

the messenger

Mid-America Reformed Seminary

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ABUSE AND THE CHURCH: RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING

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THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

“COUNTING OUR DAYS UNTIL WE GO HOME”



“So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.” Psalm 90:12

The words of Psalm 90 are often associated with the passage of time and the commencement of a new year. They speak of the brevity of life and the need to number our days aright. They remind us that we are pilgrims and aliens in this world, and our eternal home is with and in the presence of the Lord. In the words of a familiar hymn, our lives are but “a little day.” Or, in the language of the Psalmist, our days are but “a few handbreaths” (Ps. 39:5).

Like many other Psalms, this one arises out of the particular circumstances of the Psalmist.

The heading of Psalm 90 describes it as “a prayer of Moses, the man of God.” In the twilight of his service as God’s appointed servant, who was commissioned to lead the children out of Egypt and bring them to the promised land, Moses offers a beautifully crafted prayer for wisdom. God’s pilgrim people on their way to the promised land—then and now—desperately need the wisdom expressed in Moses’ prayer. We, too, find ourselves on the way to the promised land that is our inheritance in Christ. As Hebrews 11:13-16 reminds us: “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on the earth. . . . They were looking for a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”

Moses begins his prayer with a magnificent confession regarding our covenant God. Our God, who exists “from everlasting to everlasting,” is the “dwelling place” of His people “in all generations” (v. 1). He then immediately moves to draw a sharp contrast between the Lord, who is eternal and unchanging, and all men whom He returns to the dust from whence they came. God towers over and transcends the passage of time. For God, a thousand years is as “a watch in the night,” like the “yesterday” that so quickly flies away. However, all human beings who live under the holy wrath of God are like the grass that springs up in the morning but withers by nightfall (vv. 3-8).

Undoubtedly, the confession and contrast that open Psalm 90 were born out of Moses’ experience as he led the people of Israel during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness prior to their entrance into the promised land. During this period, the children of Israel had no permanent home, no lasting dwelling place of their own. At nightfall, they pitched their tents when the pillar of fire stopped before them. At daybreak, the trumpet would sound, and the people would break camp, following the glory cloud of the Lord’s presence that went before them. Their lives were marked by transience and instability; they were beset by dangers of various kinds. Most significantly, an entire generation died in the wilderness under the covenant Lord’s judgment on account of their unbelief and disobedience. What Moses declares in the opening section of the Psalm resonates with the pilgrim people of God throughout the whole course of redemptive history.

Within the setting of this striking contrast, Moses offers a simple prayer that is the centerpiece of Psalm 90: “Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom” (v. 12). Then, in the closing portion of the Psalm, Moses prays for the Lord’s favor to rest upon His people so that the works of their hands be established. The wisdom that comes with a keen awareness of the brevity of our lives inevitably compels us to pray that our “little day” be fruitful in service to the Lord. Moses reminds us that, even though our lives may be but “a little day,” the Lord is able to make them count for much by His favor.

In his commentary on Moses’ prayer, John Calvin observes that the wisdom for which he prays is as rare among men as contentment: “Children learn their numbers as soon as they begin to prattle. How much profounder our stupidity in not numbering our days. We can measure all sorts of distances and spans outside of ourselves, but not three score and ten in our own case. This is a wisdom rare among men. But what greater proof of madness than failing to consider our own end.”

As we enter another year of work at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, I can think of no prayer more fitting than the one given to us in Psalm 90. Our faculty, staff, students, and all who support our work, would do well to remember to pray for the wisdom that comes from numbering our days. Only those to whom the Lord gives such wisdom will learn to pray as well for the Lord’s favor to rest upon them.

And so let us pray: “Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!” (v. 17).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cornelis P. Venema".

Dr. Cornelis P. Venema
President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear friends,

I often refer to our work here at the Seminary as preparing the next generation of pastors for a lifetime of fruitful ministry, and rightly so. Our students, should the Lord be willing, will study, train, prepare for, and enter full-time gospel ministry. They are being equipped to lead tomorrow's church.

