

# THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

## New Vice-President of Advancement

by Glenda Mathes



Dr. Venema says, “He impressed us with his enthusiasm for the task, energetic manner, and openness to developing in the position.”

As Vice-President of Advancement, Mr. Deckinga promotes the Seminary and nurtures its external relationships. He plans fundraising initiatives, manages donor-related matters, and advances Mid-America’s mission through integrated marketing, communications, and development. He serves ex officio on the Finance, Long-Range Planning, and Promotion committees.

“I’m excited to join the Seminary in their work of preparing men to become ordained ministers of the gospel,” Mr. Deckinga says. “Working alongside and for like-minded Reformed brothers and sisters, and getting to meet and develop relationships with similar friends of the school is invigorating. I thank God every day for His providence in my life and for calling me to this work.”

Mike and his wife, Kim, have four children: Natalie (5), Taylor (3), Hailey (2), and Ethan (9 months). They live in Beecher, IL, and are members of Lynwood United Reformed Church, where Mike serves as Chairman of the Deacons.

Mike grew up in the southwest Chicago area and received his education in Christian schools, graduating from Trinity Christian College in 2006 with a B.A. in History and minors in Theology and Business. His subsequent career with the Sherwin-Williams Company spanned ten years and three positions. He began as Assistant Market Manager, earned a promotion to Market Manager, and then achieved a promotion to Professional Coatings Sales Representative.

“Often confused for a consumer commodity business, the paint supply business is more of a service industry,” he relates. “My professional experience has prepared me well for my new position. Anyone who has worked in customer service knows the best customers are friends first. Everything comes down to the quality of the relationships built. This focus on relationships will continue for me in my duties on behalf of the Seminary.”

Dr. Venema explains that the Vice-President of Advancement is not a new position. Keith LeMahieu, who most recently served as Vice-President of Advancement, was originally hired as Director of Financial and Promotional Development. The pending retirement of Florence Kooiman led the Board to appoint Keith as Vice-President of Administration.

Mr. Deckinga says, “Training men to go out to the nations to preach the good news of salvation in Christ is good work, and I am humbled and delighted to be a part of it.”

Mid-America Reformed Seminary is pleased to announce the appointment of Mike Deckinga as the Vice-President of Advancement, beginning May 4, 2016.

“Mike’s strengths are his familiarity with and enthusiastic commitment to Mid-America’s statement of its purpose as well as his understanding of how students who aspire to the gospel ministry need to be prepared academically and vocationally for this calling,”

## Au Revoir and Adieu

by Keith LeMahieu

For fifteen years it has been my great privilege to serve Mid-America Reformed Seminary in the role of financial advancement. Effective July 1, I begin the work of overseeing the operations side of the Seminary. Florence Kooiman, who has served Mid-America so effectively for thirty-five years, is retiring and I am assuming her responsibilities. You will notice I did not say I am “replacing” Florence, for I doubt that is possible. We all wish Florence God’s richest blessings in her retirement.

In my advancement role I often had the opportunity to meet colleagues from other institutions. One of the first questions usually asked is, “How did you end up involved in advancement work at your school?” I don’t believe I ever met a colleague who indicated fundraising was a career goal. Like me, the work of advancement was a second career. Sometimes they were alumni, but more often than not they came to their seminary from the business world. In my case, I came from the computer software industry, so I learned advancement work by doing it. Here are a few of the many things I learned.

First, I discovered that advancement work for Mid-America was not about me or my technique. I read books and attended conferences about fundraising and I learned techniques from the “experts.” But the longer I did this work the more I came to realize fundraising is not about technique. In fact, it isn’t really about fundraising as much as it is about “friend raising.” Mid-America prepares pastor/shepherds for the church – the bride of Christ. I saw time and again how God raises up stewards who are fiercely committed to this preparation and God causes them to give sacrificially to it. His people give not because they have been “manipulated” but because God lays it on their hearts to give. I was privileged to make friends whom God used to partner in this important work of preparing men for gospel ministry.

Second, and closely related to the first, I learned anew how God is faithful. I had seen

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## Commencement Address: “The Final Exam for a Fallen Disciple: Do You Love Jesus?”

by Rev. Greg Bylsma



This year’s commencement address was entitled, “The Final Exam for a Fallen Disciple: Do You Love Jesus?” Its focus was upon John 21:15-17, which is part of the record of Peter’s restoration to his apostolic commission where Jesus says on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, “Do you love Me?...Feed My sheep.” Several key points were drawn out of the text with a goal of edifying graduates and attendees.

