

## Assisting the Seminary by Opening Heart & Home



*Gerry and Sandi Swets bought this property to help to provide affordable housing to Mid-America students*

### Living in Chicagoland

Students moving to the Chicago area may have some apprehensions: Where will I live? What church will I attend? Where will my children go to school? What if I have a medical emergency?

The Seminary provides a welcome packet for new students that includes listings of local churches, Christian schools, medical facilities, department and grocery stores as well as a host of other pertinent information.

“Basically we create an information pack that gives them a picture of what’s available at what distance,” Office Manager Florence Kooiman says.

The welcome pack includes a “word of mouth” listing of contacts for housing. Seminary supporters often call the Seminary and let staff know about available rentals or apartments in their neighborhoods. This is a great help to the Seminary since most of the staff are also relatively new to the area.

“We depend on our constituency,” says Florence, “and they do us a real service by calling and informing us.”

Landlords that have rented to Mid-America students in previous years often call Mid-America in January or February to let the Seminary know about upcoming openings.

Although a Seminary housing complex has been discussed in the past, a survey indicated that students prefer living in the community. This allows them to worship at a variety of churches and develop friendships within their church and neighborhood.

When Mid-America relocated from northwest Iowa to the Chicago area in 1995, Gerry and Sandi Swets were thrilled to have Mid-America students and professors worship with them and preach for them. But they never imagined they would someday house Seminary students.

“We had no idea how God would enable us to be used for providing housing,” they say. “We are humbled and honored.”

The Swets live in St. John and are members of Community URC in Schererville. When their son, Steve, graduated from Calvin College in 2004, he moved back home in order to attend Mid-America. His friend and college roommate, Andrew Spriensma, was also planning to attend Mid-America, so Steve asked if Andrew would live with the family since they had a spare room.

“We loved having both young men living with us, and Andy became like family,” the Swets say. “We saw Steve fall in love and marry before his final year. We received a call from the Seminary asking if we had any room and if we wanted to continue to board students, so we added another student. Then we saw Andrew fall in love and marry as well. We have had seven different students as well as a few short term guests over the years.”

The Swets normally house two students at a time in their home. Each has a private room with a study area, but other areas of the home are available for study as well.

“Typically they are on their own for breakfast and lunch, but join us for dinner and devotions in the evening,” say Gerry and Sandi. “Our devotions and discussions become very interesting when you combine God’s Word with what the students are currently studying. We become very close, like family. This has been as much or more

of a blessing to us than what we provide for them.”

“The Swets have been so good to Mid-America’s students,” says Florence Kooiman, Office Manager. “They want to be a home away from home for them.”

This spring Gerry and Sandi purchased a property one mile south of the Seminary specifically for use as student housing. It includes two houses; a three bedroom, two bath house in the front and a one bedroom house in the back. Bathrooms and kitchens were recently remodeled, and kitchen appliances are new. First year students moved into the homes on the new property in July in order to begin summer language classes.

“When we recognized how difficult it was to find reasonable housing for students with families, we thought we could help,” they say. “The Lord blessed us financially last year and gave us the opportunity to purchase this property.”

Recent graduate Aaron Verhoef is one of the students who has lived with Gerry and Sandi Swets. “Nothing was ever odd or awkward with them,” he says. “They behaved just like any parent would. They really did all they could to make their house a home for us while at Seminary. They are a fun loving, kind, serious, amazing, godly couple.”

“While many people serve the Lord in different ways, Gerry and Sandi are two Christians who have found a need in the community and have decided to fill it with the love of Jesus Christ.”

*Glenda Mathes*

# Development Report

## The Impact of Generosity

by Keith Le Mahieu



In the last issue of *the Messenger* we considered true generosity. We determined that generosity is the act of sacrificing something of value for the good of others because we care for them. We saw that love is what differentiates philanthropy from stewardship. As summarized by Christ, the whole of the law is to love God and neighbor.

We find contentment and freedom when our lives are characterized by loving God and neighbor. This contentment and freedom in Christ is a wonderful thing, but it is something we often lack. Money matters often are the root of our discontentment and enslavement. Jesus often illustrates the dangers of money and wealth. He warns us again and again to watch out lest money and culture conspire to enslave us. The good news is that the practice of generosity is an antidote to the things that so easily rob us of godly contentment and freedom.

How many times haven't each of us said or thought, "If I were wealthy I would..."? This mentality says that if I only had more money I wouldn't have to worry. Fear grips us and we think money can protect us from all the bad things that could befall us. Jesus tells us not to worry but rather to lay up treasures in heaven. Nevertheless we work harder, carefully monitoring financial portfolios and watching for indicators of a decline in our net worth. Jesus tells us not to worry because our Father in Heaven knows what we need, and when we comprehend this our fear abates and we experience contentment and freedom from those things that enslave us. God uses a generous spirit as an antidote to fear by causing us to take our eyes off ourselves and comprehending the goodness of God the Father.

