

Social Justice
and
the Gospel

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THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: “BREAKING DOWN THE DIVIDING WALL OF HOSTILITY”



“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2:13-14)

One of the most frustrating aspects of present discussions about the coronavirus pandemic and race relations in America is that everything is politicized. Whether in printed or electronic media, the messages we read and hear bear an uncanny resemblance to “propaganda.” Rather than a sober reflection upon complex issues, we are served with political sloganeering and posturing in order to advance a specific agenda. Truth-telling counts for little. Winning the argument is all that matters, even if it means shouting loudly and bullying dissenters into silence. Civility in public discourse is displaced by power politics and shaming those who might hold a contrary opinion.

Our present circumstance reminds me of a remarkable book that I read while in seminary. Authored by a French Reformed theologian, Jacques Ellul, the book bore the striking and prophetic title, *The Political Illusion*. Ellul’s thesis was simple, but profound: citizens of France, and likewise of many Western nation-states, have fallen prey to the illusion that there are political solutions for every problem. If we elect the right politicians who have the answer to what ails us, all will be well. At the root of the political illusion is an idolatry of the state. The one common denominator across the spectrum of political views—left, right, and center—is that some or another government program will solve our problems and usher in a more just and peaceable kingdom. To express the matter in Kuyperian language, the “sphere” of the state has inserted itself into large swaths of modern life and culture. The legitimate, albeit limited, role of the state is displaced by a Leviathan-like state that swallows up everything in its path.

My point is not to deny the importance of politics, but to emphasize that the ultimate solution to what ails us lies in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is especially true with respect to any resolution of the real problem of racism in our society and in the church of Jesus Christ. What is most lamentable is that the evil of racism often resides in our own hearts and our churches where it should have no place. Whether we are willing to admit it or not, there are sinful walls of division and hostility between people of different races present in a place where they do not belong.

When the apostle Paul describes the church of Jesus Christ in Ephesians 2, he defines it as a temple, “a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (v. 22). The church that Christ is building is a house whose members include Jews and Gentiles alike. Unlike the Old Testament temple where there was a wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles, the New Testament temple is a community of those who have been reconciled to God, and to each other, by the blood of Jesus. The only “bloodline” that counts in Christ’s church is the blood of Christ. Those who were formerly “strangers” to God and his covenant, are now “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone” (vv. 19-20).

What Paul teaches us about the church in Ephesians 2 is not a political message or solution first of all. It is a deeply profound and beautiful portrait of the church of Jesus Christ as God intends it to be. Those who find peace with God through the shed blood of the one and only Savior, also find peace with also those who are found in Him. Christ’s death “kills” the hostility between Jew and Gentile and as well between any and all walls of separation that might otherwise be erected between those who belong to Him (v. 16). Strikingly, the apostle declares that this message of true peace between God and those who are purchased by the blood of Christ is the message Christ Himself preached (v. 17). When the church comes with the gospel of peace between God and those whom he reconciles to Himself, she does so because Christ Himself first preached this message to the church. He did so in order that He “might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace” (v. 15).

In the midst of the present tumult over the subject of racism in our society and world, the church needs desperately to preach the gospel of peace through the blood of Christ. The message of reconciliation through the blood of Christ offers, not a political illusion, but a radical answer to what ultimately disturbs our peace. But even as the church preaches this gospel, so it must labor to embody it in our life together as members of Christ’s body. For in the church of Jesus Christ, there is only “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Eph. 4:5-6).

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

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

I am glad you are back – thanks for reading! A number of weeks ago, we sang “Christ Shall Have Dominion” as a congregation at my church. If you know that hymn, you know how it boldly declares Christ’s ownership of all things. “Earth’s remotest regions, shall His empire be” encourages us as we sing amidst a global pandemic, a struggling economy, a seemingly crippled church, racial tension, teachers disgruntled about returning to school, and fear-stricken people all over the place. In our last issue, we were challenged by Dr. J. Mark Beach about our longing for things to be the way they used to be, as opposed to our longing for the way things should be. This month, Dr. Eric Watkins brings racial inequality to the forefront and offers a compelling account of how a Christian ought to respond to racism. We are also pleased to welcome our largest incoming class of all time. You can read biographies of these 15 individuals on page 5. Those and other articles await as you turn the page and enjoy!