Every so often, a topic comes up that can't wait for tomorrow's leaders to address. Sometimes, classes are held on subject matter that needs addressing in *this* generation. Rev. Danny Patterson, class of 2002 and pastor of 2nd Parish OPC in Scarborough, ME, was on campus in January, teaching about a subject that ought to stop us in our tracks and force us to pay attention: abuse in the church.

In this edition's feature article, "Abuse and the Church: Recognizing and Responding," Pastor Danny rightly addresses the topic, not in the abstract, but offers practical ways in which the church can be a true refuge for abuse victims. To be a church that cares well for abuse victims takes a deliberate, proactive effort. Hence, Pastor Danny includes excellent resources that the church should utilize – not soon, not tomorrow, but today.

Additionally, we cover several news stories – from a new faculty hire to our graduating seniors to updates on our finances and capital campaign. We pray this edition of *The Messenger* is everything you've expected it to be and more. Thank you for your support, and thanks for reading. Turn the page, and enjoy!



Michael B. Deckinga
Vice-President of Advancement



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Our Mission

Mid-America Reformed Seminary seeks to serve Christ and His church by assisting in the formation and preparation of servants for the Kingdom of God. Our primary purpose is to train men for the gospel ministry of Jesus Christ. Guided by this focus, we are also committed to providing solid theological training for others among God's people whose life calling may be enhanced by theological education.

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DEVELOPMENT REPORT: “HALFWAY THERE”

*“Another year is dawning!
Dear Father, let it be,
In working or in waiting,
another year with Thee;
Another year of leaning,
upon thy loving breast,
Another year of trusting,
of quiet, happy rest.
Another year of service,
of witness for Thy love;
Another year of training
for holier work above.
Another year is dawning!
Dear Father, let it be
On earth, or else in heaven,
another year for Thee.”*

Frances R. Havergal, 1874

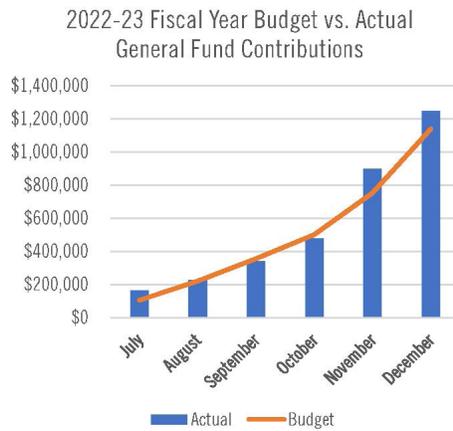
Happy belated New Year! I know, it’s March. The new year is old news. We welcomed 2023 already, didn’t we? Well, we did, but we haven’t been able to celebrate with you, until now.

It is my esteemed privilege to convey the Seminary’s profound gratitude for all you do for us – our Lord uses your prayers, gifts, and words of encouragement to sustain us. I am happy to report that even with a sluggish economy and inflation, we can continue our work, albeit with a more significant budget increase this year than is typical.

Sometimes it can be challenging to see how much we are over or under budget simply by observing a graph. The graph included here shows us ahead of budget, but by how much? Happily, we are \$110,000 over our budget for contributions to our General Fund. Our operating costs are met through US donors who contribute directly to the Seminary, and through the generosity of our friends in Canada who contribute through the Seminary’s Foundation in Ontario. There are other funds we maintain as well, but they

do not have any budgeted expectations throughout the year. You’ve not forgotten about our Student Aid funds either, as evidenced by a \$5,000 increase in contributions there. As we seek to graduate students free of any additional educational debt, gifts to the Student Aid Fund are of special importance.

Many of you know that we are actively



raising funds to expand our campus. *Foundation for the Future*, our campus expansion project, is going well. Our architect is finishing construction drawings, and our site engineer has been on campus several times performing an “as built” survey of our building and property. Recently, an official from the Town of Dyer met with us, heard a presentation of our plans, and liked what we are proposing. He invited us to a meeting with the town’s Planning Commission, which is scheduled for February 21. By the time you read this, that meeting will have taken place, and we will likely be accepting construction bids for the project. You can see renderings and a complete description of our expansion project on our website. Visit www.midamerica.edu/capital-campaign.

