

# the messenger

Mid-America Reformed Seminary

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## **BOLD AS A LION**

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# THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

## “THE CHURCH PROTECTED IN THE WILDERNESS BY HER TRIUMPHANT KING”



*“She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to His throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1260 days.”* Rev. 12:5-6 (ESV)

The vision recorded in Revelation 12:1-6 may seem like an unlikely choice for a Christmas meditation. When we contemplate the great mystery of the incarnation, the Word become flesh, our minds typically run to pictures of a little child in a manger, shepherds watching their sheep by night, and a heavenly host singing “glory to God in the highest.” Seldom do we see a “woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (verse 1). Nor does our mind conjure up visions of a “great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads, seven diadems,” standing in the presence of a woman to devour her male child upon His birth (verses 3-4). And who would describe this child as the One “who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron,” being “caught up to God and

His throne” (verse 5)? What are we to make of this strange picture drama that unfolds before us in the opening verses of Revelation 12?

However, if we remember that the book of Revelation is filled with word pictures that symbolize the great story of redemption recounted throughout the Scriptures, what John saw in this vision is not difficult to interpret. He sees that the birth of Christ, who was promised and nurtured in the womb of God’s chosen people Israel, marks a decisive moment in redemptive history. He was born to save His people, triumph over and crush the head of Satan and his counterfeit kingdom, and rule over all the nations, protecting and nourishing the church in the wilderness until He comes in ultimate triumph at the end of the present age.

To understand the vision of Revelation 12, we need to fix our attention on three figures who play a principal role in the history of redemption: the woman, the dragon, and the woman’s child.

The *woman* whom John sees is clearly a picture of the mother of Christ. When we are told that her child “will rule the nations with a rod of iron,” it is evident that John is echoing the language of Psalm 2:7-9: “You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will make the nations as Your inheritance. . . . You shall break them with a rod of iron.” But he also recalls the Old Testament teaching that God’s people, Mother Israel, will have her house filled with children whom her Husband-Redeemer will give to her (cf. Isa. 54:1-8). The description of the woman, who is “clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve diadems” (verse 1), is reminiscent of the description of Israel’s twelve sons in Joseph’s dream (Gen. 37:9). The woman symbolizes the people of Israel, from whose womb is born the promised seed who will crush the head of the serpent and redeem His people (Gen. 3:15).

The *dragon* John sees is the great enemy of God’s people and her child, the Messiah. Later in chapter 12, the dragon is identified as “the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (verse 9; cf. Rev. 20:2). Though the dragon is the arch-enemy of God’s people and kingdom throughout redemptive history, his wisdom (“seven heads”), power (“ten horns”), and authority (“seven diadems”) are a counterfeit or pretense, when compared to the wisdom, power, and authority of God and His Christ. Accordingly, when the dragon seeks to devour the woman’s *child* upon His birth, the child is caught up to God and given a share in His throne or authority over the nations.

After seeing a vision of the woman, the dragon, and the woman’s child, John concludes with a picture of the church in the wilderness, protected and nourished for 1260 days. Elsewhere in the book of Revelation, this period of time is also measured as “42 months” (11:2; 13:5) and “time, times, and half a time” (12:14). Just as Israel was protected and nourished in the wilderness before entering the promised land, so the church will be protected and nourished by God from the time of Christ’s ascension into heaven until His glorious coming for His blood-bought bride at the end of this present age.

The vision of Revelation 12:1-6 provides the church of Jesus Christ with a wonderful word of encouragement in the midst of its present struggles and afflictions. It reminds us that the child whose birth we celebrate was born to deliver His people, to be a child and yet a King, to establish a kingdom of everlasting righteousness and peace that shall have no end (cf. “Come, Thou Long-expected Jesus”).

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

We're amid a bustling academic year here on campus! While the summer months provide ample opportunities for time away from the office, and also time to work on some larger projects, there's nothing quite like when our academic year is in full swing. Students are our lifeblood! We're thankful more and more of them are studying here. This issue of *The Messenger* immerses you in our school year and brings you up to date on some exciting things happening on our campus. We hope you'll enjoy reading about our work, but we also hope you'll participate with us in our work through a thoughtful year-end contribution. From all of us at Mid-America, thank you for your support! Now, turn the page and enjoy.



**Michael B. Deckinga**  
Vice-President of Advancement

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### Editor

Michael Deckinga, Vice-President of Advancement

### Contributing Writers

Dr. Cornelis P. Venema, President

Michael B. Deckinga, Vice-President of Advancement

Dr. Marcus A. Mininger, Professor of New Testament Studies | Director of Institutional Assessment

Dr. Eric Watkins, Instructor of Ministerial Studies | Director of the Center for Missions & Evangelism

Dan Fletcher, Vice-President of Operations

### Layout and Design

Rachel Luttjeboer, Secretary of Media & Publications

### 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

[www.midamerica.edu](http://www.midamerica.edu)

### Address

Mid-America Reformed Seminary  
229 Seminary Dr.  
Dyer, IN 46311

### Phone:

219-864-2400

# DEVELOPMENT REPORT:

## “WHAT DO YOU WANT TO GIVE FOR CHRISTMAS?”

A Christmas article is challenging to write in late October, but I'll give it a whirl. I'm trying to remember that you'll be reading this article in December, so Christmas might be on your mind. There is one aspect of this season I really do enjoy – giving gifts.

