

THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

Interim class on Sustainable Ministry

by Glenda Mathes



This year's interim looked beyond placing the pastor in a pulpit to equipping him to maintain an effective ministry long-term.

Rev. Jeff DeBoer, Director of Enrollment Management, states the "Sustainable Ministry" class objective as: "To delight in the kingship of Christ by nurturing future pastors' resistance to some of the most common reasons for ministry failure and thereby

encouraging a lifetime of fruitful service."

He adds, "That may sound rather ambitious, but I could also describe the course as designed to develop godly patterns that encourage a lifetime of faithful, fruitful ministry."

According to Rev. DeBoer, a recent study indicated that ministers who possess key competencies are better equipped to avoid typical pitfalls, particularly within the early years of ministry.

"This class is designed to introduce our students to these patterns while in seminary. And by that introduction to give them a head start in areas where many pastors struggle," he explains. "Ultimately, I hope this training will help them avoid some of the most common reasons pastors leave ministry and enable them to have long-term faithful ministries."

He guided students toward that objective in an approach he describes as more vocational than academic. Students reflected on class discussions in daily journals and interviewed pastors they perceived as doing well in ministry. They participated in question and answer sessions, practiced skills through role-playing, or engaged in conversations with the instructor as well as seasoned ministers and other experts.

"Most days, someone experienced in a particular area of our study spoke to the class via Skype," Rev. DeBoer says. "These hour or so presentations provided the students with some of the very best education we (or anyone) can offer on this subject. For example, on the first day of class, Dr. Dan Wilson from Harvest USA spoke about the reality of sexual temptation and how to develop safeguards to avoid its harm."

Although Rev. DeBoer perceives a lack of quality research regarding pastors leaving the ministry, he relates, "The best guesses are that about a third fail to reach five years of ministry and about half fail to reach 40 years of ministry. Our graduates have historically done much better (only about 15% are no longer in pastoral ministry), but a further, and deeper, question—even among pastors who continue—is how many are simply hanging on, and how many would assess their ministry as faithful and fruitful. Our institution is seeking to train men to do more than survive."

He says, "The heart of pastoral ministry is to disciple people, and it's hard to disciple them apart from being able to love them well. So this course was designed to give students some basic skills that go into loving people well."

Inside/Outside Conference

by Glenda Mathes

An upcoming conference in southern Ontario seeks to edify and equip Christ's church for evangelism. The "Inside/Outside" conference will be held at Living Water Reformed Church (URCNA) in Brantford, ON, on March 4 and 5, 2016. Its theme is, "Strengthening the church to reach those outside."

Rev. Greg Bylsma explains, "Essentially we wanted a conference focus that would blend the ideas of building up the saints as well as seeing that the goal of building up the church is never for the sake of the church, but for the glory of God. And that means we have to realize God wants the church to be strong and vibrant as a witness to the world around her."

At the conference, Mid-America professors will present on: Preaching Inside/Outside, Community Inside/Outside, Discipling Inside/Outside, and Turning the Inside/Outside.

"Conferences like this can be a neat bridge by which the work of Mid-America is forwarded not only in training pastors for the work of ministry, but also in helping equip and strengthen individual members of local churches in their calling as Christians," Rev. Bylsma says. "One of the goals of the church is to dig its roots deep into the things of God, and a conference of this nature gives that opportunity not simply to ministers, but to anyone who desires to see more of the beauty of God in His word and work."

Register for the free conference on Mid-America's website: midamerica.edu/insideoutsideregistration

INSIDE
OUTSIDE

The President's Message: "Our Help Comes From the Lord"

by Dr. Cornelis Venema

"I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." Psalm 121:1

The opening words of Psalm 121 are among the most familiar in all of Scripture. In the liturgical practice of many Reformed churches, the public worship of God's people on the Lord's Day begins with the words, "Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth."

These words are especially timely at the beginning of 2016, another "year of the Lord" (*anno Domini*) in which we are called as God's people to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33).

Though we do not know what this year will bring, we may be confident that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ will faithfully realize His every good purpose in the lives of His people and in the gathering of the church from out of all the nations and peoples of the earth.

The confidence in God's careful watch over His people, which is so beautifully celebrated in Psalm 121, anticipates the magnificent language of Romans 8:28: "For we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose." At all times and places, God's vigilance in watching over His beloved children is constant and unwavering. Past, present, and future are embraced within His all-comprehensive counsel. Because God has proven beyond a shadow of a doubt to what lengths He is willing to go to secure our good, we may look to the future with confidence in His never-failing grace and faithfulness (Rom. 8:32).

Although the confidence of the Psalmist is expressed throughout in the first person ("I," "you" singular), it is a confidence that is shared with others. While the language of Psalm 121 is as personal as Lord's Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism ("My only comfort ..."), it is not individualistic in character. It applies not only to believers personally, but it also has application to the common life and institutional expressions of the Christian life.