We estimate that the total cost of these additions to our facility will be \$4.5 million. While the costs of materials and labor are on the rise, we are thankful for several things that help keep our costs down:

1. Mid-America Reformed Seminary owns

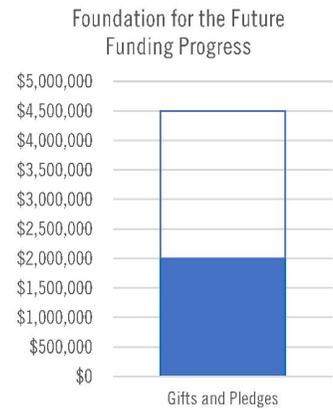
22 acres of land on our campus. We are thankful for our foresight in the early 1990s to purchase a large enough parcel to accommodate expansion.

2. We are working with constituent architects and contractors who care deeply about our school’s mission and have been performing their services affordably.

3. We are expanding our campus to adjust to our growing student body and staff needs. In other words, we’re focused on “needs” and not “nice-to-haves.” Those who have already invested in this project see the great importance of proper stewardship, and I know you do, too.

The Lord has blessed us with nearly \$2,000,000 in gifts and pledges. Please prayerfully consider how you can partner with us in this critical initiative, laying a firm foundation for the future of Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

Another year has begun. May 2023, as



was 2022, be lived in dependence upon the Lord as we actively seek His will in all things. May our God bless you and your family throughout the year ahead, and may He be pleased to use your time, talent, and treasure to further His kingdom!

Michael B. Deckinga
Vice-President of Advancement

To make or plan for a gift today, contact Michael Deckinga, VP of Advancement, at mdeckinga@midamerica.edu

NEW APPOINTMENT IN MINISTERIAL STUDIES

Mid-America Reformed Seminary welcomes a new professor to its ranks, Rev. Paul Ipema. Rev. Ipema has been appointed as an Assistant Professor in Ministerial Studies. A native of Chicagoland, Rev. Ipema grew up on a farm in Beecher, Illinois. He tells us that his proximity to a major metropolitan area enabled him to have exposure to the broad cultural context of the city, but he still enjoyed the simplicity and seclusion of rural life. At Dordt College he met his wife, Karin (who grew up in Lynden, Washington), and the Lord has blessed them with three children and two grandchildren.

Rev. Ipema's journey to becoming a professor at Mid-America began with his decision to attend Mid-America Reformed Seminary in the Fall of 1989. His childhood pastor had been an enthusiastic supporter of the Seminary from its infancy, and he persuaded Rev. Ipema to study at Mid-America. He graduated from the Seminary in 1992. Afterward, he completed two years of additional study at Calvin Theological Seminary in order to qualify for candidacy in the Christian Reformed Church.

Besides his firsthand experience as a pastor in several churches, Rev. Ipema has pursued additional studies beyond his M.Div. years. In 2010 he enrolled at the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation in Glenside, Pennsylvania, where he completed the pastoral counseling curriculum. Exposure to the work of pastoral counselors such as David Powlison, Paul Tripp, and Ed Welch led him in this direction. Rev. Ipema believes that this course of study transformed his preaching and pastoral ministry. In particular, he began to see the need to make closer connections between the biblical gospel message and believers' daily experience and needs. In his words, "Ministry took on a whole new dimension for me."

This focus on counseling ministry, with

its informative impulse for shaping pulpit ministry, led Rev. Ipema to accept a call to serve as the Instructor in Ministerial Studies at Divine Hope Reformed Bible Seminary, a prison ministry serving several prisons in Illinois and Indiana. Prison ministry has very much shaped Rev. Ipema's approach to the gospel ministry itself, for his work with prisoners not only reinforced in him the conviction that biblical truth must be practically applied, it also pressed him to present the Reformed faith in a far more evangelistic and understandable manner. That is, ministry must be accessible to all to whom we would bring the Good News of Jesus Christ. Rev. Ipema observes that many of his students in prison struggled with academic deficiencies, and even more of them knew little or nothing about the Bible, so in that context it was imperative that ministry be clear, simple, and compelling. One of Rev. Ipema's greatest joys in ministry at prisons was the development of a Gospel Communication course in which specially gifted inmates would prepare and deliver messages for the prison chapel services.

