

THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

Lansing Public Library Project by Glenda Mathes



Rev. J. Vermeer leading the forum

library staff. This forum has proven already to be beneficial.”

Attendance varies, but can be as many as 25. Some individuals are unchurched, while others come from a variety of denominations. Since Rossi is a member and former intern at Oak Glen URC, that church’s consistory oversees the work and receives monthly reports. Oak Glen’s Missions and Evangelism Committee also has been involved with organization and Rev. John Vermeer usually attends the meetings.

“The idea of utilizing the greater church leadership in the area to address a specific theme within an evangelistic context has long been attractive, but unrealized among us,” says Rev. Vermeer. “When Roberto Rossi served as a summer intern in 2012, we saw an opportunity to put some shape to this idea. Roberto has experience with a similar format, and the consistory saw that Roberto has the kind of spirit and gifts necessary to catalyze the project.”

Rossi says, “Rev. Vermeer and I were looking for that ‘point of contact’ in the community where we can have the opportunity to teach the Christian worldview as revealed in Scripture. Prior to developing a church’s mission and evangelistic strategy, I believe it is crucial to understand important aspects of the culture and context so that the church can meet people with the gospel.”

After observing how many people use the library’s resources and attend its events, Rossi presented a specific proposal that library officials received positively.

“The need for people to see life from the perspective of Christ is great in our area,” says Rev. Vermeer, “and with publicity through the library to promote this perspective in the public square, we consider ourselves blessed.”

“We hope that we can generate an interest in Christ that goes beyond this forum,” he adds. “The goal is to make disciples for Christ, calling people to a saving knowledge in him and enfolded them into church fellowship at Oak Glen. We hope that we might leave a genuinely good impression for God’s honor to those with whom we come in contact. We also hope that that the lectures will bear fruits of edification for those who presently confess Christ.”

Senior Roberto Rossi is spearheading a unique evangelistic effort at the Lansing Public Library. Each Tuesday evening from February 5-April 30, Seminary faculty and local ministers speak to people from the community as part of “Worldview Forum 2013.” The first half of the lectures focus on worldview tolerance and fundamentals, while the second half compare and contrast major world religions.

“The speakers have certainly exceeded my expectations,” says Rossi. “We have received positive feedback from the attendees and the

President’s Message: Anchored or Drifting?

If the book of Hebrews is an extended sermon, as I believe it is, the burden of the sermon is announced right up front: “Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it” (Heb. 2:1, ESV). Apparently, the Hebrew Christians were in danger of drifting away from the good message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so the preacher uses a nautical metaphor, “drifting,” to alert his hearers to the danger of neglecting what they had heard, allowing it to slip through their fingers. Unless the Hebrews pay careful attention to the Word spoken to them through Christ, they might find themselves drifting like a dinghy in the ocean and shipwreck on the rock of inattention.

While mulling over the warning of Hebrews against the danger of drifting, I am struck by a similar danger that confronts an institution like Mid-America Reformed Seminary. Some thirty years ago, a number of Reformed believers banded together to establish a school that would train students for the gospel ministry. Even though they faced difficult challenges, they formed Mid-America out of several deeply-rooted convictions; the importance of preaching as the primary means of grace, the calling of ministers to be faithful shepherds of the flock under their care, the complete trustworthiness of the Word of God in Scripture, the need for resolute fidelity to the confessions of the churches, the Christ-centered focus of the Scriptures, and the danger of “moralistic” preaching.

My aim in this new column of *The Messenger* will be to help friends of Mid-America to pay closer attention to our vision and calling as an institution. While it is sometimes observed that institutions tend to lose their way after a generation or two, this sobering observation need not be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Not if we commit ourselves afresh to the vision that undergirds our work—equipping our students for a faithful and effective heralding of the gospel of the kingdom of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth!

by Dr. Cornelis Venema

Largest Class Poised for Service by Glenda Mathes

Twelve senior students, comprising Mid-America's largest graduating class, are prepared to serve wherever God calls them in Christ's kingdom. Eleven will receive Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degrees, while one will be awarded the Master of Theological Studies (MTS) degree. Some anticipate serving the Lord in North America, while others hope to proclaim God's Word in international contexts.

Casey Bessette (M.Div.)

Casey (Waukesha, WI) and Jennifer have four children: Hannah (6), Josiah (5), Lydia (2), and Simeon (5 months). Casey seeks OPC ordination. He has learned that the minister should handle Scripture with "the utmost care" in preaching and teaching, that each church member has a "responsibility and privilege" to be "involved intentionally" in each others' lives, and that all believers have a "constant need" for "trusting, even through difficult providences, God's goodness, patience, and never-failing love."