First, we were reminded that our Lord and Saviour always uses fallen but restored disciples. The three-fold question of Jesus to Peter, “Do you love Me?” has a clear echo of Peter’s three-fold denial of Jesus. Peter had claimed that even if all others forsook Jesus, he himself never would (Mt. 26:33). Peter thought too highly of himself than he should have, but the truth is that we all fall into the same trap. After Peter spoke, all the disciples “said likewise,” (Mk 14:31) and yet,

“all forsook Him and fled” (Mk 14:50). Gospel ministry is not carried out by perfect people, but by restored sinners who know what it is to have the mercy of God applied to them in Jesus Christ.

Second, before these men are set upon this task they must ask and answer a very fundamental question. That question is not whether they graduated at the top of their class (although education and training are essential!). The question apart from which no one can serve Christ is this: “Do you love Jesus?” In the end that is the exam that every Christian and every Christian minister must constantly be passing (see Rev. 2:1-7), and it is the question which seminarians and graduates, in all their learning, must never lose sight of.

The beauty of Christ in the question, however, is seen also in the beauty of Peter’s answer. Peter answers Jesus three times in the affirmative, each time emphasizing that Jesus knows that Peter loves Him. How can Peter be so sure that Jesus knows that Peter loves Him when Peter had denied Christ with cursing in the hour of testing? When we deny Christ and are brought back to Him, are we sure that Jesus knows we love Him?

The truth is we can be sure Jesus knows our love when we recognize our love is not based upon ourselves or from ourselves, but it is the fruit of Christ’s work on our behalf. We love Him because He first loved us (1 Jn 4:19). Peter can be sure Jesus knows Peter’s love because Jesus was the one who not only prayed that Peter’s faith would not fail (Luke 22:32), but conquered death to make sure that it didn’t. The only way for fallen disciples to pass the final exam is to recognize that Christ knows we love Him, and He knows it not because our love is so great or better than that of all the others, but because our love is what He died and conquered death to secure, and His work never fails. Only by this can we say, “Lord, You know all things, You know that I love You.”

It is then upon this foundation that Jesus called Peter to take up that most glorious task of nurturing, feeding and shepherding the people of God. Christ loves His sheep, and His desire is to see them fed by that daily application of the work of God in Christ by those who continually receive it themselves. The undershepherds of Christ will then care for His people with humility, as restored sinners who love Jesus and tell the world and His church precisely why this is so. By that message, which will center upon the cross, Christ will Himself build His church. In that spirit, which will be saturated with Christ, ministers will feed His flock to the glory and praise of God.

## Board Report

by Rev. Adrian Dieleman

The Board of Mid America Reformed Seminary met May 12, 2016. We began with an evening tribute to Florence Kooiman, the office manager, upon her retirement after 35 years of service. She was with the Seminary since its inception and moved to the greater Chicago area when the seminary relocated. The Board wants publicly to thank Flo for her dedicated and efficient service in the Seminary and for the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom.

The Board also conducted a reappointment interview with Professor Marcus Mininger, and unanimously appointed him as Associate Professor of New Testament for a period of four years.

A decision was made that beginning in 2017, a \$10 increase per credit hour be implemented and increased an additional \$10 in each of the subsequent three school years. We are hoping and praying that because of the generous giving of our donors, our students will continue to graduate without any significant debt.

Board members approved the granting of degrees to seven graduates and also had the privilege of attending the Seminary’s 31st Commencement exercises on Thursday evening. The hospitality of the faculty and staff was excellent and the fellowship rich, and much thanksgiving and praise to the Lord were given for His continued blessing upon the Seminary.

Nominations were approved for replacement of Board members whose terms expire this year. Revs. Edward Marcusse and Henry Van Olst were thanked for their years of service.

### Did you know?

You can fill out the board ballot **online!**  
Visit our website at  
[www.midamerica.edu/boardballot2016](http://www.midamerica.edu/boardballot2016).  
Ballots must be completed by July 31.

## Commencement 2016 by Glenda Mathes



Seven seniors graduated at Mid-America’s thirty-first Commencement service on May 12, 2016. Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degrees were awarded to Jeremy Robert Baker, Joshua Michael Flinn, Robert Thomas Holda, Daniel Jerome Ragusa, Martin Peter Van’t Hoff, and Arie Vreugdenhil. Jacob Pieter Christian Vreugdenhil received a Master of Theological Studies (MTS) degree.

Dr. Cornelis P. Venema, Seminary president and Professor of Doctrinal Studies, welcomed attendees and opened with prayer. Rev. Greg Bylsma, Mid-America alumnus and pastor of

Living Water Reformed Church (URCNA) in Brantford, Ontario, gave the Commencement address. Using John 21:1-19 as his text, he spoke on “The Final Exam for a Fallen Disciple: Do You Love Jesus?” [See summary on page 2.]

