

the messenger

Mid-America Reformed Seminary

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**THE OLD TESTAMENT:
A Training Manual
for World Missions**
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THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

“BY HIS SPIRIT AND WORD:” MISSIONS, EVANGELISM, AND THE ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE



“Our purpose is to better equip students and pastors to plant and perpetuate Reformed, ordinary means of grace churches to carry out Christ’s Great Commission.” (Center for Missions & Evangelism purpose statement)

Perhaps the greatest folly in the contemporary church’s affection for worldly strategies in missions and evangelism is the self-defeating nature of the whole enterprise. If the church adopts a pragmatic method in order to be successful in fulfilling its mission, the church compromises its reliance upon Christ’s Spirit and Word. Whenever the church adopts a method for achieving success in its mission that does not conform to the one Christ has appointed, the church ceases to rely upon the promise that Christ will build His church upon the testimony of the apostles (Matt. 16:13-20; cf. Eph. 2:20).

If Christ is the one who builds the church, then He has the right to determine the strategy that He wishes to use to build it. Otherwise, the church will be tempted to act as though the gathering of the people of God depends upon whatever means it devises. Christ is not only the substance of the church’s *message*. Christ is also the substance of the church’s *method*. You cannot preach the Christ of the Scriptures while relying upon your own clever schemes to accomplish what He has promised to accomplish in His own way.

In the Old Testament story of the Lord’s victory over the Midianites through Gideon, we witness something “typical” regarding the Lord’s redemptive work. In the account in Judges 6 and 7, the Lord deliberately devises a strange, paradoxical strategy for securing victory. The Lord’s chosen instrument, Gideon, is an unimpressive sort, the youngest son in a no-account family from one of the least of the tribes of Israel. When Gideon is commissioned to lead Israel in battle against the Midianites, we are told the Spirit of the Lord “clothed” him (Judges 6:34). Amazingly, when thirty-two thousand men heed Gideon’s call to arms, the Lord intervenes and whittles the number of men down to a meager three hundred. Furthermore, the weapons with which Gideon and his little band of three hundred enter the fray are clay pots and trumpets. Never in the history of human warfare has there been a more lopsided set of combatants: on the one side, young Gideon with three hundred novices, armed only with pots and trumpets; on the other side, a vast number of Midianite armed men, who fill the valley like locusts overrunning a field in mid-summer.

But the key to the miraculous victory that Gideon wins over the Midianites lies in the Lord’s *deliberate strategy to employ human weakness to achieve His redemptive purposes and thereby magnify His own power and grace*. In the words of the Lord to Gideon, “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me’” (Judges 7:2). God chooses a strategy of weakness to shame the strong, and to cause His people to boast alone in His power.

I rehearse this Old Testament story of God’s work of redemption in the days of the Judges in order to illustrate the most important feature of the Reformed confessions’ doctrine of the church and the means of grace: the church of Jesus Christ is no human project, but a work of God’s grace from first to last. Therefore, the church is not at liberty to undertake its mission by any other means than those which the Lord has appointed. If the Lord has chosen to employ means that appear foolish and weak to the world—gospel preaching and teaching, the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and fervent prayer—so be it.

The simple truth is that the Lord is jealous for His glory. The Lord wants His people to boast alone in Him. This simple truth is sufficient to sweep away all the folly and proud presumption of those who would undertake to build the church by their own devices. However strong, wise, and clever our strategies and methods may appear to be, if they depart from the chosen means that the Lord is pleased to use to gather His people to Himself, they will inevitably prove to be weak and foolish. Only when the church employs the means Christ has appointed, and to do so in reliance upon the power of His Spirit, will the church be able to rest its faith in the power of God rather than the wisdom of men (1 Cor. 2:5).

As the work of Mid-America’s new venture, the Center for Missions and Evangelism, begins, may this core conviction regarding the power and fruitfulness of Christ’s Word and Spirit in the gathering of His church be a constant source of encouragement to us.

