

# the messenger

Mid-America Reformed Seminary

June 2020 | Volume 38 Number 4

## p. 7: **COVID-19 and The Lord's Prayer**

▶ p. 5: **Conferral of Degrees**

▶ p. 10: **Alumni Profile: Tony Domanik**

# THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: “FEAR NOT, I AM THE FIRST AND THE LAST”



*“When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.’” (Rev. 1:17-18)*

During the period of the coronavirus pandemic, many of us have likely heard someone quote the well-known words of president Franklin Roosevelt—“we have nothing to fear but fear itself.” Usually, these words are quoted to encourage those who are fearful for their lives to be strong and courageous. They amount to saying—“don’t be afraid!”

The problem posed by these words, however, is that they do not have the power to change the inescapable reality or existential threat that the coronavirus pandemic represents. Nor do they have the power to reassure us that we are not vulnerable, liable to sickness, even to death itself, our “last enemy.” At best these words of encouragement can only be the occasion for us to muster the courage to go on, to take whatever risks we are willing to take, and then hope that it turns out well. After all, simply saying to someone, “fear not,” does not alter their circumstances or provide the help they need. These words, whether spoken by a politician or health official or whomever, can only ask us to conjure up the fortitude to carry on despite the dangers and the difficulties we may face.

Remarkably, the first words spoken by the risen and ascended Christ in the book of Revelation are—“Fear not.” These words were first spoken to the apostle John, who was in exile on the island of Patmos “on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (v. 9). But they are also spoken directly to us through John, who identifies himself to his readers as “your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus” (v. 9). When Christ lays His right hand upon John, He lovingly and powerfully signals His awareness that John, and all his fellow believers in exile, are liable to fear, doubt and temptation. Aware of John’s fear in His presence, the heavenly Son of Man—whose voice sounded like “the roar of many waters” because it was the voice of God Himself (cf. Ezek. 1:24)—declares that he and all who are in Jesus do not need to be afraid.

When considering the power and meaning of Christ’s words, “fear not,” it is important to note that John’s fear was occasioned by his vision of Christ Himself. The first vision that is recounted in the book of Revelation is of special importance. It lays the basis for the great message of the whole book: the Lamb who was slain to redeem for Himself a people without number from all the nations is also the Lion from the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5-6), the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16). In order to gain perspective upon his own circumstance and that of the whole church, John must see who Christ is. Once John and all his fellow believers recognize that Christ is “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth” (v. 5)—they will know that His power, wisdom, and grace ensure the triumph of His kingdom, even in the midst of the raging of the nations and the hostility of His and their enemies.

Immediately after Christ says, “Fear not,” He reminds John why he does not need to be afraid: “I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.” The words, “the first and the last,” are reminiscent of words used earlier in the first chapter of Revelation: “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty’” (v. 8). With these words, Christ assures John that He is sovereign over all things from beginning to end, including everything in between. Christ is also the One who, though He died, now lives and will live forevermore. He has destroyed the dominion and power of death, the last enemy. He has the “keys of Death and Hades.”

At this present moment in history, we do well to recall these comforting words of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. All who are united to Christ through faith do not need to succumb to fear, not even fear of our last enemy, death itself. But more than reminding ourselves of this truth, we also do well to tell our friends and neighbors of this good news: Jesus Christ, the heavenly Son of Man and Redeemer, truthfully and powerfully says to all who embrace Him by faith, “Do not be afraid!”

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

# INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

June 2020  
Volume 38 Number 4

## NEWS

- 4 Development Report: Much to be Thankful For
- 5 Spring Board Recap
- 5 Conferral of Degrees
- 6 Distance Learning
- 6 Spring Conference
- 6 Summer Assignments

## FEATURE

- 7 COVID-19 and The Lord's Prayer

## ALUMNI

- 10 Alumni Profile: Tony Domanik
- 11 Our Alumni and COVID-19

## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the June 2020 edition of The Messenger. We're glad you're reading! Back in March, the editorial committee met together via Zoom to discuss the issue you hold in your hands. We were observing our governor's stay-at-home orders and thus, we were not with each other at the Seminary. Our students were participating in distance education at that time as well. Several weeks later, Indiana eased up on restrictions in the workplace and slowly but surely, faculty and staff returned to our offices to carry out our duties. It's so good to be back, but we're not all "back at it," are we? Record unemployment, online church services, hundreds of cancelled public events, and postponed commencement ceremonies (ours included) have left us with a void in our lives. "Just let us get our lives back to normal," we say. I think there's wisdom in evaluating what our "normal" once was, and so does Dr. J. Mark Beach, author of our cover story "COVID-19 and the Lord's Prayer." We hope that story, along with our news articles and alumni updates is a blessing to you. Ok, enough here – turn the page, and enjoy!



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael Deckinga".

