

# THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

## URC Pastors' & Missions Conferences by Glenda Mathes



*Over 50 pastors met in the chapel for the 3-day Pastors' Conference*

About 50 pastors, church officers, and lay people attended one or both of two recent URCNA conferences at Mid-America: the URCNA Pastors' Conference from June 24-26 and the URCNA Missions Conference from June 26-28. Creative cooperation hinged the conferences together with the Pastor's Conference's last session serving as the Missions Conference's first session.

Attendance doubled that of the first URCNA conference two years ago and consisted

primarily of URCNA ministers, along with two missionaries and two Reformed Church in New Zealand pastors.

"The thought and prayer of the organizing committee was that there would be something of significance for each attendee personally, which would also benefit his congregation," says organizer Rev. Harold Miller. "That prayer and hope was more than met. We prayed together, sang together, and together were ministered to in a brief school of Christ that we really needed."

Speakers Dr. J. Mark Beach, Rev. Alan Strange, Dr. Joel Beeke, Dr. Gerhard Visscher, Dr. Joseph Pipa, Dr. David Murray, and Rev. Paul Murphy addressed various aspects of the ministry under the theme *Ministering in Changing Seasons*.

"The speakers handled their assigned topics very well, which provided gracious and practical guidance," says Rev. Miller. "I heard many comments at how rich the feeding was."

Missions Conference speakers included Rev. Michael Brown, Rev. Bill Boekestein, Dr. Brian Lee, Rev. Mitch Persaud, Mr. Mark Bube, Rev. Richard Bout, Rev. Wes Bredenhof, and Rev. Andrea Ferrari, in addition to Rev. Murphy.

Dr. Brian Lee values gathering with other URCNA members to explore and discuss missions. "Two years ago, most everyone in attendance agreed that greater coordination will only come with greater trust across the federation, and that trust will only come as we continue to invest time with one another, and build together a common vision for reaching the lost."

Attendees appreciated the fellowship. "Mid-America graciously hosted times of fellowship between the lectures, complete with coffee and refreshments provided by area churches," says Rev. Nick Smith. "I want to commend conference planners for making fellowship a priority, and attendees for making the most of it. This allows us to benefit from the insights and wisdom learned in other situations and contexts. It allows us to be encouraged by work being done around the world. And it helps us grow in camaraderie, love, and trust as fellow ministers of the gospel."



*A group of alumni who attended the URC Pastors' Conference*

## Alumni Reflections on Conferences

by Glenda Mathes

Many attendees found these conferences unique in their federative focus. Rev. Todd De Rooy (Redeemer URC; Orange City, IA) says, "Not only are they refreshing and rejuvenating, but they also promote unity among the ministers in our federation. Getting together at Synod and Classis provides the same kind of unity, but the URCNA conference is like Synod, without the work!"

Brian Zegers, a recent Mid-America graduate who plans to candidate in the URCNA, glimpsed the federation's scope and value of ecclesiastical fellowship. "It was encouraging to see the ethnic diversity of the URCNA leadership and the geographical spread of its church plants and missional activity. I also really appreciated the contributions made to the conference by pastors and missionaries from other federations such as the Canadian Reformed Church and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church."

Some attendees, like Rev. Mitch Ramkisson, (Parkland Reformed Church of Ponoka, AB), found specific solutions. "I've begun to feel the tensions and stresses of a longer pastorate. One fear is that my enthusiasm and zeal may begin to wane, and this would show in the pulpit. The presentations addressed this anxiety, and encouraged those who, by God's grace, sincerely desire to feed God's people without barriers."

"The Holy Spirit is working in our churches, in different contexts, through different ministers," says Rev. De Rooy. "But it's the same gospel being preached, the same Scriptures and Confessions being upheld, taught, promoted, and defended. And God's people are growing and thriving, despite all the struggles and challenges of the pastoral ministry. If anyone is looking for justification for the existence of the URC, it was heard among the brothers at these conferences. Vibrancy is a word that ought to be used to describe our churches."

