

# THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

## Professor Strange Achieves Ph.D. by Glenda Mathes



Two years ahead of deadline, Rev. Strange has completed requirements for his Ph.D. and will become Dr. Alan Strange, Professor of Church History. He made his official submission on September 1, 2013, despite many personal and family concerns last summer.

“I am happy to have achieved an early completion, especially in the light of my father’s death, some health issues for me, my daughter’s wedding, and

many church, as well as seminary, responsibilities,” Rev. Strange says.

His dissertation is on “The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church in the Ecclesiology of Charles Hodge.” Hodge was a leading Old School Presbyterian of the 19th century who taught at Princeton Theological Seminary for almost 60 years. Among the many ecclesiastical controversies he addressed was the spirituality of the church.

According to Rev. Strange, some scholars claim this was a “profoundly conservative doctrine, developed to remove the church as a player in civil society’s strife over American slavery.” However, Hodge saw it “as a complex and subtle doctrine...not as a ‘muzzle’ for the prophetic voice of the church, but as a means of keeping the ecclesiastical from being swallowed by the political.”

Rev. Strange believes Hodge’s view insured the church would remain faithful to its calling by not confusing itself or its operations with those of the state, while carrying out the Great Commission, including comprehensive discipleship.

The 19th century research complements Rev. Strange’s earlier work in 18th century and 20th century ecclesiastical history, giving him a good grasp of church history and broader culture, particularly regarding American Presbyterianism. Rev. Strange’s work relates to church polity as well as to history.

“I not only teach the history and polity of Presbyterianism here at the Seminary, but I also teach the Form of Government course for the Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC (MTIOPC),” he explains. “I am always writing in this area, and my work on Hodge very much has to do with both the history and polity of the church.”

Such a significant milestone often depends on cooperative assistance.

“I am deeply grateful for the support that Dr. Venema, my colleagues, and Mid-America as a whole, have given to me in this,” he says. “The Board has been quite generous in its support of my research and writing by granting me a sabbatical and study leave as well as in other ways.” He adds, “I do not know what I would have done without the ever-ready assistance of Associate Librarian, Bart Voskuil, who has helped in countless ways. And I’m grateful for able secretarial assistance from Rachel Lutjeboer, who particularly helped with formatting.” Rev. Strange also expressed gratitude for proofreading to former and present students as well as some close friends.

The degree will be awarded by the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David (Lampeter, Wales) at a graduation ceremony in July.

## Old Testament Faculty Opening by Glenda Mathes

As Mid-America’s mission of preparing men to serve Christ’s church has grown, administration and instructional work has increased. For some time, the Board and Faculty have been considering how to best meet the need for an additional faculty member.

The Faculty recommended, and the Board agreed, that the most urgent need was in Old Testament studies, and an opening for Mid-America’s sixth full-time faculty member has been announced.

Applicants should be able to teach Hebrew and courses in Old Testament exegesis and biblical theology, and ordinarily have a postgraduate research degree in Old Testament. Membership in a Reformed or Presbyterian church is required, and ordination and pastoral experience is especially desirable.

The Board wishes to make clear this opening is for an additional faculty member in addition to the current five. Professor Vander Hart has not announced any intention to retire from his teaching position in the near future. The rationale behind adding a faculty member in Old Testament studies included considerations that a search for a suitable candidate in this area could take some time and may require up to several years of training in academic preparation. It’s hoped the additional faculty member will allow Professor Vander Hart more time for his administrative duties, especially those connected with the Ministerial Apprenticeship Program.

For more information on the Old Testament position, visit our website at [www.midamerica.edu](http://www.midamerica.edu).

## President's Message: Seminary Training and Church Planting

by Dr. Cornelis Venema



In this issue of *The Messenger*, there is a brief report on the January Interim at Mid-America, which includes mention of Rev. Danny Hyde's elective course on church planting. The topic of Rev. Hyde's course prompts me to offer a few observations regarding how seminary training may serve to prepare aspiring ministers for the challenging work of church planting.

Some time ago I learned that a prospective student was not sure he should attend Mid-America because, in his estimation, the seminary was not focused enough upon preparing students for this task. My initial observation is that the kind of training that best prepares a student for the pastoral ministry, especially the ministry of gospel preaching and teaching, is also best suited

to the preparation of a student for church planting. If the ministry requires an informed and skillful communication of the Word of God, which is the means Christ is pleased to use to gather and nourish His church, the work of church planting requires essentially the same preparation as is required for pastoral ministry in an established church context. Christ does not gather and establish a new church by fundamentally different means than He gathers and nourishes an already-existing congregation.