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

Michael Deckinga
Vice President of Advancement

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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: “HAVE YOU SEEN THE SHARK BIRDS?”

I try to use social media in a responsible way. I enjoy connecting with long-lost folks from high school. It can be a great way to keep in touch with some of you throughout the year. It is also a handy tool for the advancement office for the Seminary – we post daily on our Facebook page. So, in all, I am pleased with it. One in a while, it distracts me. I can think of one picture I found recently. It played nicely to my sense of humor. It was a manufactured photo of a bird. It had the body of a seagull and the head of a great white shark, with big teeth and looking mighty menacing. The caption said, “coming soon to 2020.” Can you imagine little flying shark birds? Then again, could you imagine any of the things that have happened so far this year? COVID-19, race riots, murder hornets (thankfully we seemed to have skipped those), an unusually quiet (yet loud at the same time) presidential election in the United States, and a significantly shortened Chicago baseball season (likely a good thing). 2020 has been quite a year thus far. I am thankful our God is sovereign – this year would be even more difficult to navigate if we did not have our heavenly Father to lead, guide, and sustain us!

Speaking of sustainability, the Lord has been pleased to look favorably upon Mid-America for yet another year – yes, even 2020! We are so thankful that He has provided us with you – our generous financial and prayerful partners. We are

thankful for our incoming and returning students. We are thankful for all our advocates on social media, in the pews, in the council/session room, and for all our alumni. We are excited too about the future here at Mid-America. We are poised for growth – strategic, careful growth. I cannot yet update you on all our plans, but they are fantastic.

As we enter our new fiscal year, we begin to track some new budget figures. The Board of Trustees passed a 1.5% budget increase for this year. This keeps our budget consistent with the modest increases in expenses we realize throughout the year. Revenue streams for the Seminary are straight forward: tuition, donations, and investment income. I guess that is not all that different from other non-profits, especially educational institutions. We will break each of those sections down, briefly.

Tuition – our revenue in this bucket is anticipated at a 25% increase this year! Praise the Lord! He has heard our prayer and provided us with the largest incoming class in the school’s history – 15 students! The incoming class for 2021 looks to already be the same size. With many recruiting platforms going “online only” instead of in-person, we may have a more difficult recruiting season ahead, but we go forward in faith. It is such a blessing and an encouragement to see this revenue stream increase as it has – not for the sake of dollars alone, but because you and I have invested in this place and we want to see the results. We want to see Christ’s church served ably by well-trained leaders to bring the good news to the next generation!

Donations – this year, we have budgeted

an increase of 0.2%. This is an unusually small increase thanks to the previous paragraph. Donation revenue, both U.S. gifts to the General Fund as well as Canadian contributions to our foundation in Ontario, are projected at \$1,725,000. Mid-America just reached its revenue budget for the second consecutive year in a row. In order to do this again, we will need all of you, and your churches, on board.

Investment Income – ouch! The economic fallout that the COVID-19 restrictions caused hurt us a bit. In the long-term, our modest investments are projected to do well. They are used to subsidize adjunct faculty salaries and supply our students with the kind of robust financial aid we offer to keep them from adding debt so when they graduate, they serve Christ, and not their creditors. There is no budgeted number tied to these funds, as their performance can be out of our hands at times.

Well, I have gone on quite a bit, and I’m out of space. If you are still reading, thank you. You will have to wait until the December issue to see my usual, awesome-looking graph. Let us start the 2020-2021 fiscal year together the same way we finished the last one – trusting in our good and gracious heavenly Father to provide for our every need. May He be pleased to bless you abundantly!

Michael Deckinga
Vice-President of Advancement

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

MEET THE CLASS OF 2023

Johnathan Allen (OPC) is a 2019 graduate of Moody Bible Institute, and he and his wife, Monica, have four children. Johnathan grew up in rural California before living in Oregon, Alabama, and now Chicagoland. In February, Johnathan and Monica expect their fifth child.

Joel Buys (URC) was born in California and comes to us from Minnesota. Joel has a History degree from the University of Sioux Falls, and for the last several years he has worked in construction.

Caleb Castro (URC) and his wife, Robyn, are native Californians. Caleb is co-producer and a leading contributor to a Herman Bavinck podcast. He enjoys illustration, playing music, and medieval history and culture. Caleb and Robyn are expecting their first child, a boy, in January.