Prior to Rev. Ipema's involvement with Divine Hope and theological instruction there, he served several churches. His first charge came in 1994 with the Oak Glen Christian Reformed Church in Lansing, Illinois. He served that church until 2001. It was during this time that the Oak Glen congregation left the Christian Reformed denomination and eventually joined the newly formed United Reformed Churches. Rev. Ipema observes that being a young and inexperienced pastor during such a critical time in the life of that church proved to be difficult, but the lessons learned about God's sustaining grace for the work of ministry also proved invaluable. From there the Lord led Rev. Ipema to accept the call as a church planter in Nampa, Idaho, where he served the congregation for five years



as their first pastor. He tells us that the experience of church planting left an indelible mark upon him and his ministry—among other things, planting a Reformed Church in a decidedly un-Reformed cultural setting pushed the limits of his ministerial training and impressed upon him the need for further pastoral development. A call to the Community United Reformed Church of Schererville, Indiana, brought him back to the Midwest in 2006, and he served there until 2015.

Given Rev. Ipema's wide-ranging pastoral experience, along with his unique and expansive perspective on gospel ministry, the Faculty and Board believe that he will naturally transition to his work at Mid-America. Rev. Ipema is eager to share the fruits of nearly 30 years of pastoral ministry. This will take place, he believes, not only in the classroom, but also to the cultivation and nurture of meaningful relationships with the seminary students and with the leadership of their local churches. As both a teacher and a mentor, he hopes to instill within his students not only a love for God and the Reformed faith, but also a passion for the visible, hands-on outworking of that love through gospel ministry.

Dr. J. Mark Beach
Professor of Ministerial and Doctrinal Studies | Faculty Secretary | Managing Editor of MAJT

SENIOR PROFILES

We thank God for the hard work of these students and pray for them as they go on to new places and ministries. On May 11, at 7:30 pm, at Redeemer United Reformed Church in St. John, IN, Mid-America will graduate (the Lord willing) the following ten students:



Nathan Bloechl is applying for a year-long internship in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) before seeking ordination

for pastoral ministry. He is very thankful for the whole team at Mid-America Seminary: “The diligence of the staff toward each student, the many generous donors and churches who have essentially provided all my tuition, and not least, Mid-America’s wise and gifted faculty who have given so much to me in their patient labors whether in fluid office hours or the classroom. Thank you all for your sacrificial Christian care and for preparing me for gospel ministry these past four years!” Nathan is married to Elisabeth, and they have three children.



After graduation, **Joshua Carpenter** will be, Lord willing, declared a candidate in June at the Christian Reformed Church

2023 Synod. From there, he will be seeking a call to the CRC. There are many things that Josh has appreciated about Mid-America, but two of them have been a special

blessing: the Ministerial Apprenticeship Program and the community. Josh comments, “The Ministerial Apprenticeship Program was one of the main things that drew me to Mid-America.” It has been a blessing to experience various aspects of ministry while in seminary, putting things we have been learning into practice already. I have also greatly appreciated the community at Mid-America and the friendships that my wife, Kayla, and I have been able to make over the course of our time here. The various events during the year, from bonfires to game nights and fellowship in each other’s homes, have been an immense blessing to us.”



Stephen Corbitt (wife, Shawna) plans to become a Minister of the Word and Sacraments in a Reformed Baptist Church. He will either continue education in

pursuit of a Ph.D. in New Testament, then enter full-time into the ministry, or immediately enter full-time ministry at Honolulu Bible Church in Hawaii or Christ the King Reformed Baptist Church in Illinois. When reflecting upon his time at Mid-America, Stephen remarks, “the education I received was uncompromising, unified, and challenging. Every lecture and textbook was like a chisel that fashioned my mind in a way that thinks Biblically and confessionally while also whetting my appetite for further study. Second, the practical experience received through the Ministerial Apprenticeship Program is an X-factor that makes this school matchless. The amount of preaching and teaching spread throughout the internships, pulpit supply, chapel messages, and classes have all contributed to my greater confidence and skillfulness as a preacher. Third, the community at MARS, with both the

faculty and the students, has made my time at the Seminary a deep joy.