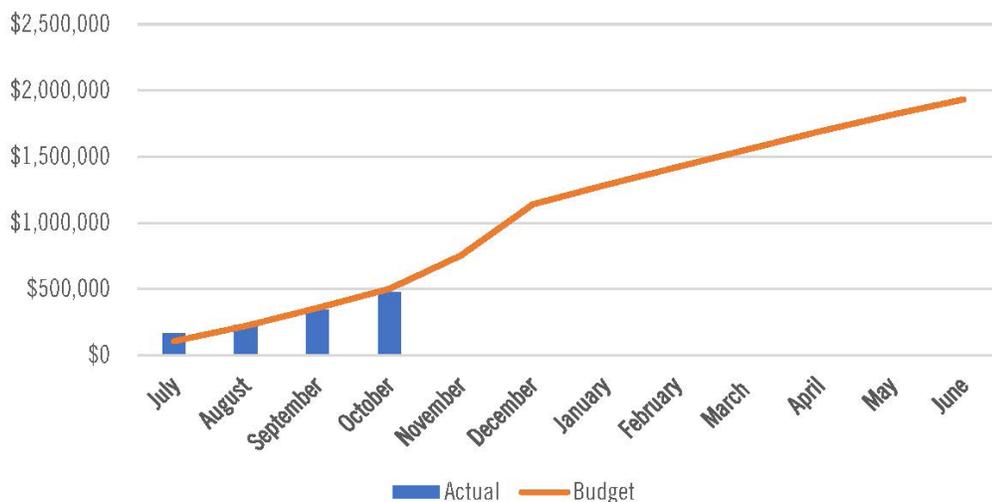
Yes, you read right. *Giving gifts*. Not “all I want for Christmas.” Rather, “what can I give for Christmas?” Soon, millions of children around the world will be asked, “What do you want for Christmas?” When I was a kid, we circled things in the J.C. Penny catalog. I suppose now, that's a little like sharing Amazon links. I think a better question to ask is, what do you want to give, and to whom do you want to give it? Long ago, the angels triumphantly proclaimed the ultimate gift – God's Son, the Christ, to His people to be their savior. This should work a spirit of gratitude in us and promote a desire to give good gifts to others.

I think I'm preaching to the choir here. I know I'm writing to a vast number of supporters of our work who have proven time and again their ability to give of their time and talents for the advancement of Mid-America Reformed Seminary. But now is as good of a time as any to remind you what a gift to Mid-America accomplishes.

You provide us with the funds necessary to sustain this institution – one that is principally concerned with the academic, practical, and spiritual formation of a future leader in Christ's church. Your gift keeps tuition affordable, so our students can serve Christ after graduation, not their debt load. Your support compensates gifted pastor-professors and skilled administrators who work to advance the Lord's kingdom every day.

December giving represents nearly 22% of our annual budget. That is

2022-23 General Fund Contributions, Budget vs. Actual



a significant number – nearly \$417,000! If you haven't yet participated in our work, now is a great time to start. As shown in the graph above, budgeted revenue has already begun to pull away from our actual contribution numbers. Given this newsletter's printing and distribution delays, the gap may be even more significant by the time you read this. Please prayerfully consider how you could help us – a one-time contribution or a recurring monthly gift.

Your giving to Mid-America can also be directed towards our capital campaign, *Foundation for the Future*. The Seminary plans to build a new chapel/ auditorium, additional staff offices, an enlarged cafeteria, and a board/conference room. Student housing is to be developed in a subsequent phase of this project. The costs identified suggest a budget of \$4.5 million. To date, we have received \$1.5 million in contributions, and we're grateful for that great starting point. Please prayerfully consider how you might be able to share with us for the benefit of our campus expansion project.

It's interesting to see the relationship between raising money for future building projects and our daily work – “which do you need more?” you might think. Well, it's a “both-and” situation, not “either-or.” We need your continued support for our general

fund now, but we also need an extra, special gift or pledge towards our building campaign.

Undoubtedly, you've received many requests from organizations trying to remind you to support them as the calendar year ends. The Lord has entrusted you to care for His resources, so deciding where to give them is not easy. We humbly ask you to consider stewarding those entrusted resources back into the Lord's kingdom by blessing Mid-America Reformed Seminary, and thus playing an essential role in safeguarding the biblical truths that summon God's people unto repentance and reliance on Him. These truths come daily under attack in an increasingly post-Christian world – truths that, when rightly handled here at Mid-America, passed on to our students, go forward as a bright light in the darkness. We are thankful for all you do to partner with us in this important work.

