

THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

Florence Kooiman retires by Glenda Mathes



June 24 marked a memorable day in Mid-America's history. After a 35-year career, it was Florence Kooiman's last day as Vice President of Administration.

"Florence was a great help to me in my work as President," Dr. Venema said. "I was not exaggerating, when I occasionally asked visitors, 'Do you wish to speak to the man in charge, or the woman who knows what's going on?' Florence was that woman. I believe I speak for all the staff and faculty, when I say she will be sorely missed. We wish her the best in her retirement."

Florence said, "I am so thankful for how Dr. P.Y. De Jong and Dr. Venema placed confidence in me and gave me the opportunity to work beside them in such a special environment."

She treasures the relationships formed with many within the Seminary community, and enjoyed helping new students settle into the area.

"What joy to assist them as they stepped out in faith to pursue God's calling!" She added, "People often speak of what I did for students, but the students did just as much for me. They gave me enthusiasm for my work, and we had fun together. But we also shared our sorrows. I feel that I received more from my work at Mid-America than I gave."

The move from Iowa to Indiana was an emotional experience for Flo. "When the Board of Trustees initiated the discussion, Orv and I were excited and committed to it. After his death, however, it became very different. My emotions seemed at both ends of the spectrum: joy about being closer to my children, and excitement about the Seminary's new location, but also fear about this farm girl being placed in an unfamiliar city, and sorrow at leaving my childhood home and supportive family and friends."

She's beginning a new business venture in her retirement. "I've always enjoyed home projects, and the Lord recently opened a door for me to repurpose furniture. Up till now I didn't have an outlet, but I've rented space in a Crown Point store called Antiques on Main."



Left photo: Florence and her three children, Tim, Nicole and Scott. Right photo: Florence with six of her nine grandchildren.

Celebrating Flo by Glenda Mathes

Members of the Board of Trustees and other friends gathered at the Center for Visual and Performing Arts in Munster, IN, on May 11 to celebrate Florence Kooiman's 35 years of service and wish her well in her upcoming retirement. About 100 people attended the event, including her children and many of her grandchildren.

"I was overwhelmed," Florence said. "I wasn't sure how I would handle it because I don't like all this attention, but God gave me just what I needed to enjoy it. It was a beautiful ending to a career."

Guests enjoyed a delicious dinner and an audio-visual presentation, featuring photos of Florence through the years and greetings from many former students and their families. Speakers included Rev. Jacques Roets (2001), Dr. Cornel Venema, and Rev. Ed Marcusse.

As Florence's pastor at Redeemer URC in Dyer, IN, Rev. Roets is well acquainted with her. He spoke of her as "courageous and humble," performing her "hidden service" so that "the men in charge looked good."

Dr. Cornel Venema expressed his thanks for Florence's energetic contributions over the years: running, reacting, multitasking, helping, and volunteering. He contrasted Florence's devotion to the Seminary with the Lord's example of the hired hand who doesn't really love the sheep. Even though her volunteer work soon turned into full-time employment, Dr. Venema stated she remained a volunteer at heart all the way through her career at the Seminary.

Board of Trustees President, Rev. Ed Marcusse, presented Florence with a token of thanks from the Board. He spoke about the importance of her assistance when the Seminary began and noted that it wouldn't be the same without her. He described her in many ways, including: surrogate mother, life coach, time keeper, and sympathetic listener. He said, "You've made a huge difference in the lives of every single person you've met, and we thank you for that."

President's Message: "Strengthening the MAP"

by Dr. Cornelis P. Venema



The Faculty shall undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the MAP requirements and their effectiveness, with a view to improving it in the following areas: the evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of new students as they enter the M.Div. program; the training of pastoral supervisors and faculty counselors in their interaction with the students assigned to their oversight; the preparation of a uniform sermon evaluation form that reflects the Faculty's consensus regarding the components of a good sermon; identifying and partnering with area churches and pastors in the spiritual formation and training of the students for the pastoral ministry; effective communication with the student's overseeing churches; enlisting the assistance of ecclesial mission coordinators and church planting leaders to provide ministry opportunities.

The quotation above is one of the strategic initiatives that the Board of Trustees of Mid-America approved at its May meeting for inclusion in the Seminary's new Long Range Plan. The aim of this initiative is to strengthen the Seminary's Ministerial Apprenticeship Program (MAP). This initiative recognizes that one of the most important features of our students' preparation for the ministry is the MAP's focus upon their spiritual formation and growth in ministerial skills.