Andrew Chang (PCA) taught privately in northern Illinois before seminary. Andrew has an engineering degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and he is part of the PCA's Korean Central Presbytery. Andrew was born in Atlanta, GA, and grew up in Cheonan, South Korea.

Stephen Corbitt (non-denominational) met his wife, Shawna, in Hawaii while Stephen was enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. Stephen is a 2020 graduate of Moody Bible Institute, where Shawna is starting her own studies.

Dan Fletcher (Reformed Baptist) has 30+ years of work experience in technology services. Dan and his wife, Lori, are longtime residents of Chicago's suburbs, where Dan serves as an elder for their church. Dan and Lori have three children, including fellow student Ken Wojnarowski, and six grandchildren.

Eric Jacobs grew up Roman Catholic and later was impacted by solid, evangelistic preaching. Eric married Cassidy before beginning studies at Moody Bible Institute, where he graduated in 2020. Eric aspires to a pastoral call, possibly teaching in a seminary or Bible college.



Pictured here are our early arrivals for Summer Greek (left to right): Dan Fletcher, Israel Ledee, Andrew Chang, Ken Wojnarowski, Michael Wall, Matthew Van der Woerd, David Myhren, Jacob London

Jae Kim (RCNZ) graduated from the University of Auckland and practiced law. Jae and his wife, Jinny, are members of the Reformed Church of the North Shore-NZ, where Jae has been ordained as an elder. Keep Jae and Jinny in your prayers, who are studying online until COVID-19 travel restrictions lift.

Israel Ledee (SBC) was born in Puerto Rico and is an elder at Brainard Ave. Baptist Church in Chicago's western suburbs. Israel is married to Mariana, and together they share a love for the Word of God. Israel is a 2017 graduate of Moody Bible Institute.

Jacob London (URC) already has completed an interim pastorate and a separate pastoral internship in the Greater Toronto Area. Jacob and his wife, Lisa, have one toddler and another child on the way.

David Myhren (URC) previously worked as a carpenter for the family business in southeastern New York. David graduated from Liberty University in 2014 with a History degree, and he enjoys being an aficionado of coffee.

Matthew Van der Woerd (URC) holds a 10-year background in finance and banking. He and his wife, Cari, have two

children. They have a marital tie to MARS—Matthew and Cari first met at Faith URC in Telkwa, BC, where Matt's dad was on summer assignment. Matthew is a graduate of Trinity Western University.

David Voytek (RCUS) was born in California and now comes from North Dakota. David has previous missions experience in Asia. He graduated in 2013 with a History degree from Thomas Edison State University. David's work experience includes manufacturing oil treatment skids.

Michael Wall (URC) and his wife, Heather, were converted together as young adults and began making church an important part of their lives. They have three children and enjoy anything outdoors. Like Matthew and Cari Van der Woerd, the Walls also come to us from Faith URC in Telkwa, BC.

Ken Wojnarowski (PCA) was born and raised in Chicago's southwestern suburbs. He sensed the call to ministry at a young age, and in 2013 Ken graduated with a Theology degree from Trinity Christian College. Ken is husband to Sarah and son of fellow student, Dan Fletcher. Ken especially enjoys hiking and the game of Risk.

Brian Blummer
Director of Enrollment Management

FACULTY PROFILE: DR. ERIC WATKINS

We are delighted to announce that the Rev. Dr. Eric Watkins (Orthodox Presbyterian Church), who has taught several courses for us in the ministerial studies department (homiletics and evangelism, particularly) has accepted a position here as part-time faculty. Such a position entails more than occasional teaching, as is the case with adjunct faculty. Dr. Watkins will regularly teach at least one course per semester in the regular curriculum, as well as electives. This fulfills a need that we've had, particularly as Dr. Beach continues to teach more in the doctrinal studies division. We thought that readers might appreciate an introduction to Prof. Watkins (in the words of his church website).

Dr. Watkins grew up in a non-Christian military home in North Carolina. His teenage years were dark and dangerous, clearly preserved by the grace of God. He came to Christ at age 21, ironically while following the Grateful Dead around the country. At the end of a

long, strange trip, someone gave him a Bible to read, and in the pages of Scripture, he met the Lord Jesus Christ, who convicted him of his sins and comforted him with the gospel of grace. This began the hard process of learning how to read the Bible and how to live what it teaches—a process which ultimately led to falling in love with the Reformed faith.