**Michael B. Deckinga**  
Vice-President of Advancement

*To make or plan for a gift today, contact Michael Deckinga, VP of Advancement, at [mdeckinga@midamerica.edu](mailto:mdeckinga@midamerica.edu)*

# DR. BEACH'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY

On Thursday, October 13, 2022, friends, family, and members of the faculty, staff, and Board of Trustees gathered at Briar Ridge Country Club in Schererville, IN, for a night of food, fellowship, and festive celebration. Dr. J. Mark Beach was honored for his 25 years of dedicated service to Mid-America Reformed Seminary. Special guests included Dr. Beach's wife, Sheryl, Rev. Justin and Bonnie Beach, Brandon and Joyce Beach, Dr. Beach's nephew and current Mid-America student Daniel and Leah Hofland, and friends Dr. Eric and Barbara Leestma, and Marvin and Evelyn Van Drunen.

Following dinner, a formal program commenced, including a slide show, taking guests for a trip down memory lane, and Rev. Jim Sawtelle, President of the Board of Trustees, and Dr. Cornelis Venema, President of Mid-America,

delivered remarks and presented Dr. Beach with a commemorative gift – a handsome leather chair and matching ottoman for his study.

President of the Board, Rev. Jim Sawtelle, remarks, "The anniversary dinner and celebration of Mark's 25 years of service was a wonderful evening. We really love and appreciate the sacrificial work of all of our faculty and staff at MARS. I'm certain I speak for all the Board members when I say it was a real joy and honor to be able to publicly acknowledge our appreciation for Mark and his 25 years of loyal, faithful service."

Dr. Beach thoughtfully acknowledged every faculty and staff member for their work at the Seminary, thanking them for performing their respective duties well. Before closing the evening in prayer, guests sang the beautiful words of "Great is Thy Faithfulness."



NEWS

Congratulations, Dr. Beach, on this milestone. May you be blessed with many more years of service to Mid-America in the Lord's providence.

**Michael B. Deckinga**  
Vice-President of Advancement

## FALL BOARD REPORT

The Board of Trustees met on October 13 & 14 for their twice-yearly meeting. With easing COVID restrictions, all Trustees were on-site but one, yielding excellent esprit de corps among the men. After Rev. Sawtelle opened the meeting with a devotion and prayer, the Board welcomed Mr. Paul Huizenga of Ontario, California, who was elected to fill the seat of long-time Trustee Mr. Ben Sybesma.

Undertaking the election of officers, the Board returned all incumbents to their offices by acclamation – President: Rev. Jim Sawtelle; Vice-President: Rev. Paul Murphy; Secretary: Dr. Edwin Kreykes; Treasurer: Mr. Bryan Holstrom; and Vice-All: Rev. Harry Zekveld.

In customary order, the Board addressed correspondence, with letters from Professors Beach and Strange, approving the Spring 2023 sabbatical request from Dr. Beach and reviewing the outstanding accomplishments from Dr. Strange's

recent sabbatical.

From there, the Board took up the traditional collection of reports from standing committees, Faculty, and Staff. As President of the Seminary, Dr. Venema's report led the pack, giving a broad summary of many happenings at Mid-America, with subsequent reports delving more deeply into events, initiatives, and accomplishments. Of note:

**Enrollment** – Another year of solid enrollment with good representation across denominational boundaries.

**Center for Missions & Evangelism** – Dr. Watkins' Spring/Summer speaking slate was active, and he's engaged with Fall commitments from California to Georgia. Both he and the oversight committee look to schedule another national conference in Fall 2023.

**Facilities Expansion** – Engineering and design work progresses, with ground-breaking expectantly set for Summer 2023.



*New Board member Paul Huizenga signs the form of subscriptions.*

**Project fundraising** is accelerating, building upon \$1.5 million already donated for the expansion.

**Financial Position** – The Seminary continues to be blessed with strong financial support, especially from Canada. The independent auditor, Mr. Dave Rambo from Desmond & Ahern, met with the Board, issuing the highest attestation to the integrity of our financial statements and practices.

The Board will reconvene May 11 & 12, 2023, Lord willing.