At the beginning of 2016, it appears this will be an especially challenging year for Mid-America Reformed Seminary. Significant changes in the seminary's administrative and faculty personnel are looming. Florence Kooiman, our Office Manager who has served the institution from its earliest beginnings until now, will retire at the end of this academic year. The Board of Trustees has appointed Keith LeMahieu to assume the position of Vice-President of Administration, assuming many of the responsibilities formerly assigned to Florence. The Board also declared the position of Vice-President for Advancement open, and we are presently seeking applications for this important and strategic task. Furthermore, a sixth full-time faculty member, Rev. Andrew Compton, will begin serving the school at the beginning of June. These developments present the seminary with new challenges and opportunities to continue our work of preparing students for the gospel ministry. They also remind us that Mid-America is approaching a period of significant turnover in its staff and faculty.

Confidence in the Lord's help in this new year and in the future does not warrant a kind of passive resignation on our part. The truth of the well-known adage, "pray and work" (*ora et labora*), must be recognized. We have the responsibility to proceed with care and diligence, faithfully discharging the stewardship that has been entrusted to us as a school. We have much work to do, and we must do it in the strength of Christ's Spirit.

And yet we may go forward in the quiet confidence of Psalm 121. Our success does not depend upon our wisdom or strength. The kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ does not finally depend upon our best efforts. We may not give way to the conceit that the Lord's church will be built by dint of our labor. Such conceit can only produce disquiet and fearfulness about what the future holds. The confidence that the Psalmist expresses in Psalm 121 should rather produce a spirit of joyful anticipation of the Lord's watchful care over us in the year/s ahead.

What Is a Sabbatical?

by Dr. J. Mark Beach

Sabbaticals have moved from the academy to the pastorate—that is, increasingly, not only professors at academic institutions but also pastors at local churches are being granted sabbaticals. Ideally, sabbatical offers a pastor (and a professor) a time of spiritual refreshment and opportunity for intensive study of a topic of interest—in short, a sabbatical offers a break in order to recharge physically and mentally, with the goal to reengage one's duties with renewed energy and zeal. Thus, a sabbatical (directly related to the Hebrew word "Sabbath") opens up chunks of time for intensive study and writing in an area of interest. Often "book projects" are the focus of a sabbatical.

The Board of Trustees graciously granted me a sabbatical for the Fall semester 2015. On my sabbatical I have focused on five areas of interest: (1) the believer's practice of forgiveness, especially exploring the implications of God's forgiveness for how we forgive others; (2) the doctrine of the covenant of works—specifically I have explored how it is neither legalistic nor graceless, nor may it be construed as contrary to the Three Forms of Unity; (3) the doctrine of predestination, focusing on modern exegesis of pivotal texts; (4) the believer's (and pastor's) battle with the Seven Deadly Sins; and (5) the theology of Francis Turretin (the last great Reformed theologian in Geneva). Articles and books are the end result of the completion of this work. Sabbatical, then, is a busy-restfulness or a restful-busyness, and a delight.



Alumni Updates by Glenda Mathes

Mid-America alumni continue to serve God throughout the country and around the world. Here are some recent updates:



After serving the United Reformed Church of Prince Edward Island (PEI) for seven years, **Rev. Nick Alons** (2006) has accepted a call to

pastor the Lynwood United Reformed Church (URC) in Lansing, IL. He and Allison, with their four children between one and eight years old, moved in December. He was installed on December 13, 2015.

St. John's Reformed Church of Lincoln, NE, has called **Rev. Randall Klynsmä** (1989) to plant a Reformed Church of the United States (RCUS) congregation in the Omaha area, where several church families are committed to the work. On February 1, 2016, he undertook his new duties, and Northland Reformed Church in Kansas City, MO, was declared vacant.

Rev. Matthew Nuiver (2004) has accepted a call to serve Faith URC in West Olive, MI. After six and a half years of ministering to the URC of Wellsburg, IA, he and Lisa plan to move with their family of six children, near the end of January. His installation is scheduled for the

morning of February 7, 2016.

James Oord (2015) was ordained as Minister of the Word and Sacraments at Community URC in Schererville, IN, on the evening of January 7, 2016. Professor J. Mark Beach and his son, Justin, participated. Dr. Beach preached on 2 Timothy 2:1-13, the same text he used at the 1986 ordination of James' father. Rev. Arthur Besteman gave the charge to the new pastor.



Rev. David Robbins (2005), former church planter of an Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

effort in Huntington, WV, was installed on October 30, 2015, as a missionary to Uganda. He and Rashel, who have three young children, anticipate moving the family to the Karamoja region in February, 2016. He will help plant a church in Nakaale, and work with the Orthodox Presbyterian Uganda Mission (OPUM) to establish an indigenous church and perform works of mercy.

