

THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

Why are we doing this? by Rev. Jeff DeBoer



Does your life seem small?

My sister recently explained to me the difficulty with 40. She looks at her life—driving children to basketball practice, making dinner each night, paying the utility bills, going to Bible studies—and she asks herself, “Is this all? Is this my life? Is it really this small?”

You likely think Mid-America is a seminary that serves the church by training men for pastoral ministry. You are right.

But there is more. We connect that training to something greater that makes all of our lives ultimately meaningful, and we train men in a specific way that enables them to bring this good news to those who wonder about a small life.

In Matthew 6:33 Jesus says we should “seek first His kingdom.” So our beginning point in training men is not with the church of God but with His kingdom.

To begin seminary education with the kingdom means we see the organized church as one part of that great kingdom—a necessary and integral part—but not the whole. Kingdom first preaching becomes more than a task done, but the living means by which the great kingdom of God is opened to some and closed to others. Discipling becomes more than relaying Bible content, but the good news Christ has set us free from bondage and placed us into full life service. Our churches become more than where we go on Sunday to worship, but the places where Christ’s reign is vividly experienced. And even, I would dare say, we begin to see the kingdom of God is more than a theological truth but the arena in which child raising, bill paying and Bible reading have ultimate meaning.

Because the kingdom of God is great, men who proclaim that kingdom need a certain kind of education. The kind of education B.B. Warfield says leads to the “connection between the head and the heart and hand” . . . an education that addresses the whole man.

First, our seminary must train men who know the kingdom. Our professors provide our students with a thorough and careful theological education.

Second, our seminary must train men to communicate the good news about the kingdom. We are dedicated to training pastors who are fully capable of ministering the gospel to their congregations and their communities.

Third, our seminary trains men who are growing into the spiritual maturity that is reflective of Jesus’ rule. We are intentional about nurturing the heart. All with the desire that men would help you see the greatness of Christ and His kingdom. As well as your place in it.

That’s why we’re doing this.

Readiness for Ministry

by Dr. Alan Strange

Orthodox Presbyterian students of Mid-America Reformed Seminary gathered with a couple from another Reformed seminary on the first Friday and Saturday in March for the “Readiness for Ministry” Seminar, conducted by the OPC. Every three years, the Home Missions Committee of the OPC puts on this seminar at Mid-America (as it does at certain other Reformed seminaries) for the purpose of ascertaining gifts of seminarians for gospel ministry in the OPC more broadly and in church planting more particularly.

While the seminar was under the oversight of the Home Missions Committee, and its relatively new General Secretary, John Shaw, others participated, notably, Associate General Secretary of the Committee on Foreign Missions, Doug Clawson; General Secretary of the Committee on Christian Education, Danny Olinger; and church planter and Mid-America alumnus David Robbins. Each of these men spoke about ministry in the OPC and the challenges that such presents.

The seminar participants each brought an exhortation that was evaluated by the speakers as well as several additional area OPC office-bearers (two ministers and a ruling elder). They were also given pastoral scenarios with which they had to grapple. All of this received evaluation and input from the speakers as well as the three office-bearers asked to help. At the end, each of these men had a personal meeting with Rev. Shaw in which he shared these evaluations with them. These seminars have proven a helpful tool both to students and the church in gauging strengths and weaknesses and in helping men in their ministerial preparation.

“The President’s Message: The Role of the Church in Seminary Training” (3)

by Dr. Cornelis P. Venema



Perhaps the most direct statement in the Bible about training men for the ministry of the gospel is the apostle Paul’s instruction in 2 Timothy 2:1-2: “You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

While some have argued that Paul’s words require that seminary training be the responsibility of a denominational seminary, this is disputed in the history of the Reformed churches. Paul’s instruction does not directly answer the question as to how Timothy was to carry out this task. For this reason, the practice of Reformed and Presbyterian churches in this regard has included various approaches. In some

instances, when a formal seminary training was beyond the competence of the churches, aspiring pastors were trained directly by more seasoned pastors in a “parsonage-training” arrangement. This approach has much to commend it. But it is normally beyond the competence of busy pastors to adequately prepare students in all areas of theology and ministerial practice.

In order to ensure that faithful men are entrusted with the Word of the gospel, most Reformed churches require that their pastors receive a formal seminary training, sometimes in schools that are owned and administered by the denomination, sometimes in schools that are so-called “independent” seminaries.

Noteworthy in Paul’s instruction to Timothy is the requirement that this task be carried out by a man who is himself a minister of the Word of God. Timothy is exhorted to entrust the good Word of the gospel, which he first heard from Paul and the other apostles, to faithful men who will then in turn be equipped to teach others. And so, whether the instruction of such men takes place in a



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school that is administered by the churches or not, it is the sort of instruction that ministers alone are able to provide. The ministerial office includes the task of teaching the Word of God to faithful men, furnishing them with the requisite tools to be effective pastors.