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

This edition of The Messenger focuses on missions, evangelism, the ordinary means of grace, and our Lord's mandate through Scripture to spread the Word. Rev. Mark Vander Hart presents an article on Matthew 28:18-20 as being an appropriate updating of the very first mandate we're given in Genesis 1. It is our hope that you will be encouraged to tell the old, old story to those you come into contact with – with the power of the Spirit in your heart, and with the confidence gained from seeing the whole of Scripture point to salvation that is intended for all of those – all tribes, tongues, and nations – that God has called unto Himself. Through ordinary means, may He be pleased to use us all in extraordinary ways.



A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'M. Deckinga'.

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.

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DEVELOPMENT REPORT: “EXTRA LEG ROOM”

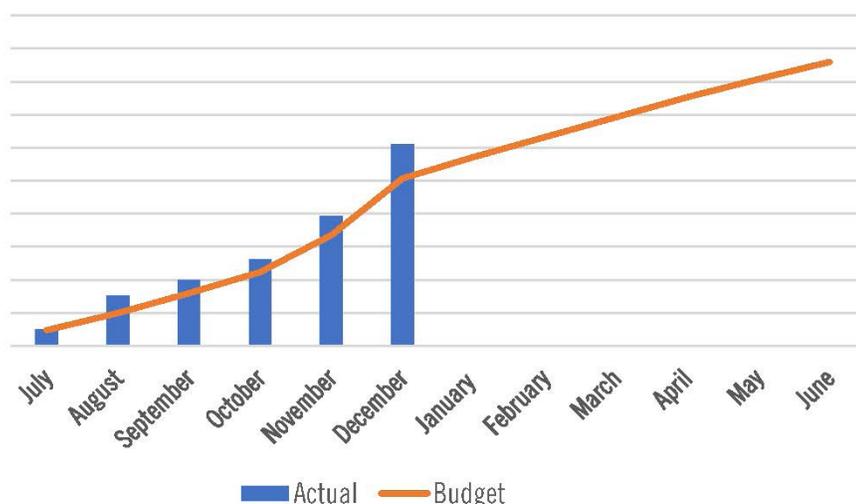
As I write this article, I'm 39,000 feet in the air on my way to our Center for Missions & Evangelism's (CME) conference "More Salt; More Light" in St. Augustine, Florida. (More on our CME's inaugural conference in June's issue of *The Messenger*, Lord willing). Heading towards warmer weather in late January isn't even the best part – what's more, my flight was significantly under-booked, so I've got the whole row of seats to myself! Plenty of space is a good thing. It's more than I need, and I appreciate the extra room to put my feet up and get a bit of work done.

My family and I began reading through the book of Acts after our meals together. So far, we've made it through chapter 5. It is so encouraging to read the account of the early church. We have enjoyed reading of the gospel's triumph over opposition. To hear how the Spirit empowered and emboldened the Apostles to spread the fame of King Jesus to all peoples – the same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead lived then in the hearts of early believers, and still lives in us today! I also am encouraged to read of the early church's practices as it pertained to leadership, and care for one another, and to see parallels yet today in my own church. Praise God for preserving His church!

I'm struck, though, by the contentment of those new believers, and the church in her infancy, to be satisfied with what they had, and what's more, to give of what they had to provide for each other and to keep the ministry going. They didn't have much beyond what was needed, and if there were times of plenty, the resources were plugged right back into the mission of the

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2021-22 Fiscal Year Budget vs. Actual Contributions



church.

Why did I feel compelled to share that I have some extra comforts on this flight? I thought you'd never ask. What I need is a seat, not three. The extra breathing room is a bit of a bonus, but it allows me to get my work done with a bit more comfort. I can be creative. Note though, I'm not napping on the clock – I'm getting my work done.

That's a bit how our calendar year-end financials look. We are satisfying the needs of our budget – and then some. Your overwhelmingly generous response to our Thanksgiving appeal letters – not to mention my phone calls, emails, and visits – have positioned us ahead of our contributions budget for the first half of our fiscal year. The figures in the graph speak for themselves.