Shortly after graduation, **Jae Kim**, his wife Jinny, and their son Judah will return to New Zealand to start a year-long internship in one of the Reformed Churches of

NZ. What Jae most appreciated about the training he received at Mid-America was “the robust academic curriculum that gives balanced attention to biblical, ecclesiastical, doctrinal, and ministerial studies. Every semester, I have been struck by how well the courses intersect with and inform one another. I have been equipped with a unified body of theological knowledge and pastoral wisdom that I trust will serve me well in ministry. I have matured in my preaching through classroom instruction, insightful feedback from professors and peers, and our two formative summer internships. I appreciated learning and growing together with brothers who share a sense of calling to the pastoral ministry. Jinny and I will cherish the friendships we have forged in the seminary community during this unique season of our lives.”



Israel Ledee (wife Mariana) plans to seek ordination in a Reformed congregation. He desires to serve in a context with a Spanish ministry outreach or

where one can be started. What Israel valued most about his time at Mid-America is three-fold. First, the professors: “All along, I have felt their

goal is to see the students succeed and thrive. They hold students accountable and cheer them on with encouragement and corrections. Our devotional prayer time every Thursday was a tremendous blessing." Second, the students and staff: "The many conversations and dialogues with the students throughout my time here have allowed me to flesh out deep theological questions and concerns. And the staff have made the day-to-day activities go smoothly. Lastly, I appreciate the sacrificial commitment of the donors to Mid-America, without which I would not be able to graduate."



David Myhren

hopes to serve in pastoral ministry after graduation. He plans on taking his candidacy exam through Classis East of the URCNA in the Fall. He has enjoyed

his time at MARS and particularly liked the class format. The fact that the classes were small enough to get to know personally and be formed by the professors and students was invaluable. He also benefitted from the two hands-on summer internships he had with local churches in Idaho and New York, as well as being mentored by his local pastor in Illinois and seeing many different churches as he traveled to fill pulpits. As a single man, David is also very grateful for the friendships he made and the many meals and laughs that were shared at the Seminary and with the local community.



After graduation, **Matt Vanderwoerd**, his wife Cari, and three children (Peter, Jaiden, and Beth) plan to move back to their hometown in Telkwa, BC, for the remainder of 2023. Lord

willing, Matt plans to study over the

summer and take his candidacy exam in September. Then, in the fall, he plans to serve in another local United Reformed Church in the area while their pastor is on a three-month sabbatical. Matthew says, "We have been very blessed by our time at Mid-America. In particular, the high quality of the education and experience we have gained through the Ministerial Apprenticeship Program has grown us in many ways. We are thankful for our precious time at Mid-America and anticipate God's plans for our family."



After graduation, David Voytek

plans to undergo examination for licensure in the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) with the purpose of pursuing a call to an RCUS

church thereafter. David is very thankful to his professors for their knowledge, expertise, and passion for the Word of God, Reformed teaching, and pastoral ministry. David says, "I have grown much in my time here, not only in knowledge and skill but also in character and friendships, particularly through the student community. My classmates have honestly been the best part of my time in seminary, challenging and encouraging me to pursue godliness in every aspect of study and cultivate a pastor's heart for Christ's sheep to whom I hope to one day minister. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ that I have had this privilege and responsibility to train for gospel ministry here at MARS!"



Lord willing, after graduation, **Michael Wall** plans to obtain a year-long internship under the guidance of a senior minister, where he can apply what he has learned and continue to grow,

cultivating habits that will make him a faithful Minister of the Word and Sacraments. Considering his time here at Mid-America, Michael says, "Whether it be assignments or required readings, daily chapel messages, our prayer groups, internships, or the oral exam, the purposefulness and diligence of the Faculty and Board here at MARS have equipped me with the tools I need for the next step." Michael and his wife Heather and four children (Julia, Adeline, Jacob, and Jackson) are incredibly grateful for the faculty's patience, grace, and support throughout this 3-year journey.



Ken Wojnarowski

plans to seek ordination as a Pastor in the Presbyterian Church in America. As a student in the Master of Divinity

program, Ken has cherished the preaching component and the hands-on experience it provided. He comments, "I appreciate how many opportunities I was given to get preaching experience while a student at Mid-America. Some leave their seminary only preaching a handful of times. I am leaving Mid-America having preached over one hundred times." Ken is married to his wife, Sarah, and they welcomed their newborn, Sadie, this past semester.