Since becoming a Christian, Dr. Watkins has been a life-long student. His first degree was an A.A. in Therapeutic Recreation. He received his B.S. in Biblical Studies from Southeastern Bible college. He became curious about the biblical languages and the Reformed faith in Bible College, and thus continued on to Westminster Seminary in California where he earned his Master of Divinity (with a counseling minor). Questions related to church history led him to pursue a Th.M. in Reformation studies from Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando. In May of 2016, he graduated with a PhD in Homiletics from the Theological University in Kampen, the Netherlands.

Dr. Watkins has been a minister in the OPC

since 2001, following a year-long internship at Harvest OPC in Vista, CA. He was first an associate pastor and then a church planter in Orlando, FL. He came to St. Augustine to plant Covenant Presbyterian Church in late 2007. Dr. Watkins strongly believes in preaching Christ from all of Scripture for all of life, and is passionate about evangelism, discipleship, and the beauty of Reformed worship. He hopes to be at CPC for a long time and rejoices at the great work that God is doing in the church.

God has given Dr. Watkins a wonderful wife in Heather. They were married in 1996 and spent their honeymoon there in St. Augustine. They now have four delightful children, Kirra, Carl, Liam and Liarra. Dr. Watkins's mother Neda also lives with the family. The Watkins are hoping to adopt more children in the near future. Dr. Watkins's pastimes are surfing, beach volleyball, and playing guitar; but above all, he loves being with his family.

Dr. Alan D. Strange
Professor of Church History, Registrar & Theological Librarian



SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE GOSPEL

DR. ERIC WATKINS

On May 25th, 2020, the world caught on fire, or so it has seemed. On the streets of Minneapolis, a crowd of bewildered people watched in horror as a man bearing the image of God died slowly with his neck under the knee of a law enforcement officer, also bearing the image of God. To further complicate things, the onlooking crowd was peppered with camera phones, not only recording a sight which remains painful to remember; even worse, the repeated pleas for mercy and intervention from the crowd were ignored. But the most troubling aspect of the event for many was the fact that the police officer was white, while the man on the ground, George Floyd, was black. Whatever the backstory of this event was, and whatever

the actual motive and context may have been, remain almost meaningless to the watching world that immediately perceived this as a video-recorded moment of police brutality and systemic, racial injustice. The moment he died, George Floyd became the instant symbol of a movement. A fire was kindled that day that has not yet been doused. But where sin abounds, so also does the grace of God. The world may be on fire, but Jesus came to bring streams of living water and healing for those who have been ravaged by sin and its inescapable wages—death. And He uses His church to bring gospel healing.

It is important for Christians to see the George Floyd narrative biblically and

compassionately. Sin tends to follow sin and violence tends to follow violence. As soon as videos were posted on the internet, the media immediately exacerbated and politicized the event. As with many highly publicized occasions in the past involving a white officer of the law and a black suspect, accusations of systemic racism, police brutality, and social injustice erupted like a volcano. The rhetorical wildfire spread worldwide almost instantly. Protests—some peaceful and some violent—became regular fare in nearly every major city in the United States and in many other countries. Police stations were overrun,



occupied and vandalized. Buildings and property were destroyed, and worst of all, people were killed. The Scripture has once again been proven true that the anger of man cannot produce the righteousness of God (James 1:20)—only the gospel can. But this is a moment in time in which Christians can learn about people whose stories and struggles we barely comprehend. Where there is genuine understanding and compassion, there will also be gospel opportunities.

“When the world is on fire, only the cool waters of the gospel can genuinely bring healing, hope and forgiveness.”

In order to process this narrative with wisdom and understanding, it is important to reflect upon several things. First, people’s perception is their reality. What people think and feel to be true, they believe to be true, even if reality is at odds with their perception. For anyone who watched the video of the death of George Floyd, it is hard to not see the event as a horrific moment of police brutality. Charges to that effect were filed shortly afterwards, and in time, the investigation and subsequent trial will conclude, and justice will be served. Yet while these things may be true enough, it is worth asking whether or not there was any clear indication that George Floyd’s death was racially motivated. Sadly, people kill one another almost every day, but in most cases the suggestion of racial motivation is omitted. So why have so many made this into an episode of “systemic racism?” In answer to the question, it may be too simplistic to say because the officer was white and the man on the ground was black. It is more complicated than that. And

this leads to our second point.