Michael Deckinga  
Vice President of Advancement

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Michael 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.

### Website

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# DEVELOPMENT REPORT: MUCH TO BE THANKFUL FOR

It's hard to believe that another fiscal year has nearly come and gone. More than that, I can't believe that I've been writing articles for *The Messenger* now for four years! Perhaps it feels like you've been reading them for that long, though. Are they really that bad? I hope not. Remember, you can always provide feedback – graciously.

We've seen some highs and lows here in the development office. Some month's contributions were very strong, others not as much. We've welcomed new friends to our work, and some have gone on to glory. We've seen our

partnership with the church grow considerably this year – you've provided increased contributions through your budget, or weekly offerings. We've also enjoyed the opportunity to fill your pulpits throughout the year. That has been particularly interesting as of late as we've been filming sermons on campus for your online services. Perhaps it has been helpful to do more than one “take” at times.

There's much to be thankful for. I'm thankful for your words of encouragement, your prayers, and your financial gifts. The Lord continues to surprise us – not that His provision for us is surprising, its more how He decides to bless us throughout the year. We've seen record estate gifts this year. I've seen firsthand what sacrificial giving to Mid-America looks like. I've read notes of encouragement from Sunday School classes, receiving their quarters, dimes, and nickels. I'm thankful for our graduates this year, and the impact I pray they'll have, by God's grace, on His kingdom. I'm thankful for what looks to be our largest incoming class of students next year. Our God is so good!

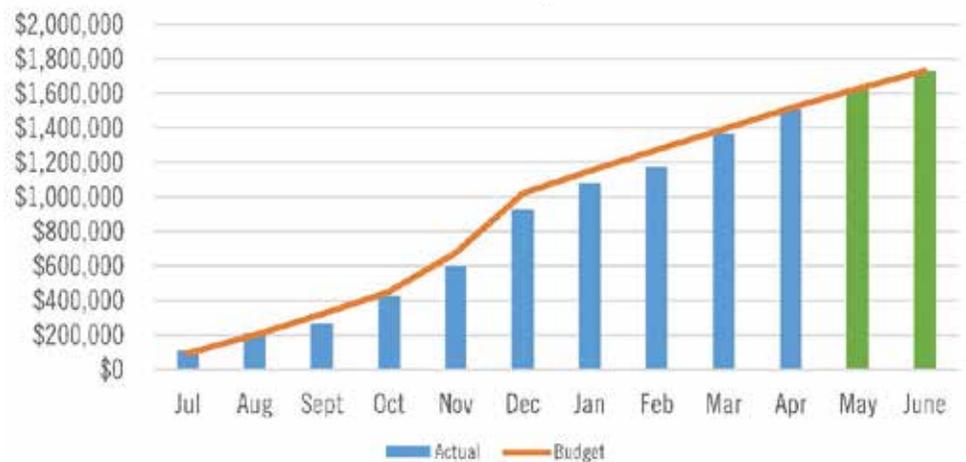
This graph shows you how contributions have added up month by month throughout the year to help us realize budget (orange line). Through April, Mid-America, blessed by your generosity, is operating at budget! Praise the Lord! As I mentioned, the last two months of our fiscal year remain a mystery. The green bars represent what we need to receive to be 100% at our revenue budget for the year (\$224,739).

We need your contributions to sustain us during our lean summer months. I invite you to participate in our work with a gift of any amount – be it a special one-time contribution or a recurring monthly gift. I ask that you remember us in prayer, and that you continue to do what you can to be our advocate to prospective students who are looking for robust, Reformed, and practical ministerial training.

We have been in regular prayer for you here at the Seminary. These times are challenging – you may have been diagnosed yourself or lost someone you love to COVID-19. You may have lost your job or had your hours/pay reduced. You may desire to help us reach our budget, but can't. Our prayer is you would always remember that “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalm 91:1). What a comfort it is to be a son or daughter of the Most High! Our God is sovereign – may He be pleased to guide, guard, and bless you with all you stand in need of during these times of great uncertainty.

Michael Deckinga  
Vice-President of Advancement

2019-2020 Academic Year Contributions  
Actual vs. Budget



# SPRING BOARD RECAP

Mid-America's Board of Trustees met to conduct their annual spring meeting on May 7. As you might imagine, it was an unusual meeting as this was the first-ever Board meeting by videoconference. While not able to be physically present, the Board nevertheless took care of business remarkably well under the leadership of Board President, Rev. James Sawtelle.

The first order of business was reappointment interviews for Dr. Marcus Miner and Rev. Andrew Compton. Dr. Miner was appointed for four years as Professor of New Testament Studies. Rev. Compton was appointed for four years as Associate Professor of Old Testament Studies.

