

# THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

## Senior Oral Exam Changes by Glenda Mathes



*Rev. Strange and Rev. Mininger held a tutorial session with the seniors prior to their oral exams*

Alan Strange, and Dr. J. Mark Beach, developed a recommendation, which the entire faculty approved in August of 2011. The Board of Trustees approved the changes in October of 2011.

In addition to comprehensive Greek and Hebrew written exams, senior students undergo a rigorous oral examination to determine theological knowledge. That exam typically takes place during January and covers a broad area of knowledge, based primarily on classroom exams.

“In general, we felt that quality was more important than quantity,” explains Rev. Mininger. “We are giving a more focused exam that prioritizes careful, fulsome knowledge of systematic/dogmatic theology (including how other disciplines feed into and are related to it), rather than a diffuse exam that attempts to cover a little bit of all disciplines equally.”

“We believe this prioritizes one of the key areas of concern to the churches as our graduates come before their classes/presbyteries for licensure, candidacy, or ordination exams and so also helps our students prepare better for those exams,” he continues. “In the past, students were being asked to prepare for such a broad exam that we felt the quality of attention they were able to give to this crucially important area (systematics) was not getting the thorough care that it requires.”

The exams will remain an hour in length, but be devoted largely to theology and confessional knowledge with other fields supporting the theology questions. The current practice of the exam being conducted by the entire faculty may continue or the exam could be given by a couple of faculty members and possibly a guest minister. Rather than conducting the oral comps only during January, one examination per week will be conducted from November through February.

It is believed that these changes will help students prepare more fully formulated answers as well as help prepare them more adequately for ecclesiastical exams. The changes will also allow faculty members to conduct necessary follow up on areas of theological knowledge.

Mid-America Reformed Seminary is implementing changes in the oral comprehensive examination procedure. These changes arise from a desire to conduct examinations that are less regurgitation of classroom material and more thought provoking sessions demonstrating a student’s ability to think on his feet.

Changes have been under consideration for some time. A pre-advice committee, consisting of Rev. Marcus Mininger, Rev.

## Student/Graduate Reflections

by Glenda Mathes

Rev. Gary Zekveld (2009) pastors the Orthodox Reformed Church (URC) of New Westminster, BC. Rev. Matt Van Dyken (2011) is in Mexico, preparing for ministry at Eternal Life Mission in Tepic. The two alumni share their oral exam reflections.

“This was my first oral exam (aside from the dentist’s office) and I discovered pretty quickly that it was a very different beast than written exams,” says Rev. Zekveld. “I found myself struggling to retrieve information, rambling, and getting more and more nervous.”

Rev. Van Dyken was apprehensive. “I was nervous about them, as I wasn’t exactly sure what to expect and I was not as prepared as I should have been,” he says. “The actual exam was more difficult than I had expected.”

“I still thought the oral exams were highly beneficial,” he adds. “Being challenged to review material that was learned years before is helpful for me, as I can often learn something quickly and forget it just about as quickly. And as the professors themselves have noted, our work in the future is generally an oral work. Being able to reply orally is an invaluable skill.”

Rev. Zekveld relates: “They revealed my weaknesses, particularly the fact that I struggled to clearly articulate some fundamental theological truths. When I wrote exams, I had time to retreat into my own head and piece together answers to questions, but that doesn’t work so well when people are firing questions at you. I realized that knowing a lot of stuff is one thing, but articulating it on the fly is quite another. The ministry requires both.”

## Is Mid-America Worthy of Your Charitable Dollar? by Keith Le Mahieu



North Americans are a generous lot. Americans and Canadians combined to give just under \$300 billion to charities in 2010 (the most recent year for which statistics are available). One might think the majority of giving comes from corporate and foundation donors, but the truth is that 80% of charitable giving is done by individuals (including bequests). If you throw in giving from family foundations that number rises to 87%. In 2010 there were approximately 1,281,000 charitable organizations in the United States. This number increased 48% over the past 10 years.

With so many options for your charitable dollar, why would you give to support Mid-America Reformed Seminary? The obvious answer is you agree with our primary mission of preparing men for the gospel ministry. You know that a healthy church depends on a steady supply of men who are trained to preach God's Word and lovingly and sacrificially shepherd His people. I hope that most of you who are regular readers of *The Messenger* do not need a great deal of convincing that Mid-America does pretty well at fulfilling its mission. There is, however, another important question that needs to be addressed when considering how your charitable dollars are spent. That question is whether the charity you are supporting is being a good steward of your hard-earned dollar. The answer to this question is usually much more difficult to discern.