## President's Message: "Maintaining the Ministry of the Gospel"

by Dr. Cornelis Venema



*What does God require in the fourth commandment?*

*First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained; and that I, especially on the Sabbath, that is, the day of rest, diligently attend the church of God, to learn God's Word, to use the sacraments, to call publicly upon the Lord, and to give Christian alms. (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. and A. 103)*

This year of our Lord, 2013, marks the 450th anniversary of the publication of the Heidelberg Catechism. Such an anniversary affords the opportunity to commemorate the Catechism's publication, and to acknowledge its place as a prized piece of our inheritance in the faith as Reformed churches. In that spirit, I would like to devote my essay in this issue of *The Messenger* to a neglected emphasis of the Catechism, namely, what it has to say about the Lord's will for the maintenance of schools that train men for the ministry of the gospel. If I may be so bold and in good sermonic fashion "apply" this feature of the Catechism's teaching, the Catechism reminds us of the importance of regular financial and prayer support on the part of believers for the work of schools like Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

Those who are familiar with the Heidelberg Catechism know that it is organized into three parts. In the first part of the Catechism, believers are taught to know their sin and misery through the law of God. All human beings are fallen sinners in Adam, and in need of redemption from the guilt and corruption of sin. In the second part of the Catechism, believers are pointed to Christ, the only Mediator who, by His work of redemption, atones for the sins of His people and restores them to favor and acceptance with God. And in the third part of the Catechism, believers are reminded that the work of Christ also includes the Holy Spirit's renewing work. Christ not only provides for the justification of believers, but He sanctifies them to new obedience in gratitude to God and in conformity to the requirements of His holy law.

When the Catechism comes to the fourth commandment and its requirements for the Christian life, it teaches that God's will in this commandment requires "that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained." If Christ is pleased to build His church through the ministry of the gospel and the sacraments, He also wills that believers make the preparation and instruction of students who aspire to the gospel ministry a special priority. In context, the "schools" that are in view in Q. and A. 103 are specifically the schools whose special task is to prepare students with a knowledge of and facility in the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ. These schools are what we today call "seminaries." In short, the Catechism is saying that the maintenance of such schools is not optional, but obligatory. Of all the institutions that Reformed churches and believers should especially prize, the seminary or school that trains men for the ministry, is a priority.

As president of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, I am continually gratified by the generosity and sacrificial giving of so many for the maintenance of this school. But I am also hopeful that God's people will continue to recognize the biblical wisdom of the Catechism. If we are to honor Christ's appointed method for gathering and building His church, then let us give special attention to the support of schools that serve the churches in training their students for the ministry.

## Faculty Update by Glenda Mathes

While faculty members aren't teaching daily this summer, their schedules are surprisingly full. And all of them are dealing with significant family matters.

Between two daughters' weddings (Carolyn on June 22 and Rachel on August 17), Dr. Venema works on the accreditation self-study and prepares to teach two courses. He's contributed essays to *Tabletalk*, *Confessional Presbyterian*, and *Mid-America Journal of Theology*. He contributed two chapters for recently published books, and he is currently preparing chapters for two more books.

Dr. J. Mark Beach celebrated a son's marriage (Brandon on July 12). He's busy as the *Journal's* Managing Editor and crafting a Heidelberg Catechism bibliography. He's had articles published in *Tabletalk* and *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy* and is writing other articles. He spoke at the URCNA Pastor's Conference.

Rev. Mark Vander Hart taught courses on ecclesiology and biblical Hebrew at the Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary in Riga, Latvia. He presented surveys of the Old Testament and redemptive history to interested laypeople. He preached for Reformed congregations in Riga (Latvia) and Vilnius (Lithuania).

Rev. Alan Strange anticipates a daughter's marriage (Maggie on August 9). He's finalizing his dissertation for the University of Wales. He chairs multiple OPC committees and the Board of Trustees for Great Commission Publications. He writes book reviews and essays, regularly preaches, and speaks.

Rev. Marcus Mininger is house hunting. He directs the accreditation self-study and writes some aspects of it. He oversees summer Greek language instruction. He's working on a dissertation chapter about Romans 3:1-26 and preparing to teach fall courses. He preaches for URCNA and OPC congregations.

We extend our Christian sympathy to Rev. Alan Strange and his family in the sudden passing of his father, Mr. Robert Strange, on June 17 in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

## Mid-America Alumni Association Announces Scholarship Initiative by Rev. Greg Bylsma

“To cultivate the interests and advancement of the seminary for the purpose of training students for Christian ministry that glorifies the triune God.” So states the Mid-America Alumni Association By-Laws as one of the purposes for which the Association has been created. In pursuit of this goal, the Alumni Association is pleased to announce the establishment of two new scholarships for full-time students in ministerial studies.

One of the goals in establishing these scholarships is to increase the interest and awareness of alumni in the seminary’s ministry. The Association prays that we will not forget the importance of seeing a new generation of gospel preachers equipped to serve the church of God. We hope and pray that these alumni scholarships will help keep alumni involved in the ongoing work of Mid-America in training the next generation of gospel preachers.