Board members Tim Beezhold, Phil Grotenhuis, Tom Kooienga, and Jim Sawtelle are reaching the end of their three-year term of service. All were eligible for another term. The board conducted reappointment interviews

with each man, and all four were reappointed to another three-year term.

The Board then received a report from the Executive Committee (EC). The Board agreed with the EC's recommendation to appoint Dr. Eric Watkins as a part-time instructor of Ministerial Studies, to create a new position entitled Director of Marketing, and to promote Mr. Jared Luttjeboer to the Director of Marketing position. Next, the Board approved the EC's recommended slate of candidates to run for open positions on the Board of Trustees (see the insert for more information).

Finally, the Board approved two important recommendations from the Finance Committee (FC). The first recommendation was to make changes to the Seminary's investment policy. These changes were designed to improve the language of the policy and to give the FC slightly greater



flexibility in the management of the Seminary's investments (i.e., the Student Aid Fund and the Faculty Endowment). The Board then approved a '20-'21 budget totaling \$2,025,480 (a 2.4% increase over last year).

The next Board meeting is scheduled for mid-October on Mid-America's campus.

**Keith LeMahieu**

# CONFERRAL OF DEGREES

"Unprecedented" has become an overused word lately in the world of COVID-19. We had a graduation "ceremony and dinner" this year unlike any that we've ever had before. Customarily, I would be reporting on a full ceremony and all its proceedings. That full graduation treatment (formal dinner of graduates and wives with faculty and wives, open house with graduates' families, and graduation ceremony/reception) will occur next year, D.v., with the class of 2021. In other words, we'll have a combined 2020 and 2021 graduation.

For this year, it looked as if such would not be possible due to shelter-in-place requirements. However, just in time, Indiana opened up sufficiently to permit fewer than 25 to meet as long as proper conditions prevailed, including social distancing. On May 11, a little "ceremony" occurred, with faculty and some staff present. It opened with prayer and litany by Dr. Beach and closed by Dr. Strange, in



*Graduates (left to right): Cristian Garcia, Elijah DeJong, Carl Gobelman, Daniel Hamstra, Arnold Lavaire, Scottie Wright, Cary Gephart*

which the graduates received their degrees and Dr. Venema gave them a charge.

Following this ceremony, students and wives, faculty, and staff met for a delicious catered luncheon, observing proper social distancing

protocol. We are glad that our students were able to be afforded such, though we also eagerly anticipate the occasion of their more formal commencement.

**Dr. Alan D. Strange**

## DISTANCE LEARNING

When news began swirling about coronavirus/COVID-19 early in the year, none of us expected that it would affect our learning routine at Mid-America Reformed Seminary. And yet on March 17, in keeping with Indiana “lockdown” measures, classes were moved online using the videoconferencing platform, Zoom.

On the one hand, the technology worked very well. There were minimum adjustments necessary to lecture to the class, and Keith LeMahieu worked tirelessly to ensure that students and professors could focus on learning and teaching instead of troubleshooting computer problems.

But on the other hand, the community dynamics of seminary study took a disappointing turn. After all, none of us came to Mid-America Reformed Seminary in search of a distance education. We came to learn in-person and to enjoy in-person friendships and community in our aspiration to pastor in-person congregations!

And yet, though not ideal, our seminary made the best of the situation. We “met” with students via video calls, text-messaging, and telephone. We stayed online after lectures to answer follow-up questions and to enjoy laughter and conversation. And while none of this replaced the joy of in-person learning, it was something, and for that we are deeply thankful.

*Rev. Andrew Compton, Associate Professor of Old Testament Studies & M.T.S. Program Director*



## SPRING CONFERENCE

On March 5th, Dr. Zack Eswine delivered a three-part series entitled, “The Imperfect Pastor: Vocational Ministry as a Human Being.”

Session one, “The Work-rest-limits of Vocational Ministry” (Ecclesiastes 10:5-15), encouraged ministers to look to the wisdom of Jesus and to slow down and to keep their ministry in its proper, finite perspective. When we’ve mastered divinity, we’ve mastered the baby talk whereby God lovingly lips to us.

Session two, “The Local Experience of Vocational Ministry” (2 Corinthians 7:5-7), meditated on Jesus of Nazareth. Wherever we end up ministering, we must learn to be in that place loving the people there.

Session three, “The Most Important Practice of Vocational Ministry” (1 Corinthians 13:1-8), showed that deep theology serves the end of loving others in Jesus’ name.