After seven and a half years of serving the Immanuel Covenant Reformed Church (URCNA) in Abbotsford, BC, **Rev. Steve Swets** (2007) has accepted a call to Rehoboth URC

in Hamilton, ON. He and Rachel moved their family of four children, ages seven and under, to Ontario near the end of December, and his installation was scheduled for January 15, 2016.



In November of 2015, **Rev. Talman Wagenmaker** (2005) and his wife, Sarah, welcomed their fifth child, Monica. She joins siblings Jonathan, Dorothy, Callie, and Silas. As they rejoice in this gift from the Lord, they also celebrate in February of 2016 ten years of ministry at the Grace URC in Waupun, WI.

In 2014, **Brian Zegers** (2013) was ordained by his home church, Salem URC in Bowmanville, ON, to serve as a missionary to the Toronto Muslim community. As part of his responsibilities, he organizes and facilitates discussion evenings, Christian-Muslim forums, presentations, and lectures. Both he and his wife, Karen, also cultivate friendships with their Muslim neighbors and host them in their home.



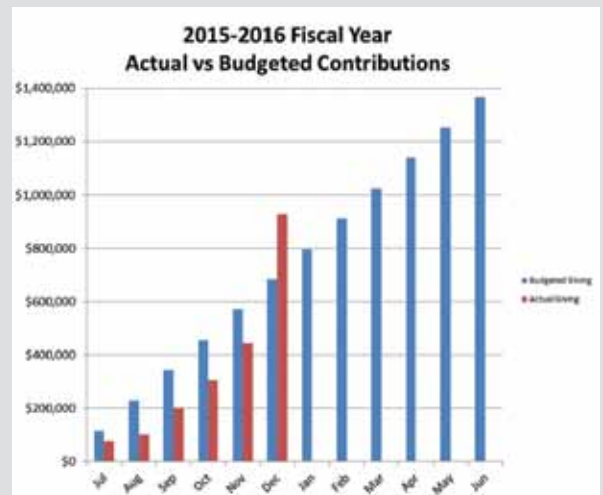
Give Thanks by Keith LeMahieu

I have done development work at Mid-America for 15 years. There are times I feel inadequate for the task. I used to meet other development people who seemed so confident while I would lie awake at night wondering how I was going to produce enough revenue to pay the bills.

It has been fascinating to watch God work these 15 years. I recently confided to a friend that I no longer lose sleep because time and again God has surprised me. I suppose I should not be surprised since God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, but that's mustard seed faith for you.

This past year has been difficult financially. I'm sure you sensed the urgency in our appeals. It would thrill your heart to see how God used you to answer our prayers in unimaginable ways. I hope you will give thanks to our great God for the way he has met our needs!


The adjacent graph shows budgeted vs actual contributions for the current fiscal year. The blue bars show the month-over-month cumulative contributions needed to meet our budget. The red bars show actual contributions. Look how God used you to meet our needs and give us the reserve needed for the new calendar year. It is nothing short of amazing. Thank you! God is good!





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**REFORMATION
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In 2017, it will be 500 years that the Reformation started with Martin Luther nailing the 95 Theses. Join Mid-America Reformed Seminary President Dr. Cornelis P. Venema for a 500th anniversary commemorative tour.

For more information, visit:
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New Book Available by Glenda Mathes



Who doesn't love the Heidelberg Catechism's warm and personal language? But perhaps the seemingly harsh words of Q & A 80 make you cringe. Some Reformed denominations have gone so far as to remove that question and answer from the text of this 16th Century confession. A recently-published book by Dr. Cornelis P. Venema, Mid-America's President, provides historical background and biblical teaching to defend the question and answer's modern relevance and continued inclusion in the Catechism.

The Lord's Supper and the Popish Mass: A study of

Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 80 was published in November of 2015 by Reformation Heritage Books as a volume of its *Explorations in Reformed Confessional Theology* series.

Richard A. Muller, P. J. Zondervan Professor of Historical Theology, Emeritus, Calvin Theological Seminary, writes: "Cornel Venema's study of Heidelberg Catechism question 80 carefully addresses both the meaning and circumstances of its addition to the catechism and the highly problematic modern effort to rid the document of any offense to Roman Catholics. Venema's analysis of question 80 both establishes the significance of the theological point in its historical context and the continued relevance of its theology. In so doing, he also highlights the lack of wisdom of contemporary attempts to erase or ignore the past for the sake of smoothing over the more difficult issues in

ecumenical dialogue."

R. Scott Clark, professor of church history and historical theology at Westminster Seminary California, says: "In 1878 Philip Schaff captured modern discontent with question 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism when he complained that it is unduly controversial. Since that time at least two Reformed bodies have sought to marginalize question 80, yet the question remains: Is it true? Cornel Venema calmly and clearly shows that however troubled some may be by question 80's tone, what we confess there is true, and it is no more controversial than God's Word. This is a truly helpful work, much to be commended."

The 96-page work may be small in size, but it is large in significance. It is available in the Seminary bookstore or can be ordered from the publisher, or other online outlets.