Each of us is enslaved to money. Jesus knows this and used the encounter with the rich young ruler in Matthew 19 to teach us about our deceitful hearts. Let's be clear: the problem with the rich young ruler (and us) was not wealth, it was the disposition of his heart. Godly men like Abraham, Job, David, and Solomon were fabulously wealthy, but each of them would rather have been a doorkeeper in the house of God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. They were storing up treasures in heaven. The rich young ruler was more attached to his wealth than to treasures in heaven. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only son when God asked him to do so, clearly demonstrating the difference in the hearts of these two men. We become enslaved to wealth when wealth becomes our god. Freedom comes when we become slaves to righteousness. Generosity is an antidote for this enslavement by providing a tangible way to lay up treasures in heaven.

Like fear, greed also enslaves us to money. Jesus, again knowing our hearts, tells us to watch out, to be on our guard against all kinds of greed. Greed is, after all, not just coveting that which we do not have, but it is also hoarding that which we do. Greed is that destructive attitude that says we never have enough. Greed destroys contentment and eats away at the heart. Generosity is an antidote for greed by easing the gravitational pull of the material world.

Generosity, borne of love, says, "How can I help?" Greed says, "What can I do to keep more for myself?" In Luke 12:13-21 Jesus tells the parable of the rich man who built bigger barns to store his grain, reasoning that excess grain would protect him from loss. Despite his great wealth he still feared loss. Jesus calls this man a "fool" and one who is not rich towards God. Having great wealth can be a great burden. It requires significant discernment to understand the implications of the choices one makes with his wealth. The fool ignores the implications of these choices while the wise and generous giver considers them carefully. Generosity is an antidote to the fear of loss.

As believers we have freedom and contentment in Christ, but our world still contends with the effects of the fall, often making this freedom and contentment elusive. Loosen your grip, practice generosity, and watch God do His work (Malachi 3:6-12).



## Golf Outing 2010

Please plan to join friends of Mid-America Reformed Seminary for a morning of fun and fellowship at the 6th annual Mid-America Golf Outing on Saturday, September 11, 2010 at White Hawk Country Club in Crown Point, Indiana.

The golf outing will follow a scramble format with a shotgun start. The tee time will be at 8:00 am with a buffet lunch to follow.

Various gifts and prizes will be awarded to participants and for the winners of contests such as longest drive, longest putt, closest to the pin, etc.

You can register for the Golf Outing online at <http://www.midamerica.edu>.

Registrations are due by August 27, 2010. If you have any questions, please call Mid-America Reformed Seminary at 219.864.2400.



# TRACS Evaluation Team Visit

During the month of June (21-24), the staff and faculty of Mid-America welcomed to campus an evaluation team from the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools. The evaluation team's purpose was to assess Mid-America's compliance with TRACS' standards, with a view to reaffirming the Seminary's accreditation for a period of ten years. Prior to the team's visit, a special accreditation committee chaired by Dr. Kloosterman had prepared and submitted an extensive self-study to the TRACS Commission on Accreditation.

After three days of intensive conversations with various members of the Seminary's administrative staff, faculty, students and Board, the evaluation team presented a preliminary version of its report to the TRACS Commission, identifying a number of recommendations and suggestions for bringing the Seminary into full compliance with the accreditation standards. At the annual meeting of the Board of Commissioners of TRACS, which will meet in Greensboro, NC, from November 10-13, Dr. Venema will represent Mid-America and a decision will be made regarding the Seminary's reaffirmation of accreditation.

We are pleased to report that the team visit was a profitable one, and are optimistic that the outcome of the process will be favorable. Though the self-study process is demanding in terms of time and resources, there are obvious benefits of accreditation with a US

Department of Education-recognized accrediting body. These benefits include:

- Confirmation by peer institutions that Mid-America offers a quality education in conformity to its publicly-stated purpose.
- Provision for the transfer of course credits among institutions or admission to graduate school.
- Assurance that Mid-America's representation of its program of study to the general public, and its supporting constituents, is fair and accurate.

- Eligibility for student aid during seminary study or the deferment of repayment while the student is in seminary.
- Eligibility for grants from charitable foundations and company matching-gift programs.
- Candidacy as a prescribed university in Canada, making the seminary eligible to receive direct tax-deductible donations from Canadian supporters after being accredited for a period of ten years.