Join us in celebrating the achievements of these young men, whether in-person or via live stream, on May 11 at 7:30 PM at Redeemer United Reformed Church. We look forward to you joining us!

Jared Luttjeboer
Director of Marketing

FEATURE

ABUSE AND THE CHURCH: RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING

by Danny Patterson



During the January term, I had the privilege of teaching an intensive course on what is typically called Domestic Abuse. This course explored how to define, recognize, and prevent both physical (e.g. sexual assault, battery, etc.) and non-physical (e.g. emotional, spiritual, etc.) abuse primarily within the home, but also other settings.

More specifically, it focused on how the church can recognize abuse, minister to victims and perpetrators of abuse, and respond to abuse so as to create a church culture that is safe for victims of abuse and safe from those who abuse.

But why does Mid-America Reformed Seminary offer a course on recognizing and responding to abuse? The simple answer is that abuse exists in the church of Jesus Christ and stands in direct opposition to His sacrificial love. Though unique because of His atoning work, the life and ministry of the Christ also serves as model of what sacrificial love is to look like in our relationships with each other. This is why Paul can call husbands to love their wives as “Christ loved the church and *gave Himself for her*” (Eph. 5:25, emphasis mine). This is also the reason Paul can call the Philippians to “have this mind among yourselves, which is also yours in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5), and then proceed to talk about the incarnational ministry of Christ as one in which His power and authority was not used to His own advantage, but for our good (Phil. 2:6ff).

In contradistinction to the life and ministry of Jesus, abuse occurs when a person in a position of power and influence uses his (or her) personal capacities and gifts to diminish the personal capacities and gifts in another person in order to control and dominate them.¹ Notice, the problem here is not that someone has power and influence. In fact, God delegated power

to human beings when He called them to have dominion over all the earth (Gen. 1:26) and commands authority structures in the civil, ecclesiastical, and familial spheres. The key distinction is that an abusive individual uses such power not in self-less service, but for selfish gain.

The above definition of abuse might lead someone to ask, “Then aren’t we all abusive?” The answer is “Yes and No.” We all struggle with selfish pride that breaks out into actions and words that cause harm to others. However, an abusive person is one who displays a pattern of relating to others in destructive and demeaning ways. For example, Darby Strickland, in her excellent book *Is It Abuse* contends abuse occurs in marriage “when one spouse pursues their own self-interests by seeking to control and dominate the other through a *pattern* of coercive, controlling, and punishing behaviors” (emphasis added), and no matter what form such abuse takes, “its intended outcome is the same: to punish and wound a victim so the oppressor gets their world the way they want it.”²

It is this description that helps us zero in on the foundational dynamic of abuse, which is idolatry. And if idolatry is, as it is often said, making good things ultimate things, we can quickly see how this plays out. Take the institution of marriage as an example. If a husband uses his God-given position in the home to dominate and control his wife, rather than giving himself for her, he is misusing (i.e. abusing) his role as husband to meet his own personal desires. In its most obvious form this domination may look like using physical force to control (slapping, grabbing his wife’s arm, backing her into a corner, refusing to let her leave a room), or it may take the form of demeaning and degrading words, such as calling her useless and attacking her

value as a mom and wife.

It is this latter form of abuse, what is often called verbal or emotional abuse, that the church needs to take more seriously than it has in the past. Often when we think of emotional abuse, we think of it as less serious than physical abuse, but to do so would be a grave mistake. Jesus reminds us in the Sermon on the Mount that sinful anger is not a sin of a different kind from murder (Matt. 5:21-26). James describes the tongue as a deadly poison (Ja. 3:8). Proverbs 12:18 contends, “There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” These verses highlight the significant damage inflicted when words are used to denigrate someone made in God’s image.

It is a misnomer, then, to believe that harsh words only inflict damage on the immaterial part of a person, and physical force only inflicts damage on the material/ bodily part of a person.³ Instead, we must realize that abuse, in whatever form it takes, inflicts damage on the whole person. Physical abuse doesn’t just leave physical marks, but creates a relational dynamic of fear, intimidation and shame. Likewise, emotional abuse impacts a victim’s physical health. Victims of emotional abuse consistently report forms of physical anguish such as auto-immune disorders, digestive problems, persistent headaches, and sleeplessness.