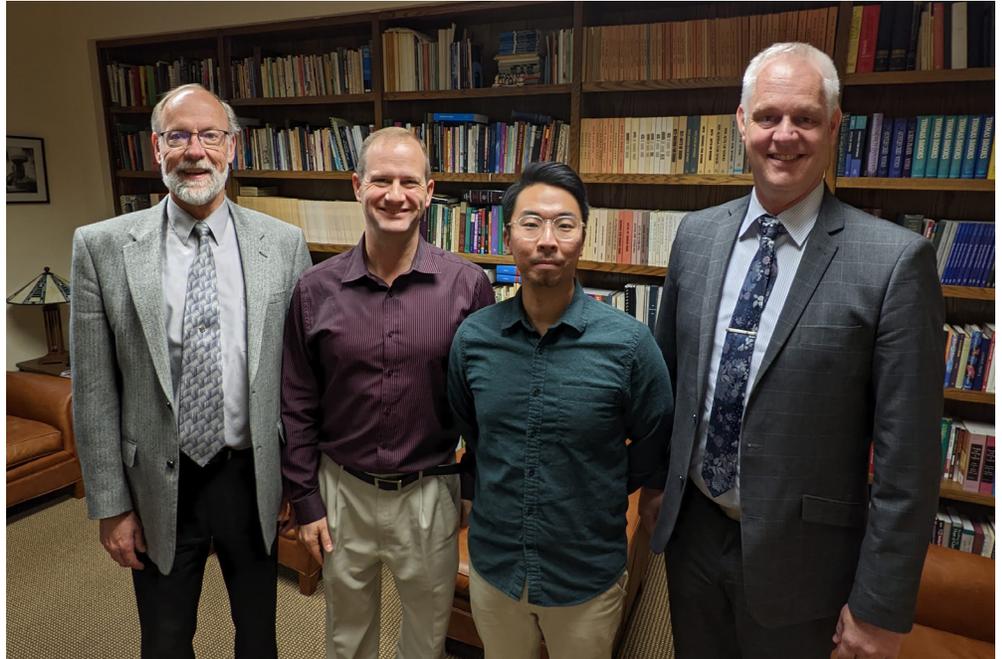
**Dan Fletcher**  
Vice-President of Operations

## MID-AMERICA AND THE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NEW ZEALAND

“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” says the apostle in Romans 10:15, quoting the prophet Isaiah. Over the past 40 years, Mid-America Reformed Seminary has been in the business of making beautiful, so to speak, the feet of those who desire to labor in and for the church of Jesus Christ, found in all corners of the world, by training them to preach the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. A good number of the feet that have entered and walked about the grounds of this institution have come all the way from “Down Under” where they have walked the beaches, hiked the hills, and strolled the streets of one of the most beautiful countries in the world—New Zealand.

Mid-America has enjoyed a steady stream of “Kiwi” students over the years. Some graduates have also moved to New Zealand for the first time, seeking to serve in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ). Eight alumni are currently serving as ministers in the RCNZ—Revs. Leo de Vos, Peter Kloosterman, Andre Holtslag, Erik Stolte, Albert Couperus, Aaron Warner, Joshua Flinn, and Nathaniel Rademaker—making up over a third of the ministers there. Mid-America’s student body comes predominantly from the United States and Canada, but it may surprise some that New Zealand students rank third among the countries from which Mid-America’s students have come.

Mid-America’s longstanding ties to the RCNZ go back to Dr. Venema’s childhood when his father served the RCNZ in the pioneer days of the federation. When the newly-formed RCNZ contacted the Christian Reformed Church and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, requesting that these denominations send English-speaking ministers to help them in the 1950s, Dr. Venema’s father answered the call. He served churches of the RCNZ in Dunedin on the South Island, and Bucklands Beach on the North Island. Due to the influence of ministers



*Left to right: Dr. Cornelis Venema, Rev. Daniel Wilson, Student Jae Kim, Alumnus Rev. Andre Holtslag*

from both the CRC and the OPC, the RCNZ is a unique Reformed federation representing an amalgam of Reformed and Presbyterian influences. For example, the RCNZ holds to four confessional standards (the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession of Faith), and uses the nomenclature of “session,” “presbytery” and “synod” for its narrower and broader assemblies. When Dr. Venema attended the Synod of the RCNZ in 2017, he noted that the presence of RCNZ students at Mid-America was one of the unexpected joys of God’s providence during his time at the seminary.

This past October, we had the pleasure of welcoming back on campus Rev. Andre Holtslag (’07) and his wife Anita, joining Rev. Daniel Wilson of the RCNZ and his wife, Raewyn. The purpose of their visit was to meet with RCNZ student Jae Kim as “deputies for students to the ministry” to discuss his spiritual life and well-being, his academic progress, his relationship with his fellow students, faculty, and local congregation, and to address any needs or concerns. Such on-campus visits typically take place once during each RCNZ student’s time at Mid-America. They are part of assessing students’ suitability for ministry

and making preliminary arrangements for a vicariate, a year-long internship in one of the NZ congregations after graduation. Jae is in his senior year of the Master of Divinity program. He plans to return to NZ with his wife Jinny and their son Judah upon graduation in 2023 to begin a vicariate. This visit proved to be an encouraging and refreshing time for the Kims, as they have been away from home for the last two years.

In addition to spending time with the Kims, Revs. Wilson and Holtslag sat in on classes, each brought a chapel message to the seminary community, and met with the faculty to discuss Jae’s progress and matters relating to the RCNZ and its ongoing relationship with Mid-America. Through their visit and interest in the work of Mid-America, we were reminded tangibly of our partnership with churches throughout the world, including those in New Zealand, in preparing our students to make disciples from among all the nations.