Oftentimes the insistence that aspiring ministers who wish to become church planters must be provided a unique kind of seminary education, betrays a false dichotomy between ministry in an established and in a newly-planted congregation. The assumption seems to be that pastors of an established church are engaged in what might be called a "maintenance" ministry, whereas church planters are engaged in a directly evangelistic or missional ministry. The problem with this dichotomy is that it reinforces a lamentable characteristic of some Reformed churches, namely, inattention to the church's task to reach the lost and disciple them in the Christian faith. This is not the peculiar calling of church plants. It is the high and glorious calling of every church worthy of the name. The heart's desire and prayer to God of every Christian and Christian church (cf. Rom. 10:1) ought to be to welcome lost sinners into fellowship with Christ and His church. If Christ is "gathering, preserving, and defending ... a people chosen unto everlasting life" (to use the well-known words of the Heidelberg Catechism regarding the church), then the church must always be energetically working to gather lost sinners into its membership. For this reason, the qualities required of a minister who is engaged directly in church planting are not different in kind from those required of any minister in Christ's church.

Of course, this does not mean that seminaries do not need to give special attention in their curricula to the specific challenges and requirements of church planting. There are unique circumstances that confront a minister who is engaged in church planting, and these need to be identified and addressed during the course of a seminary student's preparation for the gospel ministry. One of the required courses in the M.Div. curriculum at Mid-America is a course in missions and evangelism. As the title of the course indicates, students are taught to view the church as a missionary community and to recognize that evangelism (literally, "gospelizing," communicating the gospel firstly in Word but also in deeds) belongs to the essence of the church's calling. They are also taught that a faithful ministry of the Word must be undergirded and enveloped by a heart-felt compassion toward the flock of Christ, which consists both of those whom Christ has gathered and those whom He is gathering. In this course, as well as in elective courses like the one Rev. Hyde is teaching this interim, students are prepared for the work of church planting.

At Mid-America, it is our aim to prepare our students for service within the church. Such preparation must address not only the preservation but also the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, whether in established or newly-planted churches.

## Interim Intensive on Church Planting

by Glenda Mathes

From January 20-24, Rev. Daniel R. Hyde conducted an intensive five-day course on church planting. Rev. Hyde has been involved with a variety of church planting efforts since the beginning of his ministry at Oceanside URC in California in 2000.

The course, *Planting a Christian Church*, examined the local church's mission for evangelism and church planting in North America. It emphasized evangelistic preaching, congregational witness, urban ministry, and many practical considerations.

Course objectives aimed at developing a "Head, Heart, Hands" perspective: to learn the biblical-theological view on church planting, to kindle a passion for church planting, and to equip for the work of church planting.

Monday's classes explored "The Mission" from both a biblical-theological and confessional standpoint. Tuesday's morning class discussed the content of "The Message," while the afternoon class studied foundational principles for "The Man." Wednesday's morning sessions continued discussion about "The Man" by focusing on aptitude principles and family. The afternoon session introduced "The Method" with a look at getting started. Thursday's sessions on "The Method" examined the important components of word and prayer. Friday's class concluded discussion of "The Method" by exploring various media options.

Students were required to complete reading assignments prior to each session as well as produce a ten-page church planting proposal and three tri-fold brochures.

Check out our new online donation system! Find the link on our homepage: [midamerica.edu](http://midamerica.edu)

## Mid-America Alumni Council Announces Alumni Conference by Keith LeMahieu

The Mid-America Alumni Council has announced the first-ever alumni conference at Mid-America Reformed Seminary on April 8-10. Entitled “Church and Kingdom: Addressing Contemporary Challenges,” the conference is intended to help attendees deepen their comprehension of how one’s understanding of the relationship between church and kingdom impacts the contemporary challenges of ministry in the church.

The conference will consist of five sessions and conclude with a question and answer period. Dr. Mark Beach will open the conference on Tuesday afternoon with a lecture entitled, “The Two Kingdoms: A Lutheran or a Reformed Idea?” On Tuesday evening Dr. Cornel Venema will speak on, “Christ’s Kingship in All of Life: ‘Butchers, Bakers, and Candlestick Makers’ in the Service of Christ”

Professor Alan Strange will begin Wednesday morning by speaking on the topic, “Seeking to Define the Spirituality of the Church.” Professor Marcus Mininger will follow with a lecture entitled, “Eschatology and Protology, Christ and Culture: The Nature of Marriage as a Biblical Test-Case.” On Thursday morning Professor Mark Vander Hart will conclude the series of lectures by speaking on “Resurrecting the House of the Lord.”