*Luke Walkup*



## SUMMER ASSIGNMENTS

The following is a list of students who are going out to serve on summer internships. No doubt, this may be an assignment unlike any others to date. The concern over the spread of the coronavirus will have students doing livestreamed services or services with very controlled attendance in terms of number. Much of the pastoral care will be conducted via Skype, Zoom, or phone calls. Yet the work of the ministry continues, and we are thankful that our students will have these opportunities. Pray for them, that this summer will be God-glorifying and profitable for the students and the churches they serve:

### Student

Nathaniel Bloechl  
Caleb Castro  
David Dick  
Joseph Kim  
Jacob London  
Praveen Phinehas  
James Stafford  
Aaron van der Heiden  
Luke Walkup  
Peter Yoo

### Assignment

Mission Church (OPC)  
Nampa United Reformed Church  
Christ Reformed Church (URC)  
Bethel Presbyterian Church (PCA)  
Zion United Reformed Church  
Immanuel United Reformed Church  
New Covenant Community Church (OPC)  
Parkland Reformed Church (URC)  
Faith Orthodox Presbyterian Church  
Highland Korean Presbyterian Church (PCA)

### Location

Merrillville, Indiana  
Nampa, Idaho  
Sioux Falls, South Dakota  
Palatine, Illinois  
Sheffield, Ontario  
DeMotte, Indiana  
Joliet, Illinois  
Ponoka, Alberta  
Indiana, Pennsylvania  
Vernon Hills, Illinois

# COVID-19 AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

DR. J. MARK BEACH

I've heard it said many times of late: "I just want things to get back to normal." Sounds reasonable, what with the lock-down, social distancing, economic crisis, and people dying (particularly the elderly), why shouldn't we "just want things to get back to normal?"

But what does God want? Our God abounds in love and mercy. But does the Lord, given His love and mercy, *want things to get back to normal*. What is normal? Normal sinning? Normal selfishness? Normal political maneuvering and intrigue? Normal fudging the truth in business? Does He want our "normal" pattern of life to proceed as usual—chasing success, sniffing the wind for sexual conquest, turning a blind eye to neighbors in need, living for your own comfort and entertainment? Does God want life to proceed as usual—people racing after idols, detouring around Him and His Word, then revving up to indulge themselves to the grave? It's called *amusing ourselves to death*. All such things (partly at least) add up to *back to normal*. But none of it is according to God's norm. None of it honors Him. None of it participates in neighbor-love. None of it is about the gospel. And none of it calculates to *the way it's supposed to be*.

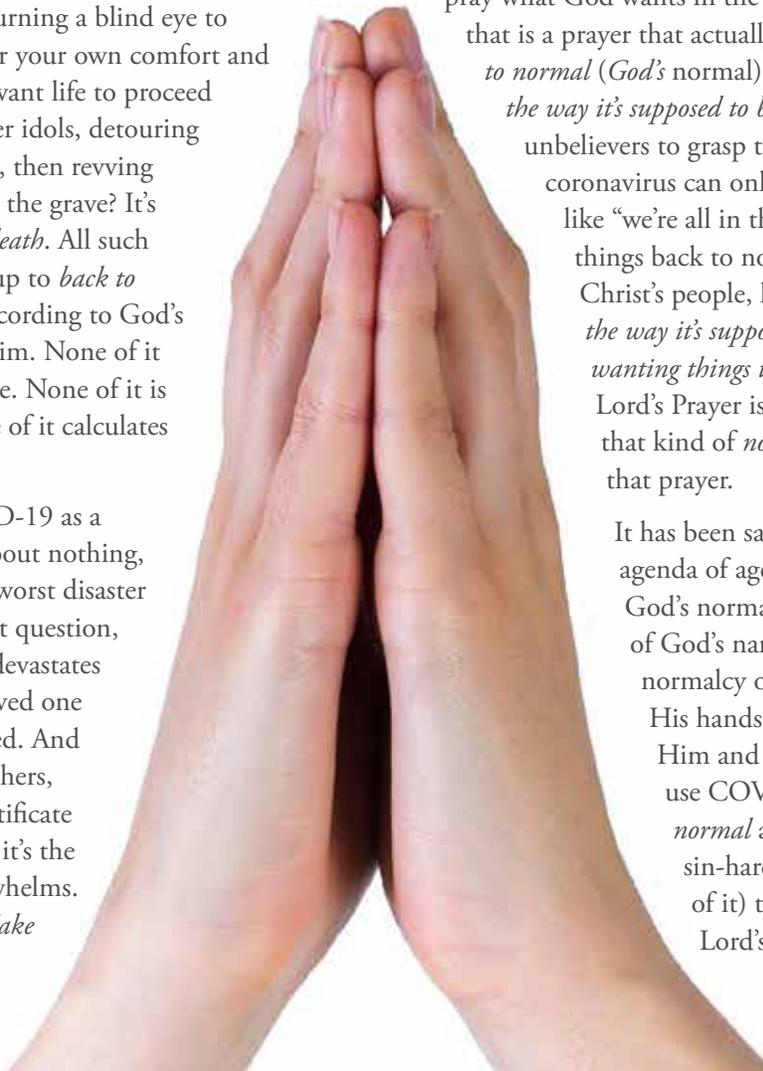
While some dismiss COVID-19 as a distant illness, much ado about nothing, others conceive of it as the worst disaster to befall their lives. Without question, it ravishes households and devastates families. When it is your loved one dying, it cannot be dismissed. And COVID-19 harms many others, not by way of the death certificate that accompanies it; rather, it's the economic fallout that overwhelms. *Will my business make it? Make*

*it? I've already lost my job!* This blanket of misery spreads wider than the physical dangers of the virus. Many business owners, and their employees, find themselves on the precipice of an economic cataclysm. It's a classic Catch-22—either way we turn, we face a bad choice: imperil lives with the spread of the virus or imperil livelihoods with a frozen economy. Neither of these is *the way it's supposed to be*.