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

**Jae Kim**  
Current Student



BY DR. ERIC WATKINS

FEATURE

# BOLD AS A LION

**MARK 14:43-52**

**H**ow do scared little lambs become as bold as lions? Mark 14:43-52 gives us a beautiful insight into not only what it is that makes us sometimes fearful before the world but what it is that makes the church bold for Christ instead. For us to most fully comprehend this passage, we will begin with the rather cryptic ending—Mark's description of a young man standing

alone in the Garden of Gethsemane. Not much is said about him besides that he appears to be alone and fleeing. What we are told about him is odd—he is naked and ashamed. He is likely one of the disciples of Jesus, but he is un-named. As the betrayers enter the garden to arrest Jesus, fear seems to have overtaken him, and now he finds himself fleeing frantically, alone, in

the cold dark of night. What can save this fearful young man? Only love—the love of God. And as with him, so also with us. We will return to this fleeing young man shortly.

Sin is not only powerful, it is deceptive; and its power to deceive is perhaps nowhere more painfully felt than in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night that Jesus is betrayed. This passage takes us to what has been going on ‘behind the scenes.’ Jesus has been praying in the Garden while his disciples struggle to stay awake. Eventually, they cease their struggle in the deep of night, and they are fast asleep. But while they are sleeping, servants of the Serpent slither in. “Immediately,” as Mark describes, as though right on the heels of Jesus’ time in prayer, an armed mob appears to arrest him. They are donned with swords and clubs. Like a small militia ready for war, they are “armed to the teeth,” as the cliché goes. This is no flash mob like we have so often seen on T.V., rioting and looting on impulse without a moment’s notice.

Rather, this mob has come on a singular mission—they have come for Jesus.

Satan has been working through Judas. The power of darkness has come in like a flood of malice and deception. Judas has been hard at work behind the scenes. With craft and cunning, he conspired with the chief priests of Israel to take Jesus by force. John 13:30 tells us that Judas had gone to them to make final preparations for His betrayal. Mark 14:10 shows us this plan had been slow-cooking in the darkness for a while. What had happened

to chief priests to bring them to this point? Throughout the gospels, we learn two things about the chief priests: they misunderstood the kingdom of God, and they misunderstood Jesus. Their understanding of the kingdom was very earthly and political. Their hope was that they would retain their earthly power. Thus, it is no surprise that they came against Jesus with earthly weapons, almost as though they were expecting Jesus to fight back with similar earthly weapons. But they were wrong; Jesus was not of this world, and neither was His kingdom. He would not fight against them on their terms. His army is a host of angels, but even they have been restrained from engaging in this conflict. His Father in heaven was the greatest power behind Jesus, yet even the Father would not protect Him from what must be. The chief priests, Judas, Satan—all the dark forces of this world would have their moment of apparent victory. Darkness would appear to win—but only for the moment—only while it is the dark “hour” for which Jesus has come.

Perhaps we should also wonder, what

**“Sin is not only powerful, it is deceptive; and its power to deceive is perhaps nowhere more painfully felt than in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night that Jesus is betrayed.”**

happened to Judas? His role in this is even more puzzling than that of the chief priests. Judas was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. How does a disciple of Jesus turn into one of his betrayers? How could His friend become His enemy? Judas walked with Jesus, talked with Jesus, ate with Jesus, and reclined with Jesus. Judas was even warned by Jesus during the Passover that Judas was about to do the unthinkable—he would betray Jesus unto death. And Judas still follows through despite being warned. How could it be so? Sin has a masterful way of deceiving us. Judas had been the

money handler for the twelve. Love of money is a “root of all kinds of evil,” and such evil had taken deep root in Judas’ heart. Elsewhere we learned that Judas had been stealing from Jesus and the twelve. In a certain sense, Judas was already betraying Jesus well before this fateful night. But sin has a way of forcing our hand. Either we will repent of our sins and forsake them, or we will surrender to our sins and forsake Jesus. Judas took the latter road, the broad road that leads to destruction. Many are on it, and none of them are safe. It looks soft and easy, but it is riddled with thorns and thistles. It makes many promises but always takes more than it gives. Judas takes the money. He buys the lies that money and power so often make. But in the end, he dies powerless and penniless, deceived by the wages of sin.

Another notable powerful force in the Garden is the power of fear. The chief priests come to arrest Jesus with swords and clubs. Why? Because they are afraid—afraid of Jesus. The word “robber” in verse 48 is sometimes used for an insurrectionist, a person who leads a revolt by force. The irony they cannot see, Jesus does. He has not come to overturn the world by force or by stealth—they have. He has not come with a band of

rebels carrying swords and clubs—they have. They have come against Jesus looking tough, but they are actually rather afraid. The world hates the name of Jesus, but also fears it. His name implies power and presence, surrender, and lordship. This is why the world always seems agitated when the name of Jesus is mentioned. But it is not just the chief priests who are afraid. Jesus’ own disciples are also cowering in fear. Verse five is a very sad commentary on the disciples: “they all left him and fled.” Sin may deceive, but fear inspires, and it inspires us to

self-preservation. Most of us can run our fastest when we are being chased by something we fear. One of the disciples draws his sword in a pitiful moment of fleeting bravery, but this is not the way of the kingdom. Jesus will not fight back with earthly weapons, and when the disciples realize that Jesus will indeed be carried off, they flee into the dark, cold night. Each and every one of them flees.

