

THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

Commencement 2013 by Rev. Alan Strange



Graduates of 2013

Classes ended on May 8 this year, followed by final exams and graduation on Thursday evening, May 16 at Bethel CRC in Lansing, IL. We had a large graduating class this year, with eleven men receiving M.Div. degrees and the wife of one of our graduates receiving the Masters of Theological Studies degree. Of that number, eight are in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and four are in the United Reformed Churches of North America. These numbers indicate the degree to which Mid-America has come to serve both the Reformed and the Presbyterian churches and we continue earnestly to seek students from both traditions.

On the last day of class, we have a closing chapel at which awards are given in each of the divisions of theological study. Jeffrey Scott received awards for the Biblical Studies and Doctrinal Studies divisions. The first of these awards is based on the highest combined score on the Greek and Hebrew comprehensive exams, while the second is based on the highest G.P.A. in systematic theology courses. Brian Zegers won the Ecclesiastical Studies award for the highest G.P.A. in that division, and Timothy Scheuers won the Ministerial Studies Award for the highest preaching evaluation scores and departmental G.P.A. President Venema also gave the closing chapel message for the year on Psalm 127, encouraging students that in our labors, we can rest in the Lord, knowing that it is the Lord who builds the house and who gives His beloved sleep.

On the evening before graduation, as is customary, the graduates and their wives gathered for a lovely dinner at a local country club with the faculty, administration and spouses. This is always a special time of reminiscing and thanking the Lord for His grace over the past years of seminary.

On the morning of the day of graduation, it is also customary for the Seminary to host an open house. This open house affords the opportunity for graduates and their families and friends who have come in for the graduation to come and lunch with the faculty and staff. Many family members and friends have not seen the seminary where these students have been for the last few years and this is a good opportunity for them to tour the campus and get to know Mid-America better.

The graduation itself was well attended and all concerned seemed thoroughly to enjoy themselves.

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*Above: Dr. Richard Gaffin
Below: Graduates, Professors & Speaker, Dr. Gaffin*



Commencement Address

by Rev. Marcus Mininger

Mid-America was privileged to have Rev. Dr. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. deliver the commencement address at this year's graduation ceremony. As an elder statesman in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Emeritus Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, PA, Dr. Gaffin chose his text deliberately: "Little Children, Keep Yourselves from Idols" (1 John 5:21).

First, Gaffin expounded upon every believer's unchanging position as God's "little child." Whether young or old, this status is never left behind but describes our constant creaturely dependence upon God. Though the graduates have reached a noteworthy milestone in their lives, they are nonetheless God's "little children," as all believers are, which recalls the gracious new birth that gives us life from above.

Second, in view of the blessing of being "little children," Gaffin explained the duty that flows from it, to keep ourselves from idols. Looking at the background of 1 John, Gaffin noted how the letter combats a rationalistic heresy that presupposes the autonomy of human reason to dictate what is plausible to believe. Such autonomy constitutes a widespread form of idolatry, elevating human reason above God's Word, which is as much a threat today as ever. Of particular relevance, Gaffin noted both postmodern claims to autonomy as well as the closest and most ubiquitous idol for all of us: ourselves. He then warned the graduates in particular how the ministry can tempt ministers to exalt themselves. Since they will often be the focus of others' attention, ministers must resist all preoccupations with "self," such as self-absorption and self-importance. Against such, the mediation of Christ through his Holy Spirit enables all believers to live as the "little children" that they are, keeping themselves from idols in humble dependence upon God.

President's Message: "The Medium is the Message"

by Dr. Cornelis Venema



For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Cor. 1:21-25)

One dominant conviction has shaped Mid-America Reformed Seminary throughout its history: Christ is the builder of His church, and He is pleased to build the church "by His Spirit and Word." The preaching and teaching of the biblical gospel or evangel lies at the core of the church's mission in the world. The ordinary means of grace, the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments, are the instruments that the Holy Spirit uses to gather, preserve, and defend the church of Jesus Christ.

The central role of preaching in the communication of the gospel of Jesus Christ reminds us of the strangely paradoxical nature of Christ's church-building work: the method the church employs must correspond to and not belie the message it wishes to convey. If the message is the saving work of Jesus Christ, especially His atoning death upon the cross, then the method God chooses to use in communicating this message must be consistent with it. You can scarcely commend the foolishness of the cross of Christ in the face of worldly wisdom, when you employ a method in gospel communication that is worldly wise. Nor can you commend the gospel of Christ's cross, which is, in the eyes of the world, an ignoble, shameful, and weak thing, when you enlist worldly strategies of power to carry out the church's commission to make disciples of all nations.

In the church of Jesus Christ, the medium is the message. The foolishness of the preaching of the cross is God's preferred means to display his wisdom, to confound the wise, and to demonstrate his power. God's power is made perfect through weakness (2 Cor. 12:9), and nowhere is this more evident than in God's chosen method for gathering and nourishing His people in the Christian faith (cf. 2 Cor. 4:7).

Perhaps the greatest folly in the modern church's affection for worldly strategies and methods is the self-defeating nature of the whole enterprise. If the church adopts a pragmatic method in order to be successful in fulfilling its mission, it fails to rely upon Christ's Spirit and Word. Whenever the church adopts a method for achieving success in its mission that does not conform to the one Christ is pleased to use, the church ceases to trust Christ's promise that He will build His church upon the foundation of the apostles' testimony (Matt. 16:13-20; cf. Eph. 2:20).

If Christ is the one who builds the church, then He is also the one who has the right to determine the strategy that He wishes to use to build it. Otherwise, the church will assume that the gathering of God's people depends upon its clever strategies and preferred methods. Christ is not only the substance of the church's message; He is also the substance of the church's method. You cannot preach the Christ of the Scriptures while relying on your own clever schemes to accomplish what He has promised to bring about in His own way.