David Franks (M.Div.)

David (Indianapolis, IN) and Amanda anticipate David's one year internship prior to OPC ordination. "Mid-America has taught me to preach Christ from all of Scripture," he says. Serving in local congregations has shown him the

"vital importance" of the church in the Christian walk. He hopes to serve a congregation "where the Spirit would bless and equip us to show forth the glory of God into a world that desperately needs to find their joy in Him."

Geoffrey Grissom (M.Div.)

Geoffrey (Bellingham, WA) and his wife, Hannah, plan to move to the western United States following his graduation, where they will seek to serve Christ in teaching, editing, writing, or whatever door the Lord opens. Seminary changed Geoffrey's life by instilling patience, caution, and receptivity to the text of Scripture. "I leave Mid-America thankful for this change and grateful that I have been given skills to equip me for a lifetime of learning."

Yevgeni Kogay (M.Div.)

Yevgeni (Tashkent, Uzbekistan) seeks OPC ordination and will serve a year internship at the Bonita OPC in southern California. His hopes include translating Reformed literature, serving in a foreign mission field, and planting confessional Reformed churches. During his seminary education, he's learned how important it is to properly balance God's grace and human responsibility. He says, "The grace of God, when rightly presented, has power both to encourage and challenge people at the same time."

Pablo Landázuri (M.Div.)

Pablo (Quito, Ecuador) and Verenisse have three children: Martin (12), Emilio (9), and Benjamin (5). Pablo seeks ordination in the URCNA with a hope to plant churches in Ecuador. "Christ has to be at the center of all," he says. "Christ must be preached from different angles and aspects while being faithful to the text. God uses the means of grace that He has provided to the Church for her growth in grace."

Roberto Rossi (M.Div.)

Roberto (Lansing, IL) and Carrie have two children: Matteo (10) and Lydia (7). Roberto has learned that a servant of the Lord must be teachable. He seeks URCNA ordination. He longs to be "faithfully preaching and teaching God's Word and discipling a congregation in the areas of evangelism and missions so that God's people may testify to the gospel in Word and deed within their own culture and context."

Paul Sandbulte (M.Div.)

Paul (Grand Rapids, MI) credits Mid-America with teaching him "the historic, biblical basis" for the beliefs he was taught as a youth. He adds, "It has also nuanced and elaborated on them." He is progressing toward ordination in the OPC. He and his wife, Jana, hope to serve in overseas missions. "Our goal is to serve the least of these brothers," he says. "We would like to help those who have little or no knowledge of the gospel."

Timothy Scheuers (M.Div.)

Timothy (Chino, CA) hopes for eventual URCNA ordination, but will initially pursue his Ph.D in Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary's Center for Advanced Theological Studies. He hopes to become a theology instructor, but also prays for an associate pastoral opportunity. He is grateful to Mid-America's faculty for shaping his understanding of theology as a "holistic endeavor" and preparing him to fulfill his future vocation "while preserving the integral relationships...of quality scholarship, pastoral church ministry, and service to society."



Seniors: Back (L to R) - B. Zegers, T. Scheuers; Middle (L to R) - G. Grissom, D. Franks, J. Scott, P. Sandbulte; Front (L to R) - P. Landázuri, R. Rossi, Y. Kogay, E. & C. Smith; Pictured separately - C. Bessette

Jeff Scott (M.Div.)

Jeff (Coeur d’Alene, ID) and Dawn have five children: Silas (11), Lillian (9), Maran (8), Eden (4), and Elias (1). Jeff seeks OPC ordination and plans a year internship at Covenant Grace OPC in Roseburg, OR. He has learned that Christ gathers, guides, and governs His church. “The duty of a minister, as Christ’s mouthpiece,” he says, “is to sow and water that Word in humble reliance upon the Spirit of Christ, who gives the increase.”

Caleb Smith (M.Div.)

Caleb (New Braunfels, TX) seeks a ministerial internship in the OPC prior to OPC ordination. His seminary education has taught him to “depend upon the Lord, and to seek Him in prayer in times of joy and trial alike.” He hopes to serve as a Minister of the Word in a local congregation, but would also like to continue his education in Biblical Studies. He and Erika have also considered church planting work.

Erika Smith (MTS)

Erika (Thousand Oaks, CA) has pursued her MTS degree to increase her personal knowledge as a Christian as well as to be better prepared to assist her husband, Caleb, in his seminary endeavor and his future ministry. “I want to be able to lead the women in the church from an educated standpoint,” she says, “and be able to assist my husband in his work and the proper training of any children the Lord may give us.”

Brian Zegers (M.Div.)