And this brings us to the options of *things back to normal* versus *the way it's supposed to be*; or, our normal versus God's normal—what God wants.

It is not hard to know what *God wants*. Jesus taught us to pray what God wants in the Lord's Prayer. Interestingly, that is a prayer that actually targets *getting things back to normal* (*God's normal*) because its petitions seek *the way it's supposed to be*. While we shouldn't expect unbelievers to grasp this (indeed, the crisis of the coronavirus can only elicit from them slogans like "we're all in this together" and "we all want things back to normal"), Christian people, Christ's people, know better. Don't we ache for *the way it's supposed to be* in contrast to merely *wanting things to get back to normal*? The whole Lord's Prayer is a declaration of war against that kind of *normal*. Take a look with me at that prayer.

It has been said: the Lord's Prayer sets the agenda of agendas. Each petition pleads for God's normal. That is, for the normalcy of God's name being "hallowed"; the normalcy of sinners seeking mercy from His hands; the normalcy of living for Him and His glory. If God is pleased to use COVID-19 to interrupt our sinful *normal* and, instead, to awaken this sin-hardened planet (if only a fraction of it) to seek His glory and honor, the Lord's Prayer prays for it to be so.



*Yes, Lord, upset our sinful normal, and reorient life to hallow your name.*

May we as believers get on board with that!

The same applies to the other petitions of the Lord's Prayer. We pray for our heavenly Father's "kingdom to come" and His "will to be done, on earth as it is in heaven." There is nothing benign in those petitions. This is a battle-prayer against Satan's kingdom. It's a reign-of-Christ prayer, wherein broken lives are mended, wounded hearts consoled, enslaving habits overcome; shameful grudges (and the malice that fuels them) receive new resources for love and forgiveness and liberation. We pray: "Your kingdom come, Lord, even in the midst of COVID-19, even because of COVID-19." That's a

**"Don't we ache for the way it's supposed to be in contrast to merely wanting things to get back to normal? The whole Lord's Prayer is a declaration of war against that kind of normal."**

different prayer and desire than *I just want things to get back to normal.*

As believers we have eyes to see God's providential care. An unhappy providence has invaded our lives—which is no happenstance or a piece of "bad luck." No, as believers we know that this virus—upending life and upsetting the *normal*—is in God's hands and that He has His own wholly wise and good purpose in view. And, so, in the midst of this disease we pray that God's *will be done*. And what is that will? Well, it is not that we merely *get back to normal*. It is not that we—a sinful world, a sinful nation, a sinful community, a sinful and sleepy church—might get back to our sinful normal. Back to sinning as always!

That "will of God" *wills* our humility, our God dependency, our turning to Him in weakness and frailty, acknowledging our shortsightedness. After all, who saw this coming? None of us! This virus interrupted our vacations and fun! It has wounded our investments! We didn't see it coming. What is more, if God desires, the coronavirus (or something much worse) could continue to invade our lives with still further unknown consequences. Does it have to be "something much worse" to humble us to pray not for *things to get back to normal* but for His will to be done?

Ponder with me for a moment, what if God does not will for life *to get back to normal*? Would that be unfair?

Listen to the sirens sounding in our ears! It is not because we are worse sinners that the coronavirus has fallen upon us, but unless we repent, we all likewise will perish (see Luke 13:2-5). How easily we dismiss the call to repentance and faith. Yes, even we believers become indifferent to the indifference around us—indifference toward God. Shouldn't we pray: "Lord, upset our indifference, awaken us! Let Your will be done on this sinful earth (as it is in heaven). Lord, overcome the indifference so pervasive toward You, the indifference toward Christ, toward His reign; and Lord, overthrow our indifference—toward lost neighbors. Gracious Father, vanquish our culture's dismissal of You! Impart faith; bring forth repentance. Defeat in your church the foolishness of packing our barns full so that we can live a kicked-back life, while our wallets are thin of faith; Lord, beat down our selfish habits to wall ourselves behind comfortable church-zones, to keep the messiness of a fallen world out. Lord, if You did that, You would keep us out! Yes, Lord, Your will be done in us. Use, if need be, the crisis of COVID-19 to accomplish this."