While we enjoy the benefit of being blessed beyond our need, we are putting those resources right back into our program – straight to the mission of our school – to train godly men for a lifetime of fruitful gospel ministry. We've got the space to be strategic and creative in our approach to ministry training, to make plans to accommodate more students, and

to expand both our physical campus and our academic program. We aren't resting on our laurels, coasting on the extra until we need to ask for more. Our foot is on the gas, and through God's grace and provision (through you!) we are able to work harder than ever to encourage and strengthen the church through the effective theological and practical training of her members and pastors.

God blessed the early church with what she stood in need of and was pleased to use bold and effective preaching to further His mission. It's just as important today – we know that, and we are thankful you see that too. We've received much, and we know much is expected. Our partnership with you has never been stronger, and we promise to be faithful and to work hard with what you've so abundantly given us. Thank you for your support. To God be the glory!

Michael Deckinga
Vice-President of Advancement

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

SENIOR PROFILES

We thank God for the hard work of these students and pray for them as they go on to new places and ministry. On May 12, at 7:30 pm, at Redeemer United Reformed Church in St. John, IN, Mid America will graduate (the Lord willing) the following six students:



Immediately following graduation, **Caleb Castro**, his wife, Robyn, and son, Theodore (Teddy),

will be participating in a summer internship with his home congregation, Oak Glen URC, in Lansing, IL. Afterward, he plans to take his candidacy exam for the office of Minister of the Word and sacraments in the URCNA. As for his time at Mid-America, Caleb remarks that it “is truly academically rigorous without the ‘busy work,’ while the curricula always have a pastoral purpose, giving us tools to be equipped for service to the church rightly. Similarly, the faculty are first-and-foremost pastors. They teach and counsel, shepherd, guard, and edify each student.”



After graduation, **Joe Kim** plans to continue serving at his current church, Bethel

Presbyterian Church (PCA), in Palatine, IL. There are several things that he’s appreciated throughout his time at Mid-America: “The school is very intentional in training those who strive to serve in gospel ministry—from the professors to the curriculum. The professors were also incredibly patient and accessible

whenever I wanted clarity and help. I also appreciate the community that we have here. Being in a smaller school, we can interact and encourage one another in the faith.”



Jacob London desired to study at a confessionally Reformed seminary to conclude his MDiv degree, “and to my delight, this

is what I received at MARS.” Jacob is thankful for his professors’ commitment to Scripture and the confessions. Furthermore, he is “grateful for their commitment to the local church, which is the hope of the world, and the training up of men to herald the gospel of grace to the glory of the Triune God.” As Jacob, his wife Lisa, and children, Calvin and Elizabeth, continue to make arrangements for ministry in the United Reformed Churches in North America, they feel that Mid-America has prepared Jacob well for a call to life-long service to Christ and His kingdom.



Lord willing, after graduation, **Praveen Phinehas** hopes to become a candidate in the URCNA. He will be waiting on the Lord as He calls

Praveen and his family (wife, Sharon, baby girl due March 1, 2022) through his church to serve Him and His people. Praveen appreciates many things about Mid-America. First and foremost, the faculty. He enjoys how the professors train students to be faithful to the Scriptures and the confessions and workers who do not need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). Praveen also cherished the MAP program, practicing what he learned in class in the local church.



Luke Walkup hopes to have a year-long internship in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church after graduation. Luke has appreciated

getting to know his professors and fellow students, further commenting, “I have gained perspective on the work of the ministry and a better understanding of the vast field of learning that yet lies before me. Mid-America has equipped me with tools and resources to aid me in the Lord’s call to the ministry of His word.” Luke and his wife, Laura, are thankful for all who supported them and their family (Mary Jeanette [6], Ephraim [4], Phinehas [2], and Moriah [1]). “We give thanks for the generosity of the saints and for their prayers throughout our time here.”