Board Report by Rev. Jon Blair

The Board of Trustees met on May 16-17. Rev. Richard Kuiken presided as president of the Board and ably led through the agenda and consideration of various reports. Among the highlights of the meeting was the interviewing and reappointment of the following faculty members for a period of four years: Dr. Cornel Venema as Professor of Doctrinal Studies; Rev. Alan Strange as Theological Librarian and Associate Professor of Church History; and Rev. Mark Vander Hart as Associate Professor of Old Testament Studies. In addition, the following staff members were reappointed: Florence Kooiman as Office Manager; Tracy Whitfield as Administrative Secretary/ Receptionist; Grant Dykstra as Assistant Financial Officer and Student Recruiter; and Rachel Luttjeboer as Media Secretary. Dr. Venema reported on his activities during his recent sabbatical. The Board was encouraged by the large slate of students anticipated for next year. Nominations were approved for replacement of board members whose terms expire this year. Board members also had the wonderful privilege of attending the 28th Commencement exercises on Thursday evening. Once again, the hospitality of the Seminary was excellent and so too the fellowship enjoyed by all, for which much thanksgiving was given to the Lord for His blessing upon the Seminary community.



Board President, Rev. Richard Kuiken, presents retirement plaques to Chuck Dykstra, Darrel Kuiper & Ken Dykstra

Summer Assignments by Dr. Cornelis Venema

As is customary during the summer months, many of our M.Div. students will be away from campus to serve as summer interns in churches from coast to coast. One student will be back in his native England, and another student will be serving in Brooklyn, New York. Such summer experiences are very enriching to the students, and an important part of the preparation for the ministry. They grant the students opportunities to apply the knowledge gained in the academy (seminary) to the practical labor in the congregations. Pray that students and churches alike may be blessed by these experiences, to the greater glory of God.

Student:	Church:	City:	Supervisor(s):
Paul Austin	Durham Presbyterian Church	Durham, England	Rev. Brin Norto
Justin Beach	Christ Church (PCA)	Bloomington, IL	Revs. Jeff McCord & Ted Powers
Steve Carr	Zion RCUS Providence RCUS	Menno, SD Vermillion, SD	Rev. Travis Grassmid Rev. Robert Grossmann
Albert Couperus	Pompton Plains URC	Pompton Plains, NJ	Rev. Rich Kuiken
Tony Domanik	Chapel PCA	Beaver, PA	Rev. Steve Maker
Andrew Knott	Covenant URC	Pantego, NC	Rev. Cal Tuininga
David Franks	Covenant OPC	Orland Park, IL	Rev. Iain Wright
Andrew Minatelli	Spencer Mills OPC	Gowen, MI	Rev. Alan Flowers
James Roosma	Faith URC	West Olive, MI	Elder Terry Rouwhorst
Aaron Warner	Messiah's Reformed Fellowship (URC)	Brooklyn, NY	Rev. Paul Murphy
Joel Worries	Redeemer URC	Orange City, IA	Rev. Todd De Rooy

Lessons Learned by Keith Le Mahieu

Last June I wrote about the benefits of simplifying your charitable giving through a donor advised fund. A donor advised fund can help avoid capital gains taxes while providing charitable giving flexibility. This past February I wrote about congressional renewal of the IRA charitable gift rollover provision which extends the opportunity to make a tax-free gift of up to \$100,000 from your IRA through 2013 if you are 70 ½ or older. Perhaps you have wondered if you can make a tax-free gift to a donor advised fund. The answer is no, but there is another way you may be able to simplify your charitable giving from an IRA rollover.

Instead of a donor advised fund, you may wish to consider using a restricted fund. A restricted fund allows you to support a charity for a number of years with one gift. A restricted fund can also be funded by others, making it possible for family members or other individuals to add to the fund. In this way, you could create a family fund or a fund that you and your friends could use to support a charity. A restricted fund can support multiple charities if it is not funded from an IRA. If an IRA rollover gift is transferred to a restricted fund, the fund can only support a single charity.

The Barnabas Foundation will help you establish and administer a restricted fund that achieves your charitable giving goals. When you establish the fund, you will designate the charity(ies) you wish to support and Barnabas will oversee your investment and make charitable disbursements according to your intent. Contact Mid-America or the Barnabas Foundation for more information on establishing a restricted fund or making a charitable gift from your IRA.





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◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

Student Conference by Caleb Smith



Dr. David P. Murray

This last semester, the student body at Mid-America had the privilege of selecting a guest speaker for our annual Spring Conference. Students presented many topics related to the subject of pastoral care, and then voted on which one they thought was most pertinent for the church today.

This year, Dr. David P. Murray, Professor at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, was selected to speak on the topic of “Depression in the Church.” Many students were familiar with Dr. Murray, having already read his book, *Christians Get Depressed Too*.

In his opening lecture, “The Causes of Depression,” Dr. Murray began by showing how man’s fall has affected every area of life. From the chemical balances of our bodies to the sinful appetites of fallen humanity, sin has left us broken. But in this dark shadow of mankind’s sin and misery, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ shines as the only ministry of hope.

In his second lecture, Dr. Murray showed some of the “The Cures of Depression.” These cures address both body (regular exercise,

rest, and medicine) and soul (repentance of sin). This lecture was then followed by “The Caretakers of Depression” where Dr. Murray presented an interview of a nearby pastor whose wife wrestled with depression. This interview was particularly helpful in that the pastor and his wife were very honest about the difficulties they had experienced.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of this year’s conference was the large number of attendees. In addition to the student body, there were approximately 30 additional visitors, showing that depression is certainly an important issue in the church today. Overall, the student body was very pleased with the conference and trusts that the Lord will use it to shape us in the years of ministry which lie ahead.