The reaction that many have had to this death of George Floyd must be seen against the backdrop of the long and difficult narrative of the black experience in America and the perception of longstanding profiling, targeting, and mistreatment of people of color. To be clear, it is not the intention of this article to suggest that every perceived instance of such mistreatment is, in reality, what it is said to be. Many people have been falsely accused, falsely misrepresented and mistreated—and that includes police officers. An important illustration of this is found in the fact that in the majority of the highly publicized cases in the last decade in which a white police officer was accused of using excessive force in the arrest of a black suspect, once the investigation was completed, the officer was found to be not guilty in the eyes of multi-ethnic juries. In other words, the broadly publicized and politicized accusations of police brutality and systemic racism were proven false. But again, once people’s perceptions were formed, not even a multi-ethnic jury could change their minds. And, of course, there are the other, sad episodes that were proven to be exactly what they were suspected to be.

There is a deeper story here. It is not simply the popularized and politicized events of the last decade that paint the difficult backdrop of recent occurrences. There is a longer historical narrative that is difficult to deny or qualify. The two major moments in this narrative are the turbulent events surrounding the Civil Rights movement of the 1960’s and the even longer, more painful story of antebellum slavery in America. When people who are sensitive to these realities see a black man on the ground or in the back of a police-car, they don’t just see an event; they feel a story. It is part of a family tree with many broken branches. And it is a painful experience. As a mixed-ethnic (black and white) person

who grew up in the south, I know only a bit of the things that I am describing; but my family (especially my parents and grandparents) know them far better. My parents had an inter-racial marriage in a time when that was not accepted. As a child, I got in fist fights with kids because my dad was black...I could go on. Now I am grown, and nearly all of that drama is behind me. I have four adopted, ethnically mixed (white and black) kids. I doubt they will experience anything like what I did; and I did not experience anything like what my parents did. But when the world watches something like what happened on May 25th, smoldering embers reignite painful memories from the past, and things we thought just “couldn’t happen” did happen—right in front of our eyes.

So where should people turn for hope and healing in such a context as this? One of the more peculiar dynamics to note in this current narrative is the number of not only white millennials, but white evangelicals that have joined protests and even begun to support movements like Black Lives Matter (BLM). This latter point is the most perplexing, as there are few organizations more committed to an anti-Christian agenda than BLM. A careful study of the organization’s defining documents, history, and leadership make it abundantly clear that BLM has less in common with the church than Jerusalem does with Athens.

By its own self-description, BLM is decidedly pro-homosexuality of all kinds (Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Queer, Transsexual, or LBGQT for short). Not only is the organization pro-homosexuality, it is also decidedly against the Christian definition of the family. Male and female gender distinctions disintegrate into meaningless, traditional ways of thinking in the BLM agenda. But perhaps the greatest offense, however, is

that of replacing the true gospel with that of the social gospel. Orthodox theology (creation, the fall, redemption in Christ) are all replaced with Liberation theology at best (or West African spiritualism or atheism at worse). Liberation theology reduces the cross of Christ to a symbol of radical political resistance. As Hawk Newsom, the New York City BLM president said in a June 2020 interview, “Jesus Christ is the most famous black radical revolutionary in history. And He was treated just like Dr. King. He was arrested on occasion and He was also crucified or assassinated. This is what happens to black activists. We are killed by the government.” The gospel, in Liberation Theology is flattened into a social reform program in contrast to the hope Jesus promised in the kingdom of heaven as a result of His own sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection. Our concerns and criticisms of BLM could be furthered, but perhaps more profitable would be to turn to the church and to ask what, by God’s grace, can we do in such turbulent times?

Of first importance, Christians should remember that there is only race: the human race. Every human being, whether black, white or otherwise, is created in the image of God and is beautiful by design. The life of every image-bearer is worthy of dignity, respect and protection. Racism is a sin, and where it exists, it should be repented of. Secondly, no one created by God is outside the scope of the gospel and its claims. Jesus can save anyone, and He saves all kinds of people, from every nation, tribe and tongue. One of the most beautiful things we see in Scripture is the way in which God saves people whom we ourselves might deem unsavable. Jonah had to learn about God’s heart for the nations from the people of Nineveh. The Pharisees had to learn about God’s compassion from the Good Samaritan. The Disciples had to learn about God’s forgiveness from the woman at the well in John 4. And the early Jewish church

had to learn how ethnically inclusive the church would be by watching the Gentiles come in droves to sit at the table the Messiah had set for those who would be adopted into the family of Abraham (who was a Gentile before he became a Jew).