Peter Yoo’s plans after graduation include seeking ordination and serving a local church in gospel ministry. He may consider further study, but in any

case, strives to serve Christ’s church in any capacity that the Lord may call him. In his honest assessment, “there are too many things I thank God for regarding Mid-America Reformed Seminary. The education I received is comprehensive, rigorous, and world-class. The professors are competent experts in their fields and organically teach the content and its significance in gospel ministry. They are also upstanding men of character, in whom there is no shortage of qualities to commend.” Peter thanks God for financial supporters of Mid-America, that he might receive this blessing of a robust seminary education without the worry of excess debt after graduation.

Jared Luttjeboer
Director of Marketing

SPRING EVENING CLASS

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE CHURCH IN REFORMED PERSPECTIVE—A GUIDE FOR CHURCH MEMBERS

This semester's evening class (geared for church members in our community) will engage the subject "Social Justice and the Church in Reformed Perspective—a Guide for Church Members." It will be taught by Rev. Dr. Eric Watkins, the newly appointed Director for the Center of Missions and Evangelism at Mid-America Reformed Seminary. This evening class will draw from the week-long course Dr. Watkins taught on the subject at Mid-America in January 2021 but will be accessible for non-seminary students. A recommended reading list will be given to participants. The class should be lively, interactive and practical. Please consider inviting members of your congregations, including teenagers and college students. It would certainly be of benefit to them, as the class will seek not only to address issues from a biblically and theologically reformed perspective; it will also discuss

practical ways in which the church can "do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God" together.

The class will start at 7:30 p.m. (CST) on four Thursday nights (February 10th, March 3rd, March 17th and April 21st.) The class will meet for 45 minutes, followed by a 15-minute break and then another 45 minutes and then a time of question and answer.

The topics covered in the course will be as followed:

February 10: *The Bible and Social Justice*

March 3: *A History of Social Justice and the Church*

March 17: *Critical Race Theory and the Church*

April 21: *Doing Justice and Loving Mercy—Practical Suggestions*



Please contact Dr. Watkins with any questions about the course at ewatkins@midamerica.edu or visit www.midamerica.edu to sign up for the class.

Eric Watkins
Instructor of Ministerial Studies & Director of the Center for Missions & Evangelism

INTERIM COURSE

WORD AND SACRAMENT IN REFORMED THEOLOGY AND WORSHIP

At the heart of the Reformation was a recovery of the means of grace: Word and sacrament. The Reformers taught that it is by Spirit-produced faith alone that we share in Christ and all His benefits and that the Holy Spirit produces that faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel and confirms it by the sacraments (cf. Heidelberg Q&A 65). We are saved through union with Christ, and to produce and sustain that union, "the Holy Spirit uses a double instrument: the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments" (see John Calvin, *Theological Treatises*, ed. by J. K. S. Reid, p. 173).

From January 11th–14th, a group of Mid-America students took a class on "Word and Sacrament in Reformed Theology and Worship" taught by Rev. Glen J. Clary, pastor of Providence OPC in Pflugerville,

TX. This four-day class examined the contributions of Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, Bullinger, Calvin, and Knox to the ministry of Word and sacrament in the Reformation era.

Day one surveyed the liturgical life of the church on the eve of the Reformation, noting the development of the liturgical calendar, lectionary and penitential preaching, the rites of Christian initiation in the Middle Ages, and the theology and role of the sacramental system in the life of the church. Days two, three, and four focused on the reformation of preaching, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, respectively.

The topics of paedobaptism and paedocommunion made for lively classroom discussion. It became increasingly clear to the students



that our views on these issues are inseparable from our doctrine of the church and our views on covenant theology.