God is so very merciful. Let us not forget that we pray to our heavenly Father. He knows our needs in this crisis; He knows us very personally—physically and economically. So it is very fitting, amid COVID-19, to remember that Jesus also taught us to pray for *daily bread*. We pray for God's merciful provision. We need (all our lost neighbors need) "a competent portion of the good things of this life" (as the Shorter Catechism says). We need divine intervention for divine healing; we need safeguards and medical wisdom to bring healing for this disease; we need deliverance—for God to graciously bestow remedies. We may pray for those things. *Yes, Lord, as Your divine gift to us, grant daily bread to us and to many desperate lives that need helping hands—even our helping hands! Lord, give us daily bread; for "neither our care and work nor Your gifts can do us any good without Your blessing"* (Heidelberg Catechism). *Humble us, Father, and provide for us.*

COVID-19, then, should prompt us to pray the Lord's Prayer with lives so manifestly fragile. May the coronavirus, therefore, create in us a disposition of seeking mercy from God and of bestowing mercy to others. This, as we pray, *forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors!* No one better understands the generosity of forgiveness than the person who has frantically sought God's generous forgiveness—and received it. Life is never about keeping score and getting even. Life lived before God is about mercy! While the world presumes—and perhaps we Christians presume along with it—on the common grace blessings He bestows day-by-day, we know in fact that such blessings can be dialed down in a flash.

The world suffers from the coronavirus—physically, economically, emotionally—yet so little is heard from leaders of any stripe to ask for God's mercy, for God's deliverance, for

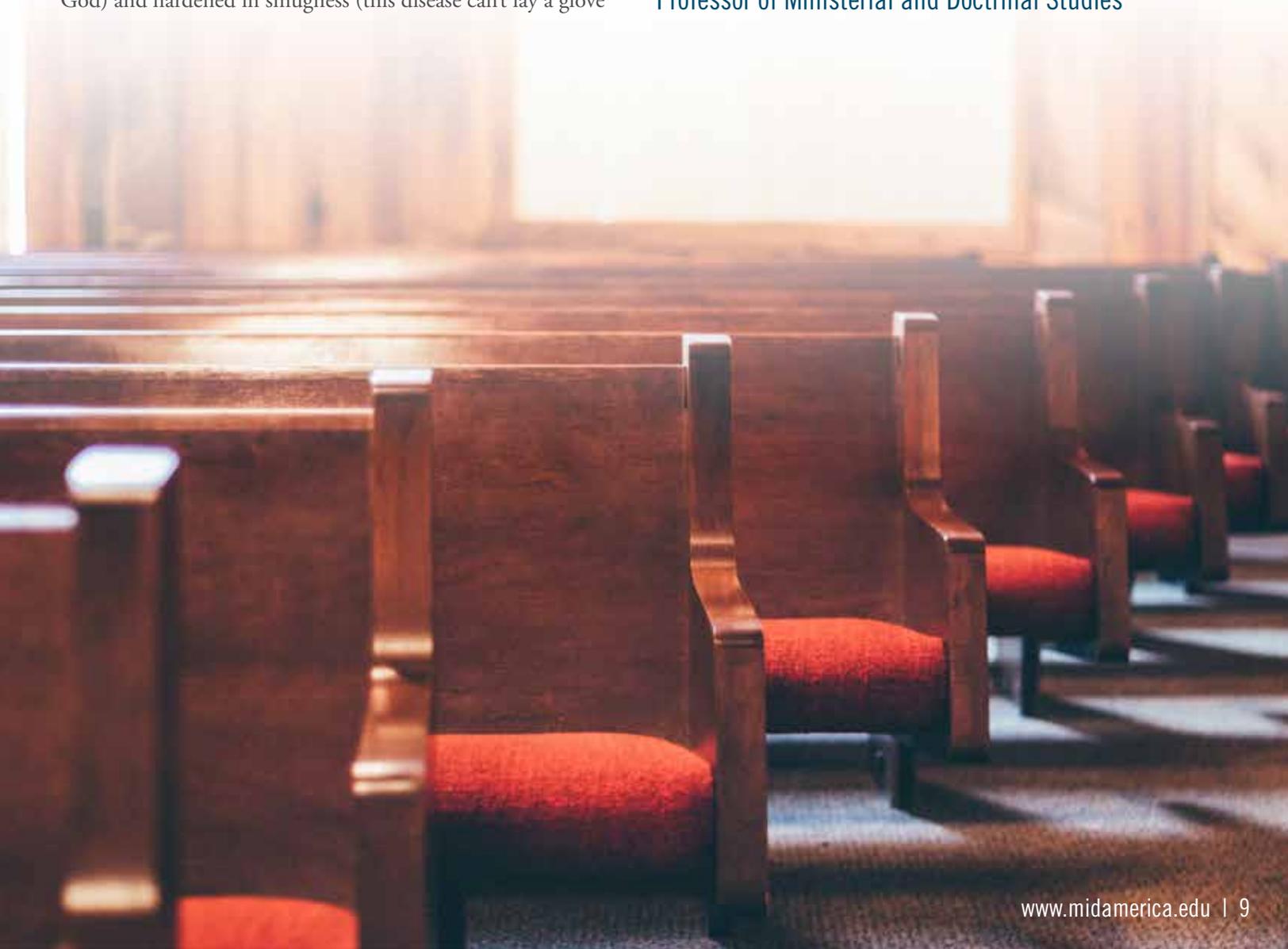
God's forgiveness, for God to pardon us as we seek His *back to normal*. Frankly, it is disheartening, but telling too, how few politicians seek God's free pardon of our personal sins and national sins. Their attitude: *What? We need forgiveness? We need mercy and grace and divine pardon?* Yes, we do. The church, too, needs to pray for the forgiveness of our debts. We can display our need for forgiveness by our acts of mercy. We can ready ourselves as churches to offer benevolent relief to local families living hand-to-mouth, week-to-week, paycheck to paycheck; and, now, no paycheck. This prayer includes grace to others. We need God's free pardon; we need His mercy. And He is merciful; He does pardon us—the lost need only call upon Him for help. May COVID-19 move us to seek God's forgiveness!