Where did the lions go? What happened to all their bold promises? Where is Peter, who said, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you”? Where are the rest of the twelve, who each affirmed the very same statement—to a man? They were ready to die with Jesus a moment ago, and now, in His hour of need, they all abandon Him and literally run for their lives. Jesus is left alone in the Garden of Gethsemane, all alone in the darkness of night. Only His betrayers and an angry mob are there. This is sin’s dark night, not just the dark night of the soul, but the dark night of human depravity. Yet off in the distance, a young man follows them into the night.

It would be easy to skip over the reference in verses 51-52 to this young man as being too brief or cryptic to be of any value. Very little is said, so little that it almost seems out of place. But it may be very important for us to consider. The young man is wearing a linen garment, a likely sign of wealth. We know from Acts 12:12 that Mark, the author of this gospel was from a wealthy family. The inclusion here of verses 51-52 is so brief and cryptic that many commentators suggest that this is Mark’s way of referring to himself. If it is Mark, it tells us a lot about him and the purpose of his gospel. The gospel of Mark was written to a young church in Rome that was just beginning to experience the outer bands of persecution. They were being tested and tried and were tempted to fall

back—to flee. The gospel of Mark ends on the note that the disciples, not yet comprehending the power of the Spirit and the resurrection of Jesus, were still afraid and were seized with fear. Mark was one of those disciples. He, too,

**“The love of the Father that compelled Him to send Jesus into the world cannot fail, and the love of Jesus that carries Him to the end of the Father’s mission will not fail.”**

had been gripped by fear. He, too, had broken his promises to Jesus to remain faithful unto death. He had learned firsthand how powerful and deceptive sin can be. And where did it leave him? Standing alone in the garden, naked and ashamed.

If this is Mark, it all makes sense. Mark is showing us a portrait of himself, overcome by fear and faithlessness, overcome by sin and weakness. So how does this scared little lamb later become bold as a lion? What power is there in this world so strong that it turns darkness to light and casts out fear? It is the power of love, particularly the love of Jesus.

Love is a powerful thing. They say it can move mountains and weather storms. It makes people do crazy things. And it can be used for betrayal. It is a tragic irony that Judas should betray Jesus with a kiss. A kiss is a sign of devotion and love. In many countries, it is still a common sign of friendship. In the Bible, it was not only a sign of love but friendship and loyalty. It is as though Judas were falsely saying, “I love you” to Jesus at the very moment he sealed his fate with a kiss. Jesus responds, not with swords and clubs but with the sword of the Spirit—the word of God. The scriptures must be fulfilled. The plan of God must be fulfilled. The love of the Father that

compelled Him to send Jesus into the world cannot fail, and the love of Jesus that carries Him to the end of the Father’s mission will not fail. Jesus loves the Father and those for whom He came to give His life. He loves His frail, frightened disciples, now cowering in the dark of night. He loves Peter, whose blustery promises have fallen flat time and time again, and He loves Mark, who, like a scared little boy, is trying to run home naked. Jesus loves His church, not because we are strong in ourselves but because we are strong in Him and in the power of His love. What overcomes the power of fear and deception? It is the love of God. The love of God is stronger than the sin of man and even the powers of hell.

Many large cathedrals depict the disciples up high in the ceiling or on stained glass. It is interesting that some of them are pictured as animals—and that Mark, of all the disciples—should be the one depicted as a lion. Mark, the likely scared little boy standing alone in the dark, naked and ashamed. Yet, in many ways, it is rather fitting. Mark writes to a church with whom he can relate. He too knew the powers of fear and deception. But he had also come to know the love of God that drives out fear and inspires gospel confidence. Not man-made confidence, but confidence in the love of God and the power of the gospel. It is the love of God that inspires the church...and makes us as bold as a lion.



**Dr. Eric Watkins**  
Instructor of  
Ministerial Studies &  
Director of the Center  
for Missions and  
Evangelism

# FACULTY UPDATES

## DR. MININGER'S RESEARCH AND WRITING UPDATE: A FORTHCOMING BOOK ON HEBREWS

When we study Scripture, we find very clear topics, that have been well understood by the church for some time, and also more difficult topics, that continue to puzzle us all. Both topics need continued attention, the former to preserve proper understanding against subsequent challenges, and the latter to shed new light for the first time. In recent years, I have been working on a book, now nearing completion, that addresses topics of both sorts in Hebrews.

On the one hand, most people have long believed that Hebrews was written to Christians tempted to return to the old covenant. But this belief has been vigorously challenged in recent years by those who do not want to see Christianity in opposition to Judaism. In response, my book seeks to provide new evidence for the traditional view, underscoring that, though the old

covenant was a gracious provision of God, its sacrifices could never cleanse the conscience; they only functioned to point forward to the greater ministry of Christ. As a result, going back to the old covenant as an alternative to Christ brings certain destruction.