Glen Cary
Adjunct Professor and Pastor of Providence Presbyterian Church in Pflugerville, TX

THE OLD TESTAMENT: A TRAINING MANUAL FOR WORLD MISSIONS

Rev. Mark Vander Hart

When Christians think about any kind of mission mandate from Scripture, they turn to Matthew 28:18-20, among other passages. Rightfully so! In this passage the risen Jesus Christ makes two indicative statements that surround the command to go to all the nations. Jesus tells His disciples, and us, the readers, that He has universal authority in heaven and on earth. He also promises to be with His people until the end of the age. The risen Christ will be with His church until history ends. Between those two

statements is this commission: “Go to all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teach all these nations to observe everything that I have commanded you.” In this way the church is commissioned to be engaged in the mission of bringing the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ to all peoples so that they might receive His free gift of salvation and life in the light of His Word.

I would offer this thesis as we think about the commission that Jesus gives to His church: the Matthew 28:18-20

commissioning is the appropriate updating of the very first mandate that God gave to us in Genesis 1. At the creation of man, God commissioned man to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, subdue and rule the entirety of creation on behalf of God the great Creator and Ruler over all. If there had been no fall into sin and no rebellion against God, then the world would have been filled with people who were image-bearers of God, identified spiritually as God’s sons and daughters, human beings who were observing everything that

God had commanded them. But in fact, sinful rebellion on the part of Adam and Eve caused the entire human race to be plunged into guilt before God, as well as corruption in body and soul in full rebellion against the living God, a rebellion that can only end in God's just wrath, judgment, and eternal death.

But how do we get from the mandate of Genesis 1 to the commissioning of Matthew 28? Redemptive-history fleshes out the story, the great narrative of the covenant of grace. God inserts enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15). The seed of the woman are those people who are made spiritually alive by God's grace in order to combat the evil represented by the serpent's seed. The pre-eminent Seed of the woman is the Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16), who by His complete work, finished once and for all, has crushed the serpent's head, removed the guilt of God's elect by His atoning death on the cross, conquered the last enemy, death, and even now intercedes for us at God's right hand. Thus, spiritual enmity marks the attitudes and actions of God's people in history.

But Genesis 12:1-3 informs us of something else. This passage marks a major turning point in redemptive-history. Genesis 10-11 records the increase of many nations and people that descend from Noah and his three sons. But at Genesis 12 we hear a divine call to an aging man from the pagan city of Ur in Mesopotamia. We learn that he and his wife have no children because his wife, Sarai, is barren. Yet God calls Abram to leave the familiar culture and relationships that belonged to Abram and Sarai in order to set them on a journey to a land that they had not seen before. Redemptive-history is moving forward. God is not saying "goodbye forever" to the nations, but rather saying, "See you later!"

God is going to create a great number for this aging man, through whom the families (nations) of the earth will be blessed. The ultimate blessing will be mediated by the Lord Jesus Christ, but along the road of redemptive-history, God's people also have this calling (in addition to maintaining the spiritual antithesis, introduced at Genesis 3:15): we mediate God's blessings to others.

“But how do we get from the mandate of Genesis 1 to the commissioning of Matthew 28? Redemptive-history fleshes out the story, the great narrative of the covenant of grace.”

But what might that include?

It is often noted by missiologists that God placed His people in the land of Canaan since it was a very strategic location, a kind of crossroads in the ancient Near East. To the southwest was the ancient and powerful nation of Egypt, while to the northeast was Mesopotamia, home to a succession of different nations and empires (Babylonian, Assyrian, Chaldean, etc.). To be sure, armies would travel through Canaan (Palestine) on their way to invade other areas. But in times of peace, trading caravans would make their ways through, or very close to, the Promised Land. What did these people see and experience when they met God's covenant people? Were God's people a blessing to the outsiders or not?

When Israel was enslaved in Egypt, they were spiritually the equivalents of very young children. But Israel was also God's firstborn son, adopted by God's grace. When the LORD freed His people from slavery, He had to teach them His holy ways, instructing them in what it means to be a people liberated from slavery and called to live a holy life. What is very fascinating to notice in God's holy laws is what God says regarding the aliens, the sojourners, the strangers. In Leviticus 19:33-34 we read this: “When a stranger sojourns with you in your

land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” All the laws regarding the aliens reveal something about the heart of the covenant God: He loves the alien, and He wants His adopted children to love them as they

love themselves, to treat them as if they are natives along with the Israelites!