Brian (Orono, ON) and Karen have three children: Keziah (6), Kiana (5), and Maelle (2). He belongs to the URCNA and hopes for ordination to serve as a home missionary in a Reformed denomination. He is interested in university campus ministry or missions to Muslims and says, “I long to see the gospel go forth—even in the face of opposition—so that the coming of Jesus Christ on the clouds of glory would be hastened.”

Lessons Learned by Keith Le Mahieu

Development work is a second, joyful career for me. One of the best pieces of advice I received when I was new to this work came from a dear widow I met. She sent a small gift every month and I stopped to see her and thank her for her faithfulness. She and her husband grew up poor and lived through the Great Depression and the war years. They made a modest living on the farm and she was widowed for some time when we met. We became friends and I think she enjoyed our visits almost as much as I did. She loved to craft and showed me things she was working on. I learned about tatting from her. She loved the church, her Savior and the preaching of the Word. Today she sees her Savior face-to-face and I miss our visits.



One of the things I liked about her was that she was not afraid to tell me what was on her mind. I think it was during my first visit when she asked, “How much do you give to the seminary every month?” What a great question! She was asking if I was committed to the cause I was asking others to be committed to. It made me think more carefully about myself, my charitable giving and my relationship to money. What is the place of money in my life? What is my relationship to money and how does it impact my relationships with others? Did my level of financial support for Mid-America give me permission to ask others to do the same?

We North Americans live in the most affluent society in the history of mankind. How we accumulate and manage money is a primary activity we engage in, yet we are reluctant to discuss it. My guess is that serious money talk is taboo in most families – we don’t openly discuss our financial affairs with our children, parents or siblings. Conversations about money are often anxious or even angry. I think the most vigorous disagreements in my marriage have not been over child-rearing, education, the church or other important matters – they involve money in one way or another. Money is a reality in our family relationships just as it is in our relationships with people and causes beyond our family life.

Money touches our most personal relationships because it touches our innermost secret life. How does money make us feel? Does the amount of money we have impact how we feel about ourselves? Is it a matter of pride or embarrassment (whether we have much or little)? Do we use money as power? Do we use money to pursue our own purposes? Do we give with “strings attached?” How do we feel when people ask us for money? What does how I spend money say about the priorities in my life? These are not easy questions precisely because our view of money is a matter of the secret place of the heart. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matt 6:21)

When you hear that the lottery jackpot has reached \$300 million, have you dreamed about how wonderful such a windfall would be? Of course we fantasize about all the good we would do with that much money, but we also think about how liberating financial independence would be. We think about the independence it would provide because we fear dependence on others. Our culture pressures us to believe that by laying up treasures on earth we can control our destiny and insure personal security. Jesus disagrees. He tells us to lay up treasures in heaven, to seek first the kingdom of God, and to guard against serving the master of affluence rather than the Lord of Lords. Jesus wants to know if our faith is in Him or in our affluence. What is the place of money in our lives and what is the basis for our joy and security? What does what you support say about what you believe is important? “Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.” (Prov 11:28)



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◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

Adjunct Professors

by Rev. Alan Strange



Rev. Danny Hyde

Due to the load that curricular changes have put on full-time faculty members, Mid-America has had greater than usual need this year for help with teaching. To assist the faculty, Mid-America has engaged several adjuncts. One of the adjuncts, Brent Evans, a local OPC Pastor, is helping teach an Old

Testament class for Professor Mark Vander Hart, who is on sabbatical this semester. Pastor Evans is a graduate of Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, MS) and particularly helps the students with the Hebrew reading part of the course. Paul Cable, a New Testament Ph.D. student at Wheaton College (studying under Douglas Moo), also teaches Greek 202, having taught Greek 201 in the Fall.

Two men who did their M.Div. degrees at Westminster Seminary California are also serving as adjuncts this semester. The first, Fritz Harms, has already taught his course here, an elective on John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. This was an intensive upperclassmen course, taught in the afternoons over the course of the first two weeks in March. In middle March, the

other WSC graduate, Danny Hyde, has come to teach a first-year course in Liturgics. Dr. Harms has a Ph.D. from Kampen in the Netherlands and Pastor Hyde has a Th.M. from Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (Grand Rapids, MI).

Two Mid-America graduates with additional training in the areas of their teaching are also teaching courses this semester. Local URC pastor Paul Ipema is teaching Catechism Sermon and Occasional Sermon to underclassmen and upperclassmen. And Danny Patterson, an OPC Pastor serving a church in Maine, is teaching the counseling part of the course on Pastoral Care and Counseling. It is a rich blessing to have these men serve alongside the regular faculty in the training of our students.