You might be surprised to know that charitable organizations like Mid-America are required to file an annual financial statement with the Internal Revenue Service. This financial statement is filled with information that helps answer the question of whether a charity is being a good steward of the money it receives. In Mid-America's case, this information is gleaned from an annual financial audit conducted by an independent accountant on behalf of the Board of Trustees. A good place to research whether Mid-America is acting responsibly is the website [charitynavigator.org](http://charitynavigator.org). Charity Navigator evaluates American charities based on the IRS filing available to the public. Charity Navigator was selected as the best charity review site by Kiplinger's Personal Finance magazine's "The Best List 2011."

Charity Navigator measures financial performance by evaluating program expenses (in our case the cost of instruction), administrative expenses, fundraising expenses, fundraising efficiency, revenue growth, program expense growth, and the working capital ratio. Accountability metrics are based on things like an independent board, audited financials, a record retention policy, a conflict of interest policy, and more.

Charity Navigator develops a combined score for financial health and accountability ranging from 0 (zero) to 70. It then assigns a star rating from zero to four stars based on the charity's overall score. A score of 25 is one star, 40 is two stars, 50 is three stars, and four stars is 60 or greater.

So is Mid-America a good steward? According to Charity Navigator the answer is yes with a little room for improvement. Mid-America is rated a three-star charity with a financial score of 55.71 and an accountability score of 59.00 for an overall score of 57.25. As you can see, this puts us very close to a four-star overall score of 60. Mid-America is striving to improve its financial and accountability score to continue to assure you that we are indeed worthy of your charitable dollar both as it relates to fulfilling our mission of preparing men for the gospel ministry and being good stewards of the resources God places in our hands through each of you.

We thank all of you for faithfully supporting our work with your charitable dollars.

## Divine Hope Seminary

Rev. Nathan Brummel was recently appointed as Program Director for Divine Hope Reformed Bible Seminary in the Danville Correctional Center. Mid-America has been involved in Divine Hope's organization, and Revs. Strange and Vander Hart serve as advisors to the Board of Directors.

Rev. Strange calls recent developments "quite encouraging" and believes that Rev. Brummel is "qualified to do far more than administer" the program: "He is qualified to teach the subject matter, to provide the equivalent of an undergraduate Bible curriculum (leading to a BA) and, in some cases, the equivalent of a seminary education."



As part of the program, Mid-America has supplied evening class lectures and other materials. In the future, professors may teach and students may gain prison ministry experience at DHRBS.

Board president Jon Hoek relates: "Rev. Brummel has extensive experience in both parish ministry, serving a congregation for ten years, as well as seven years of prison ministry in the Chicagoland area. He synthesizes a passion for confessionally Reformed theological instruction with a love for those who do not know Christ. With an academic resume that includes degrees in philosophy, missiology, systematic theology, and an M.Div., we believe, by the providence of God, that Rev. Brummel is God's gift to Danville prison."

At the request of Danville's warden, a ribbon cutting ceremony is being planned for early March.

"I am excited about the possibility of having a biblical and Reformed influence on the Illinois prison system, which is like a vast archipelago," says Rev. Brummel. "I have found that the gospel shines very brightly against the dark backdrop that is prison."

**Adjuncts** by Glenda Mathes



*Dr. Richard Gaffin*

Three men who are experts in their respective fields and who have previously taught at Mid-America Reformed Seminary have been welcomed back for the slate of classes during the Spring 2012 semester.

Dr. Richard Gaffin, Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology (Emeritus) at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, will teach two credit hours of New Testament Exegesis. He taught a similar stint of New Testament Exegesis in April of 2011.

During Rev. Alan Strange's study leave, two adjunct professors are replacing him in the classroom. Dr. Peter Wallace, pastor of Michiana Covenant Church (PCA) is teaching Medieval Church History, a course he previously taught in 2008.

Rev. John Mallin is teaching Pastoral Counseling. Rev. Mallin is an OPC minister who has been a pastoral counselor for the past twenty years. He taught Pastoral Counseling in 2010.