Without being sent explicitly to the ends of the earth during the period of the old covenant, Israelites could be missionaries in their own backyards, so to speak. How? By treating the foreigners who came to live in their midst with love, kindness, respect, and the justice that God's laws require of native Israelites. In this way, God's people could mediate goodness and blessing to the nations in their own villages and cities. Thus when the aliens needed to use Israel's courts, they were to be treated with impartial justice. They were permitted to glean in the fields and vineyards of the land. They could bring sacrifices to the holy shrine, and there the officiating priests would minister the sacrificial blood that brought forgiveness (Numbers 15:26,29). The aliens were also required to be present every seven years with all Israel for the reading of God's law (Deuteronomy 31:12). In this way the aliens were being instructed in the ways of God's covenantal Kingdom. In sum: the Old Testament already outlined the approach and the practice of reaching the outsiders with love, mercy, and truth.

Think, perhaps, of Old Testament Israel in this way: Israel was a child in Egypt, God's firstborn son. But if Israel is a firstborn son, then that

suggests that there are other sons who will appear in the household. Israel receives God's training in His covenant and its laws, so that Israel might learn His ways and grow to maturity. For example, if you desire one of your children to be a missionary to others, you would not send him out when he is five or ten years old. Your son is young, too young, but he is learning to love and to live obediently. At the right time, he is commissioned to go to bring the truth to others and to live the truth among others. In the old covenant era, Israel is learning, even while she could be the light among the nations and the peoples who traveled along the ancient Near Eastern roads, and who even came to live in the midst of Israel.

God's law is a critical part of that blessing. We are not saying that legal obedience would merit anything from God apart from His covenantal grace and blessing. Still, consider this: learning to live in covenant with God means turning away from all the false, non-existent gods of the nations. Israel and her neighbors would learn that God must be worshiped as He directed and not according to the imaginations of the worshiper. Israel and her neighbors should turn away from the foolishness of bowing to dumb images of gold and silver, images that have mouths but cannot speak. Israel and her neighbors would learn that God is a Spirit, that His Name is holy, and we all live in His unseen presence. Israel and her neighbors would learn that God has a pattern of time in which we are assigned to work and to worship, to be engaged in matters of culture as well as the cult (worship), and the Sabbath is a liberating thing, giving us all the opportunity to think of another reality, a new creation that will never pass away. All of these things would be a blessing to the nations!

By learning to love one's neighbor, God's people would also mediate blessings to others. Again consider

this: in God's laws we learn to respect our parents and all who are in authority over us. This leads to an orderly society. We practice love toward our neighbors, also in terms of their person. God's law of love forbids us to harbor grudges against others, forbids hating each other, but instead enjoins upon us the requirement of doing good even to our enemies. That actually sounds revolutionary today, even as such a command was unheard of in the ancient world.

We learn to treat marriage with the highest respect, being careful to keep marital intimacy in the bounds of one's own marriage. We work diligently, treating the resources of God's creation in a responsible way as good stewards, even sharing with the poor out of the abundance of God's goodness to us. God's people speak the truth, especially about each other, being careful to safeguard the good name

“When we see how the Genesis 1 mandate plays out in redemptive-history in the old covenant era, we see more clearly how Jesus Christ is pressing upon His church today the mandate to make disciples.”

and reputation of our neighbors. In short, we are a contented people who do not look with coveting eyes and hearts upon what others have. A people who practice these things with loving enthusiasm are a sight to behold, a people who receive God's blessing, but who also mediate that blessing to the world. God's laws “make good sense”

when compared to the arbitrary and vain imaginations of so many laws and edicts in the history of the world. We read in God's Torah: there is one law for both Israel and the alien. This was God's intention in the beginning, and it remained His truth throughout redemptive-history.