## New Student: Ruben Zartman by Rev. Alan Strange



Ruben and Heidi Zartman have just moved to the Dyer area from Indianapolis in order for Ruben to attend Mid-America Reformed Seminary. Ruben will begin his studies this spring, and they both look forward to becoming a part of the Mid-America community. With both of them coming from missionary families, between

them they have spent time in South Korea, Colombia, Mexico, and Panama, as well as various states of the Union. Ruben’s coming here fulfills a long-term desire on his part. They have been married for 13 years, and share a love for the Peanuts comic strip and the music of Mondonville. Heidi produces and sells handmade greeting cards in support of the persecuted church, with profits directed to the Middle-East Reformed Fellowship ([www.octoberwednesday.com](http://www.octoberwednesday.com)). For the past several years in his spare time Ruben has engaged in proofreading and editing work for Reformed books and articles, and serves as an administrator on the Puritan Board ([www.puritanboard.com](http://www.puritanboard.com)).

## Giving Thanks for the Mundane by Keith Le Mahieu



The Mid-America Board of Trustees employs me on behalf of the Seminary Association (that’s you) to oversee development of the financial resources necessary to carry out the Seminary’s mission of training men for pastoral ministry. While I commonly use this space to write about money and matters of stewardship, charitable giving strategies, and specific needs related to the Seminary, this time I would like to review a few brief 2013 highlights that testify to the remarkable goodness of God and how He is using your support.

Last spring Mid-America students hosted a conference on “Depression in the Church” with Dr. David Murray, author of *Christians Get Depressed Too*. The conference helped students understand how to minister to those who wrestle with depression and its effects. Additionally, the Seminary hosted a pastors conference and a missions conference in the summer. The pastors conference, “Ministering in Changing Seasons,” addressed the joys and difficulties pastors face throughout their ministries while the missions conference explored the myriad of issues faced in missions settings at home and abroad. Men from as far as New Zealand attended these conferences.

Mid-America graduated twelve students in May. This class represented the largest number of graduating students in a single class and included students from Ecuador and Uzbekistan. Thirteen new students joined the student body this fall with connections to places such as New Zealand, the Netherlands, Chile, South Korea, Haiti, and Egypt.

God also graciously intervened this past year to spare several members of the Mid-America community from serious health related matters. We are most grateful for His watchful care over us.

What, you might ask, is so remarkable about conferences, students, and day-to-day issues of life? We often fail to consider how God orchestrates all things for His glory and as a token of His loving care for His people all over the world. He is using Mid-America as an instrument to build and sustain His people by His mighty hand. What a blessing to participate in the building of His kingdom. We are grateful for the partnership of those who labor with us to make that happen.



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A higher purpose.

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Mid-America Reformed Seminary's  
Evening Class

led by Dr. J. Mark Beach  
entitled

Learning to Forgive:

Practicing Forgiveness as God's Chosen People

March 6, 13, 20 & 27  
at 7:00 p.m.

SPREAD THE WORD.  
CULTIVATE THE HEART.  
EXPERIENCE THE HARVEST.



◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

**Learning to Forgive** by Dr. J. Mark Beach

Receiving and practicing forgiveness is one of the most blessed acts broken human beings can accept and perform. To be recipients of God's forgiveness is what defines believers as Christians, for we receive forgiveness because of God's love and mercy, a love and mercy that comes to us in Jesus Christ. Sinners deserve God's justice and displeasure. There is hell to pay for sins, and Jesus Christ has paid it.

Forgiveness is therefore never cheap. It is always costly. It always involves enduring a wrong, and it always involves releasing persons from the consequences of some hurtful word or deed or intention of which they're guilty. It thus also involves opening the pathway to reconciliation and healing, to restoration and new fellowship.

As recipients of God's forgiveness—and being forgiven of God is the most fundamental and

distinctive characteristic of what makes a person a Christian—we are called to practice forgiveness. The fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer is inescapable: Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. But forgiving our debtors is not always easy. In fact, sometimes forgiving those who have sinned against us is among the hardest struggles of the Christian life.

It has been my experience that many believers are confused about the practice of forgiveness. Many believers think that forgiveness must be commensurate with repentance—that is, to the degree the guilty party is sorry for their sin, to that degree I ought to forgive him. The guilty party's remorse is the prerequisite to forgiveness—and so repentance and forgiveness ought to be proportionate to one another. Without question, complete

reconciliation and healing are extremely difficult to achieve unless the guilty party acknowledges her wrongdoing. But many veteran Christians know that sometimes persons disagree, such that each party feels deeply wronged by the other—each convinced that he is in the right—and cannot persuade the other of his sin. Now what? Bear a grudge? Allow yourself to be eaten up with anger and feelings of revenge? Ask God to avenge the wrongdoer? (Rom. 12:19) Or is there another path?

The Spring Evening Class will explore this and other topics surrounding the practice of forgiveness. The class is open to the general public and is scheduled to meet on four successive Thursday evenings at 7:00, on March 6, 13, 20, and 27. All are welcome!