“God is the great reconciler. He causes wars to cease and storms to be still.”

Racial stereotypes and ethnic disparagement are about as old as history itself. But God’s eternal plan to redeem a beautiful church for himself, painted with all the colors of humanity is even older the creation. The church is beautiful because of Christ, but His glory is reflected in the many colors with which He has been pleased to infuse creation. God’s compassion for the nations and for the lost ought to ignite in His church a holy fire (not a rebellious one) that longs to see His mercy and grace bestowed upon many who are still outside his kingdom and are being deceived by the world’s promise of hope apart from God and the gospel. Mercy is not simply a feeling of the heart; like love, it is embodied in actions that speak louder than words. God Himself is the “father of the father-less and protector of orphans and widows” (Psalm 68:5). He sent Elijah to a husbandless, gentile mother (1 Kings 17) to demonstrate the compassion of God and preview the hope of the resurrection. God sent Jesus to heal the daughter of a Syrophenician woman. He sent Philip to evangelize and baptize an Ethiopian Eunuch. And finally, He sent someone to us (preachers, parents...friends) to show us tangible expressions of His love, and to proclaim the gospel to us. When the world is on fire, only the cool waters of the gospel can genuinely bring healing, hope and forgiveness. This world’s offers of

deliverance cannot avail, because the world cannot change its own heart. But the gospel can.

A final word about prayer. It is undeniable that many who have watched the news in recent months have experienced the raw emotions of horror and frustration. Discussions about these events have become tiring. But there comes a time when we spend less time talking and more time praying. Prayer is an effective means of change. It humbles us. It brings our hearts into conformity with the heart of God. God is pleased to use our prayers as a means of accomplishing all His holy will, and that includes subduing the hearts of His enemies.

God is the great reconciler. He causes wars to cease and storms to be still. He accomplishes what riots, protests and even politics cannot, compelling those who bear his image to love him with all their heart, soul, strength and mind, and even to love their neighbors as themselves. And God works through His church as the church proclaims the gospel, carries out loving deeds of justice and mercy, and as we pray. The world may be on fire, but Jesus is the living water the world so urgently needs.



Dr. Eric Watkins
Instructor of Ministerial Studies

ALUMNI PROFILE: MATT VAN DYKEN

Dear Mid-America community, Greetings! I graduated from MARS in 2011, and have been in the field in Mexico for 8 years now with my wife Anne-Marie. I enjoyed my years at Mid-America very much. The years were a blessing in different ways. I would say that what I appreciated most of all was a love for God and His Word expressed in a love for the students and a desire to equip and form us. The Seminary staff and community were selfless and giving, and I take this opportunity again to express my thanks for your work and care for us. I enjoyed the close relationships with the professors, the prayer times with Dr. Strange, the breakfasts with Rev. Vander Hart, being adopted into the Swets' family where I stayed, and of course the classes and training. In terms of training for foreign missions, the two things that stand out in my mind are the internship program, which got me on the field with two experienced missionaries for extended periods. The second was being able to tailor several mission elective courses with Dr. Beach and Dr. Venema. Thank-you, brothers and sisters!

It has been eight years now serving the Lord in Tepic, Nayarit, Mexico. Tepic is about an hour from the west coast and is one of the least reached Mexican cities. I am serving as the pastor of a small church here. We are thankful for the Lord's upholding grace, and for the family in the Lord that He has given us. The brothers and sisters here have become very dear to us and to our four children. Our most pressing need continues to be godly leaders at home and in the church, and that is where I am trying to focus my efforts, in terms of discipleship. The greatest difficulties have been working through conflict and sin with Christ-like humility, keeping our eyes on the Lord in both

the ups and the downs, and knowing how to challenge but not push the brothers. The greatest joys have been answered prayers after many years of waiting, seeing dear brothers and sisters willing to suffer difficulty for Christ and yet praising Him, and opening the Bible and praying for the first time with new believers. And I should not forget our yearly Vacation Bible School week led by our young people's. Seeing God's people rejoice to speak of His goodness is a delight.