Having looked at the seriousness of abuse, it is then important to ask, “How we can become churches that care well for victims of abuse?” Three

1. See *When Home Hurts: A Guide for Responding Wisely to Domestic Abuse in your Church* by Jeremy Pierre and Greg Wilson, p. 39

2. See *Is it Abuse: A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims* by Darby Strickland, p. 24.

3. For an excellent treatment of this see the two-part blog series by Anne Marie Goudzwaard and Nate Brooks at the Biblical Counseling Coalition website entitled “Emotional Abuse is Abuse of the Person”.

things come to mind.

First, we must acknowledge that abuse is occurring in the church of Jesus Christ and more specifically in our Reformed and Presbyterian churches. That is, we must acknowledge abuse as something that is occurring among us, not simply out there in the world, or even out there in other denominations. If we can't acknowledge this, we will not move to proactively address it in our churches and will be caught off-guard and unprepared when instances of domestic and sexual abuse arise, and when that happens, it will be victims who suffer the most.

We know that God's heart is for the orphan and widow (James 1:27), which are the Bible's categories for the most vulnerable folks in the church, and victims of abuse are certainly some of the most vulnerable among us. Psalm 82 says, "Give justice to the weak and fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy *deliver them from the hand of the wicked*" (vv. 3-4). This begins with acknowledging that abuse is a problem among us and needs to be addressed.

Second, we cannot stop at simply acknowledging abuse is a sin that lives among us. We need to raise awareness of it in our congregations, in our sessions and consistories; in our presbyteries and classes. In our congregations, when the passage calls for it, it should be preached about from our pulpits. Conducting a Sunday school class or small group study on abuse with books mentioned in this article is a particularly helpful way to foster discussion and understanding about the dynamics of abuse.

And when we do raise awareness,

we shouldn't be surprised when people begin to share their own experiences of abuse. We never want to send the message, even if it's unintentionally, "We don't talk about that in this church." One of the hardest things for a victim of abuse to do is to come forward. They fear they will not be believed. They fear they will be blamed for the problems in their marriage (because that's what their spouse has done to them). Sometimes they fear putting themselves and their children in further danger. So when they do come forward, whether it's to a pastor, elder, deacon, or member of the church, they need to be assured that our churches take abuse seriously because our God does. Raising awareness fosters such a response.

Third, we should take action. Though this may seem to be a distinction without a difference from raising awareness, the goal here is to take concrete steps to make our churches safe for victims of abuse and from abusers.

Take a group of interested individuals, along with some elders and deacons, through training on abuse and how to make your church a refuge for abuse victims. *Becoming a Church That Cares Well for the Abused* is a free, web-based curriculum, the lessons of which are designed by experts to help church leaders and lay-people understand and implement best practices for handling a variety of abuse issues that churches deal with. In my work as a Domestic Abuse advocate, one of the things I have heard over and over again from victims is not that their church doesn't care about them, or even that their church doesn't believe them. It is that their church wasn't prepared for how to respond to their situation. There wasn't any policy in place on domestic abuse, or any procedure to follow when abuse was disclosed. Instead, the church was left scrambling to respond to a matter in which there are varying perspectives and solutions. Again, in

situations like this, it is the victims that suffer.

A well crafted, theologically sound policy on domestic abuse and clear procedures on how to respond to disclosures of abuse are important tools to help us love and help those who are victims. They help us work through matters such as what to do when someone discloses to you that they are in an abusive relationship, or when a parent tells church leaders their child has been molested by a family member or church volunteer. What are our first steps? How does a report of domestic abuse differ from a report of child sexual abuse and what is the church's responsibility in each case? These are matters we address in our class on abuse because they are essential to the church and its leaders taking seriously the protection of the flock God has entrusted to them (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-2).

In addition to the above, our churches should encourage women to get involved in this ministry. Since the vast majority of abuse victims are women, it is hard for them to feel comfortable working only with male leadership in the church. Therefore, gather a group of mature, compassionate women to come alongside victims and advocate for them.