In my estimation, this is the biblical warrant for the historic Reformed practice of commissioning ministers to the special task of teaching theology to aspiring ministers. Even though they are served by denominational and independent seminaries, Reformed churches should play a key role by providing seminaries with teachers of theology who are ordained ministers of the Word. In the writings of the great Reformer, John Calvin, and in the church polity of many Reformed churches, four offices are often distinguished: elders, deacons, ministers of the Word, and ministers who engage in the “extraordinary task” of teaching theology to aspiring ministers. Though it may be debated whether or not the fourth of these offices is simply an application of the more general calling of all ministers, it is not debatable that this task belongs to the ministerial office. And in this way the teaching of theology in seminaries belongs properly to the church through her ministers.

But is it really so important that teachers of theology be ordained ministers of the Word?

Indeed, it is. The churches have every reason to insist that seminary teachers be office-bearers of the church. Aspiring pastors can only be adequately prepared for the pastoral ministry when their teachers are themselves pastors. And the churches can only preserve their testimony to God’s Word of truth when those who teach future pastors are themselves respectful of the churches’ faith-commitments and practices.

If the church of Jesus Christ wishes to be a “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15), then it will be sure to commission some of its pastors for the special task of entrusting the Word of God to faithful men. Such a church will not willingly abdicate its responsibility to insist that such teachers be faithful servants of the Word of God.

Watch Out! by Keith LeMahieu

Are you a “high earner?” Didn’t think so... Did you know the IRS might not agree with you? If they don’t – watch out! The IRS says you are a high earner if your income exceeds \$250,000 for joint filers or \$200,000 for single filers. “I’m nowhere close to being a high earner,” you say. “I only make \$75,000 per year. Not so fast...”

Farming has been a family tradition for generations, but your children are not interested in taking over the farm. You want to retire and sell the farm which is appraised for \$850,000. Farm income was always modest, but if you sell you are now a high earner.

That apartment building you bought for \$300,000 generated a nice income over the years, but being a landlord is not fun anymore. The appraiser says your apartment building is worth \$1,000,000. That’s a capital gain of \$700,000. Guess what – selling makes you a high earner.

So why is being a high earner important? You probably already know that capital gains tax and sometimes sales tax can significantly erode the income from the sale of appreciated assets. But did you know that the Affordable Care Act (aka Obamacare) is about more than just healthcare – it is also about taxation? The Affordable Care Act introduced what is known as the Net Investment Tax or NIT. The NIT hits high earners with a 3.8% tax on top of other taxes you already pay.

Let’s use the farm sale example above. Assume your income is \$75,000 from farming operations and your capital gain from the sale of the farm is \$750,000. Your total income for the year is \$825,000. Because you are filing jointly, your \$825,000 income exceeds the \$250,000 “high-earner” threshold by \$575,000. The 3.8% Affordable Care Act tax on \$575,000 is \$21,850. This is in addition to any capital gains taxes.

The good news is there are ways to mitigate both capital gains and the NIT. I will write about that next time.

Eight graduates anticipate serving Christ's church by Glenda Mathes

Paul Austin, from Lincolnshire, UK, taught for seven years at a Bible college in Kampala, Uganda. When his UK minister recommended he attend seminary, he decided on Mid-America. While in the States, he and Kilby and daughter Hilary (2) attend Redeemer URC in Dyer, IN, but remain members of Durham Presbyterian Church (Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales). He hopes to serve that denomination, but first plans to settle his family in Durham. "My goal is to put down roots in our home church before looking for a call to ministry. I hope to support the local community and be involved as a lay-person while continuing to learn and grow myself."

Justin Beach and Bonnie have three children: Paxton (4), Evie (2), and Vera (9 mos). Justin taught youth and was involved in missions at Covenant Community Church (PCA) in Scottsdale, AZ, as well as working with an inner-city church (New City Phoenix) to mentor underprivileged youth and organize community restoration projects. The Beach family belongs to Cityview Presbyterian Church (PCA) in the west loop of downtown Chicago. He seeks a pastoral call in the PCA and has a strong desire to church plant. "I hope to preach, teach and evangelize all ages, discipling them to grow in love for Christ, and I hope to encourage the church's role in caring for the needy."

Steve Carr and Crystal have four children: Steven, Jr. (7), Hannah (5), Charles (4), and David (8 mos). The family belongs to Redeemer RCUS in Golden Valley, MN. Steve previously led youth groups and taught junior high Sunday school. He also was involved with jail ministry, led Bible studies, and exhorted. His pastor, a Mid-America alumnus, heartily recommended the Seminary. Steve hopes to receive a call as Minister of the Word and sacraments in an RCUS congregation. "I hope that He will use me to preach Christ and Him crucified in order to build up His church and perfect His saints. My only desire is to do His will in a faithful manner."

