted to know if she could assist the library as a volunteer. Diane has over 20 years of experience as a professional librarian, having worked in public, university, and seminary libraries. Most recently, she was employed as a Reference Librarian at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. She and her husband Allan, a senior vice president at Crossway Publishing, live in Wheaton, Illinois, and are members of Bethel Presbyterian Church.

Diane volunteers weekly at Mid-America. The library staff greatly appreciates her help! Diane has worked on many projects, both large and small, during the past two years. She has helped with the organization and the evaluation of library materials. Diane is frequently called upon to perform tasks that require close attention to detail, compiling lists of material as varied as online journals, publishers' catalogs, and software applications on library computers. Most recently, Diane has begun to work through the library archives. And she has certainly helped to re-shelve many, many books!

In addition to her valuable assistance, the staff, faculty, and students of Mid-America are thankful for Diane's unfailingly kind and gracious manner. We very much appreciate the generosity of our sister in Christ.

Faculty Update

Dr. J. Mark Beach led a conference at West Sayville Reformed Bible Church in West Sayville, NY in October on the “The Sinning Christians: the Seven Deadly Sins Today.” He taught a new elective course on the Three Forms of Unity and their relevance to the church today during interim. He is teaching an elective course on “The Theology of Jonathan Edwards” in the spring semester, which explores the riches of “America’s Theologian” for understanding Reformed thought in our contemporary setting. He has been preaching regularly in area churches.

In addition to preaching in a number of churches throughout North America, **Rev. Alan D. Strange** has spoken at a number of conferences on the means of grace, justification, church government, and Christian education. He was speaker at the pre-classis meeting of the URCNA Eastern

Classis in New Jersey. He attended various presbytery meetings. He chaired a meeting of the OPC’s Psalter Hymnal Committee and attended meetings of the OPC’s Christian Education Committee and the Board of Great Commission Publications (of which he was elected President). He continued working on his dissertation and other writing projects.

Rev. Mark D. Vander Hart spoke at a Reformation Rally in Smithers, British Columbia, on October 29, and then led worship services in the Bethel URC of Smithers, BC, and the Faith URC of Telkwa, BC. He has been leading a monthly study of the Canons of Dort for the Covenant Fellowship of the Oak Glen United Reformed Church in Lansing, IL. He has preached in a number of churches in the United States and Canada.

Dr. Cornelis P. Venema was the conference speaker for the Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Lynchburg, VA in October. He gave two presentations there. He also led an adult Bible class on the topic of his book “Children at the Lord’s Supper? Assessing the Case for Paedocommunion.” He taught an evening class on Thursdays at Mid-America for the general public on “Men and Women in the Service of Christ” in November. He presented three addresses at the Western Ministerial Conference (for Canadian Reformed and United Reformed ministers) at a Bible camp near Lynden, WA in November. On November 9 Dr. Venema represented the Seminary before the Accreditation Commission of TRACS, which met in Greensboro, NC and approved Mid-America for a reaffirmation of accreditation for a term of ten years.



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wanted: men of integrity

We're looking for a few good men (ministers and laymen) to serve on the Mid-America Board of Trustees. Do you know someone who is committed to the church and passionate about the preparation of the next generation of faithful pastors? We want to hear from you.

The 3-year term begins in the fall of 2011. Please send the name and contact information of your nominee to info@midamerica.edu.

Nominations must be received by **March 15, 2011**, so don't delay.

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