Of course, none of the above ensures that abuse will not happen in our congregations. In fact, one of the most insidious elements of abuse is that it most often occurs in private. However, when the church and its ordained leaders are trained how to recognize and respond to abuse, we are poised to honor Christ, minister to victims, and witness to the world that we take this matter with the utmost seriousness.

Rev. Danny Patterson
Mid-America Alum (2002),
Pastor of Second Parish Church in
Portland, ME

ALUMNI UPDATES



Zachary Anderson (1986) continues serving the Lord establishing a Reformed congregation in Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, Mexico.

He will soon hold dual citizenship. They maintain three small apartments (studios, with bathroom and kitchen) for use by those who wish to see their work and escape the cold north!



Paul Freswick (2018) is beginning his fifth year of service at Grace United Reformed Church in Wau-pun, Wisconsin. Paul and his wife

Vicki are blessed with four little ones: Sophia (4), Jude (3), Evelyn (2), and they just welcomed baby Isabelle on January 8th of 2023! They thank the Lord for the blessings of service in Christ's church and for their multiplied blessings in the home!



On November 11, 2022, **Praveen Phinehas Muthusamy** (2022) was ordained as the Minister of Word and Sacraments at

Hills United Reformed Church; Hills, Minnesota.



When **Jaap Vreugdenhil** (2016) and his wife Henny returned to the Netherlands in 2016, the situ-

ation there was somewhat similar to the one around the CRC in North America about 1990:

“We used to be a member of the GKV, the Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijge-

maakt) (Reformed Churches [liberated]), but these churches were becoming more and more liberal. Two small denominations had split off from the GKV, and we became members of one of them, the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN). Here Henny and I became soon involved in work for younger people in the church: we organized Bible study weekends and published Bible studies. Beside that, I became an elder and gave some lectures in the country. Frequently I accompany as an organist the singing in the worship service. We also try to stimulate a unity between our denomination and the other small denomination that split from the GKV.

Two years ago we moved to Apeldoorn, where I am studying at the Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn, working on a dissertation about good application when preaching from OT narrative. Recently, as a delegate of the GKN, I travelled to the General Assembly of the OPC, and to the ICRC, the International Conference of Reformed Churches in Namibia. Our six children plus spouses and our twelve grandchildren are doing well.”



Steve and Amy Williamson (2011) have found it a sanctifying joy to serve the Lord for 11 years in

Cornerstone URC of London, ON. With the psalmist, they confess, “The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad.” (Psalm 126:3) “We are thankful for our training at Mid-America, which the Lord used to prepare us for an intense first few years of ministry; thankful for the sweet five girls and strong three boys he has given us to love; thankful for the beloved church he gave us to shepherd and witness be reborn; thankful for the faithful five brothers who served among us and moved on to become pastors or commence seminary studies. It is a

tremendous blessing to reflect on how our gracious God draws straight lines with crooked sticks. We look to our heavenly Father to carry on His work in you through our regular prayers for the seminary. May the Spirit of Christ work mightily in you all! May the bold appeal of Christ for men to be reconciled to God be widely proclaimed. Much love in Christ, Steve & Amy (Sierra, Isaiah, Titus, Ethan, Brooklyn, Ella-Rose, Tiana, Hope)”



Moody Wasif (2017) is currently in the PhD program in OT at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He still practices general dentistry and oral surgery at his practice in Schererville, Indiana. He and his

wife have three children: Lily 12, Elijah 9, and Levi 3. His wife, Dina, works as office manager at Moody Dental. Their family just moved to their new permanent house that they built in St. John, Indiana.

Peter Yoo (2011): “Since my last update, there have been a few developments that the Lord has done in my life. By God's grace, I have been approved by the RCNZ Student Deputies to serve in the RCNZ as a vicar, and I began my year-long vicariate at the RCNZ about a week ago. I continue to lead services frequently and to be mentored by Pastor Daniel Wilson, who has been a tremendous blessing in training me for the ministry. My fiancée and I continue to plan for the wedding ceremony and reception, as well as go through premarital counseling with Pastor Daniel and his wife. My work visa has recently been approved, but at the time of writing there are a few more responses we are currently waiting on. If you remember, I would ask that you pray for me, my fiancée, the wedding planning process, and my vicariate at RCNZ.”



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