Albert Couperus came to seminary from New Zealand, where he worked for 16 years as a physical therapist. His family belongs to Wanganui Reformed Church, and he hopes to serve as an ordained minister in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, which is currently experiencing a shortage of pastors. He and Hanneke have four daughters: Michaela (13), Grace (11), Kate (8), and Zara (7). They would like to express their thanks for the overwhelming support, prayer, and blessings received during their time in the States. "We see this as a collective journey and we could not have done it without the support of the churches here, as well as our supporters back home."

Sung hwan Kan and Inok Kim with their two children, Sophia (4) and Grace (1), belong to the Holland International Church in Holland, MI. Originally from Seoul, South Korea, Kan was ordained in 2010 in the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Baekseok). He served in various capacities prior to coming to Mid-America for his Master of Theological Studies degree. He is open to the Lord's leading into further ministry, teaching, or PhD study in a Reformed denomination. "I eagerly hope that God use

me to serve Korean congregants in the States. Because they are thirsty and hungry for the word of God in Korean, I want to have the opportunity to serve them."

Darryl Kretschmer and his wife Hsiang-I (Anita) have two children, Lydia Jo (8) and Johann (4), and expect another. He is originally from Pioneertown, CA, and hopes to be ordained in the OPC with a view toward becoming a foreign missionary. Prior to seminary, he served as a missionary in Taiwan and China and is fluent enough to preach in Mandarin Chinese. "After being a missionary for over nine years, I realized I lacked the theological education to be effective in ministry. I pray that the Lord will use me to minister the gospel to his flock: through the Word and sacraments, counseling, evangelism, encouragement, and the other facets of ministry this entails."

James Oord grew up in western Michigan, witnessing his father's ministry. While in college, he began to desire to share with others the wonders of God's grace. James and Raylene (who is from Alberta, Canada) belong to Community URC (Schererville, IN), where he will serve as pastoral intern this summer. "I pray that in whatever church I serve, the congregation and I will grow together to be Jesus-centered people, seeing in Him the fulfillment for every need and the hope for every longing of our hearts. Mid-America has blessed my own spiritual and theological growth. The professors didn't simply teach me how to preach and teach, they taught me to love the church."

Aaron Warner and Audra have three children: Caedmon (6), Josiah (4), and Abbiel (9 mos.). A life-long member of Bethany URC in the Grand Rapids, MI, area, Aaron has worked at different jobs, including several years as an electrician. He mentored men with substance abuse, taught junior high youth group and Sunday school, and served on short term mission trips to Trinidad and Costa Rica. Shadowing a missionary was one way the Lord prepared him for ministry. "I hope to serve God in any way that He calls, but I have a heart for missions and church planting. I pray that someday I will be able to serve Christ's church in that capacity."

Seniors: back: Justin Beach, Steve Carr, James Oord, Darryl Kretschmer; front: Paul Austin, Sung hwan Kan, Albert Couperus, Aaron Warner





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◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

Ten Year Reaccreditation!

Mid-America is pleased to announce that the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), a respected accrediting body serving many sister colleges and seminaries across the country, has reaffirmed the Seminary’s accreditation for a period of ten years. Ten years represents the longest amount of time that ATS can confer for re-accreditation, so the Seminary thanks the Lord for this very positive and encouraging result, which affirms our institutional vitality and effectiveness.

The process of re-accreditation is a lengthy one. It began more than a year and a half ago with a months-long, comprehensive internal assessment process, during which faculty, staff, students, alumni, and Board members all helped evaluate the Seminary’s health and effectiveness. After that internal process concluded, ATS then sent a team of outside observers to campus last fall

by Rev. Marcus Mininger

to conduct interviews, review documents and procedures, and see the Seminary at work.

Following this intensive process, ATS not only granted Mid-America the maximum period of reaccreditation, it also noted several of the Seminary’s distinctive strengths. First, it observed “An outstanding model of formation for effective pastoral leadership in the context of the Reformed and Presbyterian traditions that permeates the curriculum and the ethos of the school.” Second, it recognized “a clearly defined mission statement that guides the board, faculty, staff, and students in their daily work, which demonstrates an unwavering sense of purpose and commitment to the church.” Third, it highlighted “a well-designed Ministerial Apprenticeship Program (MAP) that provides continued (academic year-long) and focused (summer-intensive) opportunities for real-

world clergy formation. This program utilizes partnerships with churches, who supply both opportunities and funds, thus enabling students to express their academic progress in practical ways, which help form them for ministry in the pulpit.”

In short, ATS was very pleased with the Seminary’s distinctive strengths, which make it a valuable and even unique place for training pastors. ATS also recognized how the Seminary’s effectiveness is due in large part to its close partnership with supportive churches, for which the Seminary is so thankful.

We can rejoice together, then, in the Lord’s provision for the Seminary, both in the ten-year reaccreditation and even more so in the privileged calling and abundant resources God continues to bestow on us to enable our common labors in the gospel. Thanks be to our God!