The old covenant failed in all of this. The Mosaic covenant did not secure the blessing of the Holy Spirit, who alone can write God's word upon our hearts. This is a marvelous blessing of the new covenant in Jesus Christ (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:7-12; 10:15-17). But I trust my point is clear: in the old covenant era, God's son Israel is learning how to be a blessing to the nations, something Israel could not be without the absolutely necessary grace of God. Can we now begin to sense the force of so many Old Testament passages that promote the worship of the true God? In the Psalms, again and again, the worshiper sings, says, and commands that all nations should join in worshiping the LORD. Psalm 117, for example, says: “Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol Him, all peoples! For great is His steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!” A steady diet of Psalm singing and Psalm study would press upon us all the fact that God calls upon all peoples to join in a holy worship of His great Name, as they submit to His Messiah (Psalm 2).

Therefore, when we see how the Genesis 1 mandate plays out in redemptive-history in the old covenant era, we see more clearly how Jesus Christ is pressing upon His church today the mandate to make disciples (i.e., loyal learners and followers) of all nations.

Rev. Mark Vander Hart
Associate Professor of Old Testament Studies & Ministerial Apprenticeship Program Director

ALUMNI PROFILE: CALEB SMITH CHURCH PLANTING IN THOUSAND OAKS

With over 200 alumni spanning nearly 40 years of graduating classes, one would think it could be easy to identify an alumnus or two to profile each edition of *The Messenger*. Since so many alumni stories are worth telling, the Editorial Committee needs to be selective. After all, we only print four issues a year.

This edition's alumni profile features a bit of a rarity – husband and wife, completing seminary and serving together – what a blessing! Rev. Caleb Smith and his wife Erika concluded their studies at Mid-America back in 2013, with Caleb enrolled in the Master of Divinity degree and Erika enrolled in the Master of Theological Studies degree.

They were drawn to Mid-America for a number of reasons. They were appreciative of the opportunity to spend time with professors and ask some in depth questions. If you have been around Mid-America for any length of time, you would know that the professors are accessible – both in the classroom, but also out of the classroom. The Smiths used these opportunities to get to know the professors – personally, but also capitalizing on the time available to engage in theological discussions and have their questions answered. Their pastor in San Antonio, TX, Rev. Nathan Hornfeld ('01), was influential in the Smiths' decision to study at Mid-America. Being edified by Rev. Hornfeld's preaching and encouraged by him to visit Mid-America, the Smiths decided it was time to try Midwest living. Few students cite a geographic draw to Northwest Indiana as being part of

the equation to attend seminary, but for the Smiths, it was all part of a new adventure.

Caleb remarks, "The emphasis on preaching and pastoral care, particularly through the Ministerial Apprenticeship Program, gave me invaluable opportunities for preaching and teaching. It was a way for me to learn the ropes of pastoral ministry. The Master of Divinity degree gave me a solid foundation that has equipped me for further research and study, as well as fruitful gospel ministry in the local church." The Smiths' advice for those considering attending seminary: "Pursue a theological education so that you can love the Lord with your mind, but also to use your heart and hands to be a useful servant in Christ's church."

Service in Christ's church began shortly after graduation with an internship at Bethel Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Wheaton, IL with Rev. Craig Troxel and Rev. John Fikkert overseeing Caleb's work. This led to a move to southern California to work on a Th.M. in Historical Theology at Fuller Seminary, joining fellow alumnus, Rev. Tim Scheuers. This stage in life was not without its challenges as Caleb lost his father to a long battle with Lewy Bodies Dementia. That, paired with a few other life changes, has left his work at Fuller unfinished, but work in the ministry continued. The Smiths (becoming quite familiar with moving) then followed the Lord's call to Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA, where Caleb served as an Associate Pastor with Rev. Mark Sallade. The Lord blessed the Smiths with two



children during this time, Joel and Oliver.