On the other hand, most people have long been puzzled by Hebrews' strong warnings against apostasy and its insistence that those who have "once been enlightened" and have "tasted the heavenly gift" but have fallen away cannot be "restored again to repentance" (6:4-6). In response, my book sets forth a new interpretation, showing that, in this particular context, being "restored to repentance" means being restored to right-standing under the old covenant. As a result, Hebrews 6 is not saying that those who fall away from Christ cannot return to him to be forgiven. It is saying that those who fall away from Christ



cannot, instead, return in repentance to the old covenant, since that would be rejecting the ministry of the one whom the old covenant was always preparing for all along.

Whether defending what is already clear or shedding new light on what is not, the work of biblical studies is never done. Please pray that the Lord would preserve and enhance right understanding of His Word in His church and that He might even use this forthcoming book as a small contribution toward that end.

**Dr. Marcus A. Mininger**  
Professor of New Testament Studies &  
Director of Institutional Assessment

## DR. CORNELIS P. VENEMA: ANOTHER VISIT TO RIGA

During the second week of September this year, I had the privilege of teaching for the eighth time at the Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary (BRTS). The BRTS was formed in the Fall of 1998, when Dr. George Van Groningen taught the first class in Reformed theology on behalf of what was known at the time as "Christ For Russia" (today it is known as ITEM, "International Theological Education Ministries"). Through Dr. Van Groningen's encouragement (perhaps better described as "strong-arming"), I first visited the beautiful, ancient city of Riga in January 1999 to teach a class on "Theological Foundations." On that occasion, I first met Artis Celmins, Principal of BRTS, and Alvis Saukis, a pastor of one of two Reformed churches that had been established in

the period after Latvia's liberation from the former Soviet Union.

Though the ministry of the BRTS and the Evangelical Reformed Church in Latvia may be small by worldly standards, I am always reminded in my visits to Riga that God's people should never "despise the day of small things" (Zech. 4:10). In the long history of the Latvian people, the only Reformed church in Latvia was a German Reformed expatriate congregation. Since the day of the early beginnings of the BRTS, several new congregations have been planted in Latvia and neighboring countries; a small Reformed denomination was established, and the reach of the seminary now includes many of the former countries and republics that were part of the Soviet Union.



The class I taught in September included six Latvian students in person, with another 13 students joining the class online: 6 Russian, 2 Ukrainian, 2 Belarussian, 1 Lithuanian, 1 Kazakh, and 1 Uzbek. The course was taught in English and simultaneously translated into Russian, a language known by many of the peoples living in eastern Europe.

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

# ALUMNI UPDATES



**Phill Grotenhuis** (1993) served the United Reformed Churches since their inception in the mid-1990s. He and his wife Joy have served in four pastorates

(Toronto, ON; Lynden, WA; Springfield, MO; and Phoenix, AZ) before taking on a new venture in Abbotsford, BC, at Pathway Christian Church in the Canadian Reformed federation. “Not many pastors at 60 years old shift from one federation and one country to another, but we strongly felt the call to Pathway given its articulated vision, intended trajectory, and youthful passion.” Pathway consists of several younger families (about 225 members) desirous of presenting a gospel-centered and outward-faced ministry to Abbotsford, a multicultural city of around 175,000 people just east of Vancouver. Pathway’s ministry centers on worship that is intentionally accessible to both Christian and non-Christian, small groups, a budding mercy ministry, Sunday pm worship catechetical instruction, post-worship discussion time, and hospitality. Phil and Joy are extremely appreciative of Phil’s training at Mid-America and are especially thankful for the Seminary’s commitment not only to confessional integrity but a new-found sense of missional urgency. Phil currently serves on the Mid-America Board.



**Andre Holtslag** (2007) was recently back at MARS. While visiting the USA for a vacation, including attend-

ing the Puritan Conference in Los Angeles, he presented a chapel service. He was also part of a delegation from the Reformed Churches of New Zealand that sat in on classes, met with the

faculty to discuss the sending of RCNZ students to MARS, and conducted a pastoral care visit with student Jae Kim and his wife, Jinny, and son, Judah, who are from New Zealand.



**Joel Irvin** (2017) is at Heart City Church PCA in Elkhart, IN.

He and his wife opened their home back up to fostering, and Joel took a part-time chaplain position at the local hospital. The hospital has turned out to be an excellent opportunity to be on mission while being a part-time tentmaker.

“I am reading scripture and praying for more people outside the church than ever. Please pray for wisdom, endurance, and souls won for Christ! Heart City Church PCA is nearly 3 years old, and we continue our labors to bring the true gospel to the downtown.”



**Arnold Lavaire** (2020) passed his ordination exam on October 8,

2022, at the PCA James River Presbytery in Richmond, Virginia. He will serve as an assistant pastor at Iglesia Hispana Presbiteriana in Midlothian, Virginia. He is working with the Hispanic community in the Richmond, Virginia area. He and his family moved in July 2021 from Illinois to the state of Virginia for a year-long internship to later become licensed and ordained in the PCA. “I want to thank Mid-America Reformed Seminary for its commitment to preparing ministers of the gospel.”