These scholarships also provide an important channel through which alumni can be a practical blessing to students currently in the seminary community. Alumni have benefited significantly from the generosity and prayers of many in the support community, and we join in providing this support for other future alumni.

The two scholarships created are the Mid-America Alumni Association Entrance Scholarship (for first year students) and the Mid-America Alumni Association Scholarship for Pastoral Ministry (for upperclassmen). A minimal grade point average is encouraged for both scholarships, but the primary focus is directed towards men who display aptitude for pastoral ministry. Criteria for receiving the scholarships will thus include areas of service in the church and in evangelism, the ability to communicate God’s Word, and goals for future ministry. The purpose is to support and encourage men who show desire and ability for Word-centered service to the people of God.

All alumni are encouraged through this initiative to continue steadfastly praying for, supporting, and being involved in Mid-America’s ongoing work of training gospel preachers. We will also be looking to our alumni for yearly donations to provide funds for these awards. Please remember that we are not necessarily looking for large donations (although they are welcomed!), but we are hoping to see a large number of alumni donating faithfully in support of training future generations of gospel preachers. Funds for the scholarships can be donated by sending checks to Mid-America with “Alumni Scholarship” in the memo line.

Finally, we also wish to inform alumni that plans for an alumni conference for continuing education are currently in the works for the spring of 2014. More information will follow.

## The Joy of Participation by Keith Le Mahieu

For more than thirty years, *The Messenger* has informed readers how God is using Mid-America to build His church and to encourage you to participate in that building process. Isn’t it amazing that God invites us to participate with Him in the joy of building His kingdom and then richly blesses not only our work but also us along the way? What a good and loving Father we have!

God is inexorably drawing to himself “a great multitude that no one can number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages to stand before the throne and before the lamb” (Rev. 7:9). As Dr. Venema points out in his article, “Maintaining the Ministry of the Gospel,” Christ is pleased to work through the ministry of the Word and sacraments. We rightly esteem those whom the Great Shepherd has given us to watch over His flock. Indeed, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

At the same time, let’s not forget there are varieties of gifts, services and activities in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12). Each one of us is privileged to use these gifts in the service of Christ. Some have a particular gift of generosity (Romans 12:6-8), but we are all exhorted to excel in this grace (2 Cor. 8). Since the ministry of the Word and sacraments is the primary means God uses to build His kingdom, it follows that our gifts, including the gift of generosity, should be used primarily to buttress the ministry of Word and sacraments.

Thank you for your generosity to Mid-America! I encourage you to joyfully support us in the preparation of students for the ministry of the Word and the glory of Christ!







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## Upcoming Events

Orientation to Hebrew - August 21-23  
Registration & Orientation - August 26  
Seminary Retreat - August 27  
First Day of Classes - August 28  
Golf Outing - September 7  
Reading Recess - October 24-28

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## ◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

### Golf Outing 2013 by Keith LeMahieu



*At the 2012 Golf Outing*

For nine years running, Mid-America Reformed Seminary has hosted a golf outing on the Saturday following Labor Day. The date for this year's event is September 7. This late summer date usually means wonderful golfing weather for outing participants.

Lincoln Oaks Golf Course in Crete, IL, will host the outing again this year. Lincoln Oaks is designed by Scottish architect Tom Bendelow. Bendelow designed such celebrated courses as Olympia Fields which hosted the US Senior Open in 1997 and the PGA Championship in 1961, and Medina Country Club which hosted the 1990 US Open, the 2006 PGA Championship, and the 2012 Ryder Cup Championship. Lincoln Oaks is a reasonably challenging course known for its tree-lined, bent fairways and manicured greens.

The outing follows a scramble format with a 9:00 am shotgun start. Prizes are awarded to the first and second place teams with the lowest scores. Additionally, prizes are awarded to individual golfers for the longest drive, the straightest drive, the longest putt, and closest

to the pin. The outing is still just \$100 per golfer which includes green fees, cart, gifts, refreshments, and a buffet lunch.

Sponsorship opportunities are available for golfers and non-golfers alike. For a donation of \$500, event sponsors receive two golf and lunch registrations, a sign on the course indicating your sponsorship and a prominent listing in the event program. A \$100 hole sponsor is acknowledged by a sign on one of the holes and a listing in the program. Gift or prize sponsors can donate a prize or gift (including cash) for the outing. Gift sponsors are recognized in the program.

To register, use the outing brochure you received in the mail or register online at the Mid-America website. We look forward to seeing you there!