Currently, the Smiths are back in southern California in Erika's hometown of Thousand Oaks. There, they are planting a new OPC congregation – Thousand Oaks Presbyterian. Each Sunday, around 35 people gather to hear the Word preached and to promote the glory of God and the joy of humanity. Since moving, the Smiths have welcomed baby Ezra.

A growing family, a new church plant – there are challenges here, and the Smiths would be encouraged if they could be remembered in prayer. Caleb comments, "It has been a joy to teach people some of the basic building blocks of the Christian faith, and to be partnered with and serving families who are committed to seeing a new reformed church established. As a church plant, we need local leaders. As the planting pastor, it is also a constant challenge to keep a good balance between work and family life."

May God bless Caleb, Erika, and their growing family as they seek to bring God glory and encourage His people in Thousand Oaks, California.

Michael Deckinga
Vice-President of Advancement

ALUMNI UPDATES

Zachary Anderson remains ministering and living in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, with his wife Sandra. His focus is on church planting. They offer translations of their Bible studies and services for English speaking visitors. Those vacationing in Puerto Vallarta may feel free to contact them for information about visiting with them. URC, RPCNA, RCUS, OPC ministers: they would be happy to give you help in organizing your vacation and finding activities. They also have two small rooms that they rent out that they often lend out free to those who might need them!



David Dick (2021) accepted a call to Hancock CRC in Hancock, MN, and was or-

dated on November 7, 2021. Also, David and his wife Rachel, along with Hazel and Silas, welcomed Mabel Mae Dick on December 14, 2021.



Pablo Landázuri (2013) and his family moved to Pella, IA after graduation.

After a year-long internship at Covenant URC, Pablo was ordained and sent as a missionary minister to Quito, Ecuador, in April 2014. He has been serving a small congregation at Luz de Vida Reformed Church, which has been growing

steadily in the last years. In addition to the work in Luz de Vida, he has been working on opening a preaching point in a valley close by (that merged with the church in the city), and currently, on a church plant in the south side of Quito. Luz de Vida has 3 elders, 3 deacons, and 2 licensed men that are being trained for the ministry. In 2019, Luz de Vida started a Pastoral Training Program in Spanish, which recently became the Seminario de las Américas under the supervision of City Seminary in Sacramento, a work managed by a Board of RCUS brothers. He has the privilege to teach alongside other MARS graduates, such as Rev. Valentín Alpuche and Rev. Ruben Zartman. Pablo completed his ThM in Biblical Studies in 2020 at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. His wife, Verenisse, teaches at a nursery school. Martín, their oldest son, is attending college; Emilio is a high school senior; and Ben is in 8th grade.



Joel Irvin (2017): “Praise God for Heart City PCA Church’s 2 year anniversary! God has privileged us to plant a reformed inner city church in such a time as this. Jesus has been so good to us, and He continues to bless our labors. We added 9 families in 2021 and had multiple faith professions and baptisms. We are looking forward to a building dedication service this year after we finish renovations. We are thankful for God’s provision of funds and contractors.”

Please pray for additional leaders, musicians, and growth as we hope to particularize by the end of 2022.



Timothy Scheuers (2013) received his Ph.D. in Historical Theology from Fuller Theologi-

cal Seminary following the successful defense of his dissertation, entitled, “Charitable Bonds: Oaths, Confession of Faith, and the Binding of the Conscience in the Era of Calvin and His Contemporaries.” Dr. Scheuers continues to serve as the Associate Pastor of First United Reformed Church in Chino, CA, and occasionally teaches as an adjunct professor of history at Providence Christian College in Pasadena, CA.



Brian Zegers (2013) works with Word of Life Ministry as full-time home mis-

sionary to the Muslim community in Toronto, Canada. He proclaims the gospel and shows the love of Christ by facilitating Christian-Muslim discussion evenings, hosting one-on-one and small group Bible studies, providing counseling and prayer, building relationships through hosting and visiting, writing for Muslim newspapers and websites, and more recently, by starting up a YouTube channel called True Salaam (True Peace) where he seeks to explain the Christian faith to Muslim viewers.



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