Rev. Ed Marcusse, President of the Board of Trustees and pastor of Immanuel’s Reformed Church (URCNA) in Salem, OR, conferred degrees. Dr. J. Mark Beach, Professor of Ministerial and Doctrinal Studies, led the audience in a litany for Commencement. Maria Luttjeboer sang, “Take My Life.”

Rev. Mark Vander Hart, Associate Professor of Old Testament Studies, presented the charge to the graduating class from Luke 6:40. He pointed out how a disciple (or student) begins instruction by not being equal to his teacher. Yet, once the student is fully trained, he may be like his teacher. “Thus there is an eschatological hope built into the situation between a student and his teacher,” he said. In the biblical context, the teacher is the Lord. “You will never graduate from the school of Christ.” He emphasized that a great love of study, combined with a great love

for the congregation, will increase the student’s growth and knowledge, just as Christ first loved the truth, spoke the truth, and showed the way.

Dr. Alan D. Strange, Professor of Church History, offered a prayer for God’s blessing, and the assembled people sang “O Worship the King, All Glorious Above,” as a recessional hymn. Mrs. Nancy Venema on the organ and Mrs. Lauren LeMahieu on the trumpet accompanied the singing.

Jeremy Baker intends to complete an internship at the Yuma, AZ, OPC church plant. Joshua Flinn will return to New Zealand and pursue ordination in the RCNZ. Robert Holda seeks a call within the OPC. Daniel Ragusa hopes for ordination in the URCNA, and may pursue further study at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Arie Vreugdenhil is open to URCNA or other calls and may eventually continue theological study. Jaap Vreugdenhil plans to return to the Netherlands and serve as God calls him. Martin Peter Van’t Hoff hopes for a call within the URCNA.

## Summer Assignments

Professor Mark Vander Hart reports, “Once again, a number of our students are going out as assigned by the Faculty to serve in a variety of churches during the summer months. These internships very nicely and richly complement the classroom instruction that M.Div. students receive.”

The following students anticipate serving churches this summer:

Jonathan Beall	New Covenant Community (OPC)	Joliet, Illinois
Daniel Beezhold	Faith Reformed Church of Telkwa (URC)	Telkwa, British Columbia
Paul Freswick	Covenant United Reformed Church	Byron Center, Michigan
Ehren Gaebler	Grace Presbyterian Church (PCA)	Hudson, Ohio
Tad Groenendyk	Bethany United Reformed Church	Wyoming, Michigan
David Jouf	Living Springs Community Church (RCA)	Glenwood, Illinois
Pablo Martínez	Momence Orthodox Presbyterian Church	Momence, Illinois
Ryan Noha	Hope Presbyterian Church (OPC)	Grayslake, Illinois
Andrew Pinson	United Reformed Church of Nampa	Nampa, Idaho
Ruben Zartman	El Pacto de Gracia URC Fellowship	Chicago Heights, Illinois

“A problem is that we have more requests than we can fill,” Professor Vander Hart says. “Yet we hope that churches may consider having a seminarian for a 10-week internship to give students experience (more than just a ‘taste’) in what the work of the pastor is.”

Internships allow congregations to become personally acquainted with a seminarian, while partnering with Mid-America in training men for gospel ministry.





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## ◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

### Au Revoir and Adieu continued... by Keith LeMahieu



God's faithfulness in many ways long before I came to Mid-America, but I saw it in new and oftentimes completely unexpected ways. The pressure to make sure the Seminary has the necessary financial resources

to make payroll and keep the lights on can be difficult. Early on in this work I would lie awake at night wondering how I was going to meet that need. Much has happened during the time I have been here. We saw terrorists fly

airplanes into the World Trade Center, war in the Middle East and a financial crisis in 2008 that almost caused global financial chaos. God taught me that "eating the bread of anxious toil" is vanity (Psalm 127). Whenever finances at Mid-America were tight God provided for us — often in unexpected ways that made it clear it had nothing to do with me. I now sleep like a baby.

Third, fundraising deepened my personal faith. In his epistles Paul often encourages his readers to be imitators of him. The opportunity to meet hundreds of Mid-America constituents and learn their personal stories of joy and sadness has been an inspiration and increased my confidence in

our God. I think I am also more generous as a result of seeing your many examples of generosity.

Finally, I made countless friends, many with amazing life stories. I remember one man (who is now in the church triumphant) who should have had a book written, and probably a movie made, about his remarkable life. These friendships are priceless and I think this is what I will miss the most.

Thank you for all you have done to make this work of seminary advancement such a joy. I am confident you will enjoy working with our new Vice President of Advancement, Mike Deckinga, in the years to come.