And yet, this virus, though it should move us to seek God's pardon, also occasions more sinning. Temptations lurk at our door. The Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray: *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*. We need God's protection from temptation, but also His deliverance when temptation comes. Presently, God is *testing* (not tempting) us. But we see many hard hearts—hardened in fear (with no turning to God) and hardened in smugness (this disease can't lay a glove

on me). Testing reveals what is in our hearts. What's in yours? Suppose, by the time you read this that the world is getting back to normal. Suppose the economy enjoys a quick recovery. Suppose this coronavirus thing turns out to be a titanic miscalculation—a global overreaction to a disease that menaces mostly those predisposed to lung illness and immune deficiency. Suppose all of that. What thoughts roll around in your head? And what idols vie for supremacy in your heart? *Back to my tidy life as usual. Back to my fun-filled plans*. Is it back to some version of *my name be honored, my kingdom come, my will be done*? Will we go back to that? Back to *more, more, more*? Back to *avenging our debtors*?

We have as the conclusion to the Lord's Prayer the well-known words: *For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever*. Again, we ask: "what does God want?" May we pray not for to *things to get back to normal*. Rather, let us pray for *the way it's supposed to be*—His kingdom and power and glory on eternal display!

**Dr. J. Mark Beach**  
 Professor of Ministerial and Doctrinal Studies



# ALUMNI PROFILE: TONY DOMANIK

We caught up with alumnus Tony Domanik (2014). Since Seminary, Tony has been teaching at a Chicago area Christian high school, and recently received a call to the OPC. He was gracious enough to shed some light on how Mid-America trained him for both educational and pastoral ministry.

## 1. What did you most appreciate about your time at MARS?

“Firstly, the faculty has an obvious concern for the student body, with a clear intention to form us into men who are prepared for the most important aspects of gospel ministry – intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, etc. Secondly, the camaraderie of the student body – especially my class (2014). We “struggled together.” That really pushed us to help each other. I’m reminded of one particular person I studied with until very late into the night (you know who you are!), and how much we helped each other out.”

## 2. You were a teacher at a Christian high school in the Chicago area. How did the theological training you received at MARS equip you to do this work?

“The perspective that MARS teaches from allowed me to deliver to my high school students the pure milk of the Word in a way that is coherent, reasonable, and grounded in sound biblical hermeneutics. For the modern-day teenager, there are so many things in their lives that are suspended in the realm of mystery and uncertainty. They easily lose sight of what actually is certain anymore, and they don’t know where to turn in order to find truth. This creates unhealthy stress, despair, and anxiety that they deal with constantly. What they need is a mature exposure to the truths of the Word of God that will apply regardless of the time-period or circumstances.



MARS equipped me to be an expositor of the Word. For someone to cut through all of the uncertainties, and to show teenagers that the Bible IS God’s inerrant word, that it HAS a clear and consistent message in ALL of its contents, and that message CAN be understood – this is exactly what the modern-day high school audience needs today.”

## 3. You’ve been recently called to ministry in the OPC – congratulations! How will your experience as a teacher inform your ministry?