**Rev. Strange's Study Leave** by Glenda Mathes

From February-July, 2012, Rev. Alan Strange will be on a requested study leave to continue work on his Ph.D. dissertation, "The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church in the Ecclesiology of Charles Hodge."

Although Rev. Strange will not be teaching in the classroom, he will remain on campus for most of his six-month study leave, continuing to fulfill his administrative responsibilities and functioning as the Seminary's Theological Librarian. He will likely be off campus periodically as he conducts additional research in original source materials. He plans to spend a total of about six weeks researching materials in libraries at various locations in the United States, including Princeton Seminary and University, Rutgers University (New Brunswick, NJ), The Presbyterian Historical Society (Philadelphia, PA), and Westminster Theological Seminary (Glenside, PA).

"I am deeply appreciative of the generous support of the Board in granting me a sabbatical in spring 2008 that allowed me to begin the process of application for a Ph.D.," writes Rev. Strange. During that initial sabbatical, he not only initiated the application process, but he also completed extensive research. Since that time, Rev. Strange has continued working on the project, beginning to write his dissertation in the summer of 2010.

In addition to the onsite research he plans to conduct, Rev. Strange hopes to accomplish a significant amount of writing. He expects to revise some material in chapters of his dissertation that he has already completed. He also intends to write two or more additional chapters of the anticipated eight. This study leave will help him work toward his goal of an early completion.

"The program that I am in has me set to finish in 2015, as a part time student," he writes. "I would like to finish and receive the degree in 2013. This study leave would greatly facilitate that."



*Rev. Alan D. Strange*

**New Students**



*Joel is welcomed to campus by Keith LeMahieu*

Mid-America welcomes two students with international connections to the student body for the spring semester. Joel De Leon was born and raised in the Philippines where he studied at the University of the Philippines and the Center for Biblical Studies. Around 2008, Joel moved to Salt Lake City, Utah, with his wife, Patricia, who

is finishing her PhD studies in the field of chemistry. While in Salt Lake City Joel and Patricia joined Christ Orthodox Presbyterian Church where they have been worshipping and serving. Joel hopes to enter pastoral ministry upon graduation from Mid-America.

Darryl Kretschmer grew up in Southern California, and after graduating from the University of California, San Diego, with a degree in Chinese Studies, moved to Taiwan. For the past six years he worked there as a missionary church planter for Youth with a Mission. Changed by the Holy Spirit during his first year in college, Darryl has a passion for reaching the un-reached with the gospel. Darryl came to Mid-America out of a sense of needing a strong foundation in Reformed Christianity to equip him to bring the gospel to the nations as an ordained pastor, missionary and church planter. Darryl is joined by his wife, Anita, and two children, Lydia and Johan.



*Darryl with his wife Anita, and two children, Lydia & Johan*



## Spring Evening Class: “Pierced for Our Transgressions”

This year’s Spring Evening Class will be led by Dr. Cornelis Venema. The topic is “Pierced for Our Transgressions?: Rediscovering the Glory of Christ’s Cross in the Face of Recent Criticisms.”

In the words of the apostle Paul, the preaching of the cross of Christ is a “stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1:23). What was true in the earliest apostolic preaching of the gospel remains true today. Dr. Venema’s class will treat the biblical understanding of Christ’s work upon the cross and answer a number of contemporary objections to the teaching that Christ’s death involved His substitutionary endurance of

the condemnation that we sinners deserve. The class will address such questions as: why was it necessary for Christ to die upon the cross? What did Christ’s death accomplish? For whom did Christ die? What objections are often raised today to the biblical teaching about the cross of Christ?

The class will be held on Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. on March 1, 8, 15, & 22.

March 1: “Christ’s Work of Atonement: A Biblical and Historical Orientation”

March 8: “The Glory of Penal Substitution”

March 15: “The Scandal of Penal Substitution”



*Dr. Cornelis Venema*

March 22: “Penal Substitution and Particular Redemption (aka Limited Atonement)”

To register for the class, call the Seminary, or visit our website at [www.midamerica.edu](http://www.midamerica.edu). The cost is \$10 per person.



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**Wanted: Men of Integrity**

We are 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 starts in the Fall of 2012. Please send the name and contact information of your nominee to [info@midamerica.edu](mailto:info@midamerica.edu). Nominations must be received by March 14, 2012.

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