Undoubtedly, the foremost task of a seminary is to provide the students with an excellent theological education. A seminary is an academy, and it must maintain the highest academic standards that are required for the gospel ministry. In each area of the curriculum—biblical studies (including knowledge of the original biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek), ecclesiastical studies, doctrinal studies, and ministerial studies—seminary students must become adept at reading and interpreting the Scriptures. Their reading of the Scriptures must also be informed by the study of church history and the church's confessions, all with a view to the effective communication of the gospel to a modern audience. The high calling of the gospel ministry, which is in all of its facets a ministry of the Word of God, demands nothing less than this.

But the Seminary's task, in collaboration with the churches who recommend students to us for study, also includes careful attention to the cultivation of the student's spiritual maturity and aptitude for effective ministry. One of the legitimate criticisms of seminary education in our day is that it is isolated from the life and ministry of the church. This is the reason some have argued for what they call a "parsonage training" model. In this model, students are trained within the local church setting by competent pastors. They receive what might be called "on the job training." The problem, of course, that this model always faces is obvious: how can a busy pastor (or pastors) find the time, or have the theological wherewithal, to provide such students with the academic instruction that is needed?

While it is relatively easy to criticize the parsonage training model for its vulnerability in respect to a student's theological formation, it must be admitted that seminaries often neglect the spiritual formation of their students. Like many colleges and universities, they are driven by the need to have more students in order to be financially stable. The more students they train, the better. Sadly, many of these students are often unprepared for the rigors of the pastoral ministry and do not possess the spiritual strengths that are required of those who aspire to the ministry (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-7).

In my estimation, there are three features of this initiative to improve the MAP that are especially important.

First, when students begin their studies, seminary faculty need to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the students. Such an evaluation will provide the faculty with a standard by which to measure the students' progress especially in areas of identified weakness or where there is clear room for improvement.

Second, there are several ways in which Mid-America can improve its partnership with supporting churches in the training of our students. These include more regular and effective communication with the student's supervising consistory, session, or classical/presbyterial candidates committees. They also include the training of, and partnership with, local church pastoral supervisors or mentors, who monitor the student's growth in pastoral skills.

And third, students need to be exposed to the challenges of pastoral ministry in an increasingly secular society and culture. In addition to the many opportunities that our students enjoy in leading public worship and exhorting, they need to be placed in ministerial settings that test their ability to communicate the gospel in church planting and evangelistic contexts.

Assemblies & URC Synod

Seminary personnel represented Mid-America at major ecclesiastical assemblies this summer, and two professors invested numerous hours in assembly work.

Dr. Venema addressed the RCUS Synod (May 16-19) in California. Mr. Keith LeMahieu represented Mid-America at the OPC GA (June 8-14) in Maryland; he also chaired an advisory committee and drafted the Assembly's resolution of thanks. Dr. Venema and Mr. Mike Deckinga were present at the URCNA Synod (June 13-17) in Michigan. And Rev. Jeff De Boer was at the PCA GA (June 20-23) in Alabama.

At the OPC GA, Dr. Strange presented for the Committee on Appeals and Complaints as well as working on other matters, notably the Trinity Psalter Hymnal approved by this year's OPC GA and URCNA Synod. He serves as general co-editor of that songbook, which will include the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards.

Dr. Beach presented for the Liturgical Forms Committee at the URCNA Synod. The assembly decided to publish two books in addition to the Trinity Psalter Hymnal. The creeds and confessions approved for inclusion in it will also be printed in a separate book. Another book will contain prayers and URCNA-specific liturgical forms.

"Synod several times received our work with much thanks and commendation," he said. "It has been an honor to serve the churches in this capacity."

Regarding the Trinity Psalter Hymnal, Dr. Strange observed, "Such a book, containing no denomination or federation specific documents, will represent Reformed ecumenism at its best, and we hope that it will be used to draw confessional Presbyterian and Reformed communions worldwide closer together."



David and Rashel Robbins by Glenda Mathes



Pastors Robbins and Dave Okken

Contrasts abound for the David Robbins (2008) family, serving as OPC missionaries in the Karamoja region of Uganda. Mountain vistas and exotic plants display the beauty of God’s creation, while creatures and disease invade their home. They rejoice to teach God’s word, but grieve the pervasive human suffering.

it,” Pastor Robbins says. “As parents of small children, such news makes you stop and think. But the villages all around are full of lost and dying souls. Who can deny them the word of life?”

Pastors Robbins and Dave Okken share teaching and preaching responsibilities at a medical clinic and in surrounding villages. They perform administrative tasks and disciple men to become spiritual leaders. Because their work is constantly interrupted by people begging for assistance, diaconal matters require a huge time investment.

“The suffering and poverty is sometimes horrific,” Pastor Robbins says. “We know we need to tell the gospel, but how are we to show it? Our resources and wisdom are completely inadequate, so we are continually forced back upon the Lord.”