“My experience in teaching high school has certainly forced me to “step up my game” in many areas. For instance, my skills in Bible knowledge, Greek and Hebrew, Biblical theology, apologetics, etc., have all been honed by communicating the truths of the Word in a palatable way. The basic (and very difficult) question that drives how I develop my classes is, “What do they need to know, and when do they need to know it?” This question also guides how I write and deliver sermons. I get to know how an audience thinks through being in a classroom and daily having to lay out what to do,

demonstrate, explain things (re-explain things!), conclude with what I showed them, check for comprehension – all this will help make my sermons more clear and meaningful. Other areas that have certainly been tested are my skills in counseling, having to set out standards and accomplish goals, working as a team, the importance of communication, and the necessity for a humble reliance upon the finished work of Christ in all that I do!”

## 4. What advice would you give to prospective students contemplating seminary?

“Check your pride at the door when you walk into the classroom. Seminary is not a place to show off how smart you are, or a place that’s designed to make you into a clean, white-collared intellectual. It is a place that equips you to carry out the most fundamental aspects of gospel ministry. Be on your guard while you study! The Devil doesn’t want another preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He will do anything to snuff him out before he gets into the pulpit and leads the flock. What better time than during this preparation! You should get accustomed to divesting yourself of your own pride before you walk into the classroom.”

# OUR ALUMNI AND COVID-19

We asked all of our alumni how the coronavirus pandemic has either challenged or positively impacted their ministry, or maybe a few words of encouragement to all of our readers. Here's what they had to say:

**Vic Bernales** (2008): "The global coronavirus crisis has made me realize how comforting the truth that as children of God we are the Lord's and He is our loving Father. This truth is sustaining me, my family, and the saints in our congregation. It gives us joy in the midst of trouble, peace in times of panic, and hope when life seems bleak."



**Brian Blummer** (2011): "It's a shame I never, ever thought about handshakes before COVID-19. But now I get weird looks every time I (still mindlessly) put out my hand for a handshake. I'm going to shake the tar out of people's hands (and hug them) when all this is over!"

**Raymond Christian**: "Being a first responder of the United States Armed Forces, I assure you that the United States of America has the most brilliant minds in the world when it comes to research and development. We live in the greatest nation in the world and we shall overcome this test of faith. Let us continue to keep God first, keep those who rule over us in prayer, and remember, we walk by faith and not by sight."



**Bryce DeZwarte** (2019): "My ordination service, originally scheduled for April 18, has been postponed, and although I have been serving my congregation for over a month now, I have not seen them from behind the pulpit since last December. Certainly, this isn't the way I thought I'd be entering the gospel ministry. And yet, God has still been good to me and to my congregation as we have sought to embrace the comfort of knowing that the plans God has for us are even better than the plans we

could ever make for ourselves."

**Joel Dykstra** (1998): "My ministry has been challenged by the physical separation that is so integral to our work. As I'm sure all my colleagues will attest, preaching to an essentially empty sanctuary and conducting pastoral work over the phone presents new burdens to the work. On the positive side, there is a renewed love for worship among the congregation and a greater sense of community as we support each other during these difficult days."



**Christian McShaffrey** (2003): "Reformed worship invites God's people to set their minds on things above and to embrace their identity as elect pilgrims in a world of uncertainty. The weekly means of grace have well-trained the saints at Five Solas Church to recognize the heavenly purpose behind this particular season of trial and to respond appropriately:

'Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.' (1 Peter 1:6-7)"



**Jacques Roets** (2001): "As our life came to a standstill, and we were brought face to face with how fragile our lives truly are, the relevancy and power of God's Word to speak hope and bring comfort was again brought home to me. What a glorious Savior we are able to preach! He has removed the sting of death and provides everlasting treasure, so that we have nothing to fear if we lose everything! (cf. Rom. 8:31-39)"



**Erik Stolte** (2011): "Like most churches we have reverted

to livestreaming services, while using Zoom for weekly meditations and prayer times. During this time God has impressed on me the humility and surrender of prayer as he does His work when I cannot (Acts 1:14). With the NZ government soon to relax lockdown conditions we hope to be able to worship together very soon."

**Joe ten Brinke** (2008): "I have been working as a primary therapist for a residential therapeutic community dealing with addiction. The COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges and stresses within the community. Being grounded in Christ has demonstrated a hope not found in this world, helping not only residents but also fellow staff. Our God is truly sovereign."

**Nathan Tomlinson** (2012): "It has been wonderful to see how some believers with more perennial anxiety have responded to the current situation. One sister in Christ commented to me, 'now they all know how I feel all the time!' The Holy Spirit has been using some of these very saints, who once felt like the weakest of believers, to voice confidence and provide strong encouragement to newly anxious believers. What a privilege to observe God at work!"



**Ruben Zartman** (2017): "The lockdown orders and

difficulty of travel led to an historic first for the RCUS: the very first delegated and virtual Synod. There are some gains in efficiency and savings in cost, but there is a lot happening simultaneously to keep track of."



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# 16TH ANNUAL GOLF OUTING

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SEPTEMBER 12, 2020



Stay tuned for more information over the summer.