## Search for a Professor Underway

After the Board of Trustees acquiesced to Dr. Kloosterman's decision to discontinue teaching at Mid-America in order to pursue other ministry endeavors, the Board asked its Faculty Development Committee to initiate a process to find a replacement. The following Board and faculty members serve on the committee: Rev. Richard Kuiken, chair; Rev. Jon Blair, secretary; Rev. Ron Scheuers; Rev. Mark Vander Hart; and Dr. Cornelis Venema.

In recent months, the Faculty Development Committee has taken several steps in the search for a new professor:

- A notice was placed in a variety of periodicals, alerting prospective applicants to an opening in the area of New Testament Studies at Mid-America.

- The Committee adopted a protocol for the application process that includes the submission of a formal application, several interviews with the Committee and Faculty, and concludes with an interview by the full Board with a view to a formal appointment.
- An application form was posted on the Seminary's website.

Several applications have been submitted and are now being reviewed by the Committee. The Committee is hopeful, D.V., that it will be able to present one or two applicants for the position for an interview by the full Board of Trustees at its next regular meeting. Friends of the Seminary are encouraged to keep the Committee and the Board in your prayers as they engage in this important task.

## Alumni Association Update

About a year ago Mid-America announced that it was working to develop an alumni association. Work has gone forward on formation of the association and all the necessary details should be in place before the end of the year to have a functioning association in place.

A set of preliminary association by-laws were written and approved by Mid-America's Board of Trustees at its spring meeting. These by-laws identify the purpose, membership, government, and benefits of

the association. The association will be governed by an alumni council consisting of six alumni serving three-year terms. The alumni submitted nominations for this inaugural council, and the Board of Trustees will select the first six council members from this list of nominees. Ratification of these new council members is expected to take place at the fall Board meeting.

The purpose of the alumni association is to encourage the Seminary's alumni to pray for the Seminary, to support the Seminary

in its recruitment efforts, to encourage financial support, to represent the Seminary in a godly fashion, and to interact with the Seminary regarding matters of interest to the Seminary's well-being.

In turn, all alumni are eligible to receive Seminary publications at reduced or no cost, they are eligible to utilize the Seminary's resources, and they will have greater access to the Board of Trustees through the association.

## Faculty Update

**Dr. Beach** completed his sabbatical at the end of January. He resumed teaching in February. His book entitled, *Piety's Wisdom: A Summary of Calvin's Institutes with Study Questions*, was published in March. Dr. Beach is busy on two other book projects at this time. He preaches every Sunday in area churches. He also serves on the synodical Liturgical Committee for the United Reformed Churches.

**Dr. Kloosterman** participated in an online conversation on reformedforum.org from January to May. In April he spoke at a conference at First URC, Chino, CA. In June he led group discussions on incorporating a theology of work in seminary training at Acton University. Dr. Kloosterman was the keynote speaker at the Puritan Project conferences in Belem and Maragogi, Brazil, from June 30 to July 15. He also gave lectures on homiletics at the Aldeia Training Center in Recife, Brazil. Dr. Kloosterman has also been preaching in a variety of locations.

**Professor Strange** has been engaged in OPC denominational committee work, as well as preaching and speaking in a variety of churches. He has given conferences in Alberta, Canada, the California Sierras, and the San Bernardino Mountains. He addressed the Reformation Society of Indiana. He attended the meetings of a number of church judicatories in connection with his work in the area of church polity and discipline. He taught the MTIOPC course on the OPC Form of Government, ending with several days of lectures in May at Bethel OPC in Wheaton, IL. He served as a committee representative at the OPC General Assembly in July.

In May **Rev. Vander Hart** concluded a survey of the book of Isaiah with the Covenant Fellowship of the Oak Glen URC in Lansing, IL. In May he and Dr. Kloosterman visited the Danville Correctional Institution to explore how best to establish a Bible-college level program there. He was the speaker at the Pentecost Festival of the Nampa (ID) URC, May

28-30. He presented three addresses on the church: as the Bride of Jesus Christ, its office-bearers, and the 'body life' of the church as a community. He also preached in the Nampa URC on Sunday, May 30. In June, Rev. Vander Hart spent time in Ripon, CA, to preach in the Zion URC.

**Dr. Venema** was a part of the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology (PCRT), which discussed the topic "These Last Days: A Christian View of History" this spring. He spoke at the pre-conference for all four conference locations and at the main conference for three of the four events. He gave a presentation on the "Federal Vision Report" of the Study Committee of the URCNA, of which he is a member, on two occasions in March: at an open forum, sponsored by the Community URC of Schererville, IN; and at a pre-classis conference at Covenant URC in Pella, IA. Dr. Venema will be representing the Seminary at the URCNA synod in London, ON, from July 26-30.



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