We have a saying in English which applies well to missionary life in Mexico. "When it rains, it pours." There is another saying for rainy season: "If you don't like the weather, wait five minutes." Some weeks are quiet, with sermon preparation, visits, family life, and Bible studies. Some weeks, however, are full of phone calls, emergency visits, requests for help,

and crises. Not all is joyful harvesting. There is a lot of slogging too. But in all things we give thanks to God who truly is the immovable rock, for Christ is the solid rock on which we stand. He will gather and provide for His people, and for that we thank Him.

How can you help? We have always been thankful for the steady support and prayers for the work here. Thank you! I speak out of abundance, not lack. You can simply pray for us, that God will raise up labourers for the vineyard, both here in Mexico and in the United States and Canada. And you can pray in these coronavirus times, when God is shaking us all, that "words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ...that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak" (Ephesians 6:20). May God bless and keep you.

Pastor Matt & Ann-Marie Van Dyken



ALUMNI UPDATES



Casey Bessette (2013) is grateful to the Lord for having been installed as the Pastor of

Pilgrim OPC in Raleigh, NC, on June 26 (which was also his wedding anniversary!). He previously served the congregation of Christ OPC in Janesville, WI, as Teacher of the Word for 4 years, which was a part-time role as he supported his family working full-time as a software engineer. He and his wife, Jennifer, have six children: Hannah (13), Josiah (12), Lydia (9), Simeon (7), Elijah (5), and Abigail (4).



Bryce De Zwarte (2019) was ordained into the gospel ministry on July 17, 2020 and is serving as the pastor of Adoration URC in

Vineland, ON. Revs. Harry Zekveld (one of Bryce's mentors from our Ministerial Apprenticeship Program) and Ryan Swale (a friend and fellow 2019 graduate) officiated the ordination service.



Cristian Garcia (2019) Being an international student, the COVID-19 situation had a big impact on Cristian and his family after graduation from

MARS. He and his family were not able to return to their home country of Ecuador since the borders were closed, and the paperwork for their youngest one, who is an American, was very difficult to obtain.

In His providence the LORD opened the doors for them to have a two year long internship under Pastor Bernie Van Eyk, who is the Pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in Stuart (PCA), Florida. The congregation of Grace has been very supportive and a blessing for them since their time of arrival. Also, working under

the direction of Pastor Van Eyk has been a great blessing for him and his family since Pastor Van Eyk has a lot of experience working with interns, preparing them for the ministry of the Gospel. They are looking forward to seeing what the LORD has in store for them during their time in Florida and in the future!



Jared Luttjeboer (2018)

continues to serve Mid-America as the Director of Marketing,

Digital Media, and Publications. He loves producing content for friends of Mid-America to enjoy, especially sitting down with the faculty to record sessions of the Round Table Podcast. Jared and his wife, Maria, currently attend Beacon Light Community Church (CRC) in Gary, IN, where he serves as an Elder, preaches at least once a month, and teaches Adult Sunday School.



Nathaniel Rademaker

(2019) is serving as a Vicar (intern) at North

Shore Reformed Church in Auckland, New Zealand. He has been on the North Shore for a year. Nathaniel was declared eligible for call after passing his candidacy exam on the 25th of July 2020. Nathaniel's wife Sharon is expecting baby number 7, a little boy, due on the 7th of November 2020. They are excited to see where the Lord is leading them as they seek to serve Him!



Mitch Ramkissoon

(2001) recently accepted the position of

Prison Pastor for Redemption Prison Ministry (Cambridge, Ontario Canada).

His service will include visiting inmates who are students of RPM's Bible studies, and seeking out additional contacts in the federal prisons of Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan and, Lord willing, as many provincial prisons as he can have access to. Of course, with the Covid-19 restrictions he has not been able to enter the prisons, and is eagerly looking forward to this. Mitch hopes that his experience as a Pastor will serve him well as he converses, counsels, and, of course, shares the gospel with incarcerated inmates. Mitch served as Pastor of Faith Reformed Church of Telkwa, BC from 2002-2006, and Parkland Reformed Church of Ponoka from 2006 to 2020. He and his wife, Doris, are the happy grandparents of six. Prayer is certainly desired for Doris who continues to suffer from Ulcerative Colitis and chronic fatigue.

ALUMNI:

Stay in touch with other Alumni through the Mid-America Reformed Seminary Alumni Group on Facebook!



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ARCHAEOLOGY: Friend or Foe of Old Testament History?

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Stay tuned for dates and registration.