After graduation, **Jeff Scott** (2013), his wife, Dawn, and

five children moved to Roseburg, OR, where Jeff has been serving Covenant Grace OPC, first as a year-long intern and, now, as pastor for the past 8+ years. Jeff also has the pleasure of serving as the stated clerk of the Presbytery of the Northwest and as a member of the OPC’s Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension. Jeff and Dawn hope to see their oldest son, Silas, eventually study at Mid-America in preparation for the ministry to which he believes the Lord is calling him.



**Peter Yoo** (2022) moved to New Zealand (NZ) a few months ago to pursue ministry in the Reformed Churches of New

Zealand (RCNZ). Since he came to NZ, he’s been worshipping the Lord at the Reformed Church of the North Shore (RCNS). The plan for him was first to acclimate to life in NZ and the RCNS; second, to enter into an internship stage for a few months; and third, to enter into a year-long vicariate. He is currently in the internship phase, and he has led a few worship services with more services scheduled. He’s also been learning under Pastor Daniel Wilson (the pastor of the RCNS), who has been a wonderful and helpful mentor. At the time of writing, Peter recently proposed to his now-fiancé, and she said yes! They are planning for a wedding ceremony and reception on April 8, 2023, in NZ (April 7, 2023, in the States), and a wedding reception in the States sometime after. At the time of writing, he’s currently still waiting for the necessary paperwork to come from the States so that he can complete his work visa application. He asks that you pray for him, his fiancé, and his current visa situation. May our Lord Jesus Christ continue to be glorified around the world.



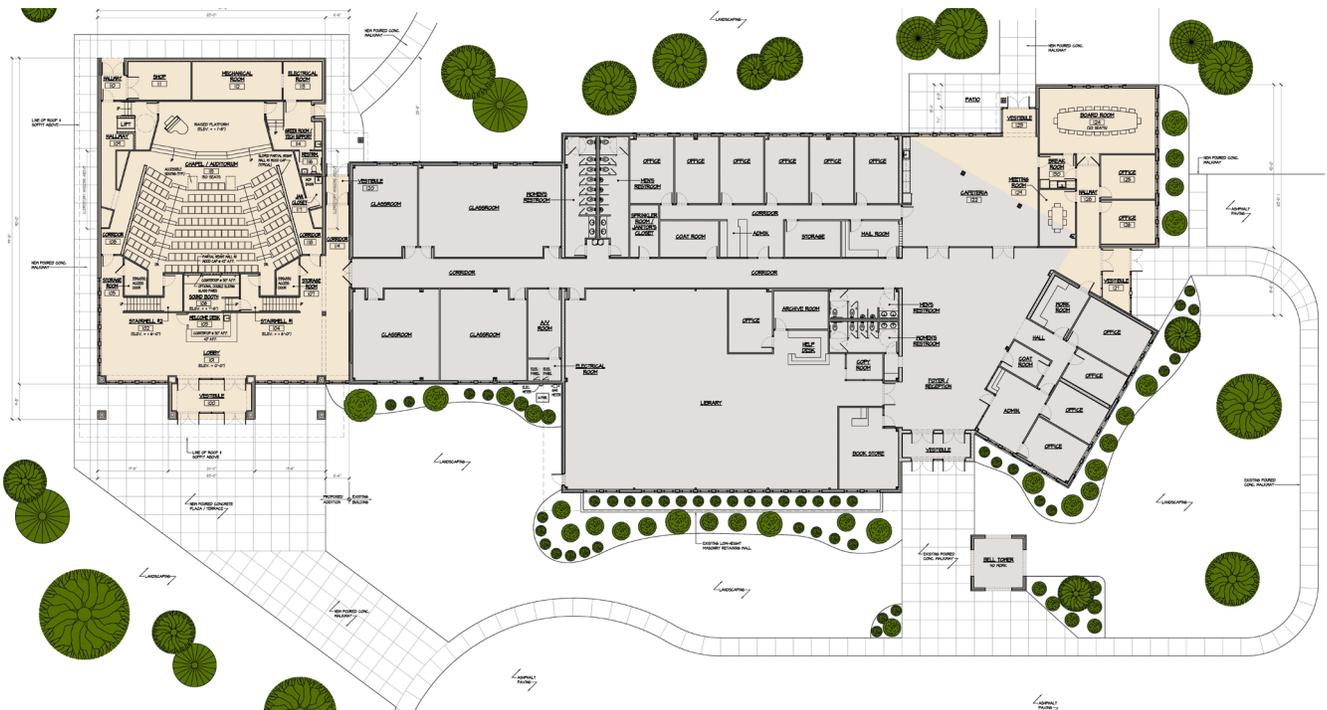
Tel: 219-864-2400

Fax: 219-864-2410

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