The biggest challenge—and most fervent prayer request—for the Robbins family is learning the language. “The sounds are so completely different from anything I’ve ever studied,” Pastor Robbins says. “I’m so glad I learned Hebrew under Rev. Vander Hart, because Karimojong has fascinating parallels with the Semitic

languages.”

Although many other challenges exist, he says, “None of them diminish the fact that we absolutely love it here, and we have great joy in the blessed privilege God has given us to bring the gospel to these needy people.”

Pastor Robbins views problems as “endless opportunities” to share the gospel. After he preached recently at a funeral, several men began asking for assistance. He opened the Bible and taught them about the responsibilities of God-fearing men, in contrast to their culture of laziness and drunkenness. Then he urged them to follow Jesus.

“I get to do that all the time,” he says. “It’s amazing and wonderful.” He rejoices at these daily opportunities to open God’s word and publicly preach the gospel to needy souls.

“Our life here is not easy, but there are many wonderful and special things we enjoy,” Pastor Robbins says. “God’s creation is spectacular. The stunning beauty and loveliness in this sin-burdened place constantly lift my eyes to the glory and loveliness of God.”

Malaria is a real and constant threat. David is recovering from a mild bout, while Rashel’s recovery from a severe case may take three months.

“In the few months we’ve been here, some muzungus (whites) down country have died of

375 Words and a Picture by Mike Deckinga

I count it a privilege to write my first article for *The Messenger*. I have read this publication for years, and as I look back, I never imagined I would get an opportunity like this. As many of you likely read in our last issue, I am new to Mid-America Reformed Seminary. My family and I feel very blessed to be a part of this community. In my short time here I have gotten to meet with many wonderful friends of Mid-America. It has been such a blessing to hear your stories of how our Lord has sustained you and your families. I look forward, in God’s providence, to meeting many more of you as time progresses.

At our last editorial meeting, I was given 375 words and a picture for this edition of the newsletter. 375 words and a picture—that is a small amount of space. I have already used up 168 words! Somehow, I need to introduce myself, make a good first impression, and write some sort of compelling article you will enjoy reading, all while using up so little space.

Small, yet powerful—that got me thinking about Mid-America’s reach into God’s kingdom. Did you know that our students, alumni, and professors, have impacted over 28 countries worldwide? We view our work of training men for the gospel ministry of Jesus Christ in light of the Great Commission found in Matthew 28: 16-20. Our Lord, through His grace and providence, has established the work of our small institution and granted us the privilege of advancing His kingdom to many nations. Praise be to God!

We need you to partner with us in this work. Financial aid available to Mid-America’s international students is based solely on what God is pleased to provide through your gifts. We just wrapped up another fiscal year, and we are so thankful that you have lifted us up in prayer and have shared with us financially. As you make charitable contribution decisions, please consider a recurring or one-time gift of any amount to the International Student Aid Fund. Even the smallest of gifts can be used in a powerful way, all to the glory of God our Father. Will you help impact Christ’s kingdom in this way?





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◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

Faculty teaching extends to community and world



For his tenth year, Rev. Mark Vander Hart taught at the Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary in Riga, Latvia. During his four weeks overseas, he taught a survey on the book of Isaiah, including a definition of biblical propheticism. Six lay leaders took the course for credit while several more audited it. The 18 hours of lectures were recorded

and sent digitally to students in other locations. Rev. Vander Hart also tutored a student in biblical Hebrew and another in biblical Greek.

He preached in Reformed churches in Latvia and Lithuania, and was the speaker for a Family Bible Camp. He spoke from Isaiah on rotten leadership, the meaning of our feasting, and divine comfort in an age of idols.

Rev. Andrew Compton spoke at the Men for God conference on June 24-25 in Surrey, BC. He presented two talks about David, one on his call and another on his fall and restoration. The conference was hosted by Joy to the Word Ministries, whose president, Fletcher Matandika, attended seminary with Rev. Compton. While at the conference, Rev. Compton monitored a Mid-America informational display. The following Sunday he preached at New Westminster URC and Surrey

Covenant Reformed Church (URCNA).

“It was a great blessing to worship with Reformed brothers and sisters and bring them the words of life on the Lord’s Day,” he said. “And to bring greetings from the Seminary to supporters way out west!”

A public class scheduled for Thursday evenings in October will feature Rev. Marcus Mininger on “The Dwelling Places of God: Past, Present, and Future.”

“The class will explore the various locations God has designed for his special presence with his people throughout history, from the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem,” he explains. “Special emphasis will be given to where God’s presence is now, where it will be found in the future, and how these truths can nurture and direct our present Christian hope.”