

# THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

## Summer Time Ecclesiastical Ties by Glenda Mathes



Mid-America fosters its relationships with several fellowships of Christ's church. This summer Seminary personnel attended major ecclesiastical assemblies in various capacities.

Keith LeMahieu represented Mid-America at the RCUS Synod in Sutton, NE, on May 19-22, the OPC General Assembly in Grand Rapids, MI, on June 4-9, and the PCA General Assembly in Houston, TX, on June 16-19.

Dr. Venema participated in a colloquium at the URCNA Synod Visalia, California, on June 4. The panel of four professors (two URCNA and two CanRC) engaged each other in a discussion of their respective federations' doctrine of the covenant. The purpose was to determine whether different formulations or understanding might prevent church union.

"The event effectively highlighted the differences of emphasis existing within the two federations, and illustrated that these differences do not appear to compromise our mutual commitment to Scripture teaching as summarized in the 'Three Forms of Unity,'" Dr. Venema says. "It demonstrated necessary doctrinal and confessional unity, and that the real obstacles to union lie elsewhere (in the provisions of the proposed Church Order, the use of a synodically-approved hymnal, difference of ethos, and the question of theological education).

Synod 2014 appointed Dr. Beach to serve on a study committee regarding membership matters. He also serves on the URCNA Liturgical Forms Committee, which will recommend the creeds, confessions, forms, and prayers for inclusion in a proposed songbook. He explains that the Three Forms of Unity require careful analysis of extant translations and their derivation. The Heidelberg Catechism was written in German and then translated into Latin, while the Belgic Confession was written in French and underwent various translations.

"Since these documents are intended for use in the churches, and were cast in the vernacular, and since the vernacular is the original text," Dr. Beach says, "as a committee we wish to be as true to this use and honor the language of the original documents as much as possible."

Dr. Strange served as an OPC fraternal delegate at the URCNA Synod, and as a commissioner at the OPC GA. He has held leadership positions on various denominational committees for many years, including the Committee on Christian Education, the Board of Great Commission Publications, and the Committee on Appeals and Complaints. He has chaired the OPC's Psalter Hymnal Special Committee since its inception.

While this highlights some of the Seminary's involvement over the summer months, Mid-America strengthens its ecclesiastical ties in many other ways throughout the academic year.

## It's Greek to Professor Mininger

by Glenda Mathes

In addition to Mid-America's presence at major ecclesiastical assemblies, Seminary professors find other opportunities to serve governing bodies of Christ's church.

Professor Marcus Mininger's Greek expertise equips him to oversee the Seminary's Greek program, including the intensive and notorious Summer Greek courses. In lengthy and daily classes from June 30-August 15, students cover six credits between Greek 101 and Greek 102.

Professor Mininger also serves the OPC as the official Greek examiner for licensure candidates in the Presbytery of the Midwest.

"This dovetails nicely with what I already do in overseeing the Greek program here at the Seminary," he says, "so it works well in that regard."

The Presbytery's Candidates and Credentials Committee has appointed Rev. Mininger as the only examiner in an ongoing capacity. The Greek exam is one of several required for licensure, and he conducts the examination whenever a candidate in the presbytery reaches that stage.

"I'm the one who administers and evaluates it," he says, "determining whether the candidate has sustained it and can move on or not."

Rev. Mininger explains that in the OPC "licensure" is more like "candidacy" in the URCNA, in that a licensed man may not only preach in the churches, but may soon begin seeking a call.

While some seminaries and denominations are reducing language requirements, Rev. Mininger stresses the importance of Greek instruction and proficiency: "Learning Greek is very difficult and time-consuming, and so most students probably dread the Greek licensure exam. But reading the Bible directly in its original language is really a tremendous privilege, and it is also indispensable to the most careful study of God's Word."

## The President's Message: Why a 'Confessional' Seminary?

by Dr. Cornelis P. Venema



You have undoubtedly heard the slogans—"no creed but Christ," "no book but the Bible." These slogans express the low view many evangelical Christians have of the historic creeds and confessions of the church. They reflect the sentiment that it is possible to believe in Jesus Christ and to hold to the teaching of the Bible, while disregarding what the church has corporately and historically confessed about Christ in its understanding of the Bible's teaching.

No doubt these slogans have a kind of superficial attraction. After all, the Bible is the supreme standard for any understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ, not the confessions, which aim to summarize the Bible's teaching. And yet, they have unhappy consequences, not only for the church but for a seminary that seeks to serve the church.

At Mid-America, we often emphasize that our institution is a confessional seminary. We subscribe to four great confessions of the Reformed churches: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession of Faith. Our professors are asked to subscribe to these confessions and to echo their teaching in all of their instruction of the students in the classroom.

The question I would like to pose here is: why a "confessional" seminary? What difference does it make whether or not a seminary teaches from the conviction that these confessions faithfully summarize the teaching of Scriptures? How important are these confessions to our ministry on behalf of the church?

In my view, a seminary's adherence to the church's confessions has two important benefits.

In the first place, faithfulness to the church's confessions is an expression of Mid-America's service to the churches. Many critics of contemporary theological education have noted how seminaries are often divorced from the life and ministry of the churches. Rather than viewing their work as a means to bolster and foster the church's faithful ministry of the gospel, seminaries view themselves as academies that are free to interpret the Scriptures as they please. Academic freedom is prized, and the confessions are regarded as an impediment to the kind of creativity that many academics prize. In the contemporary world, novelty is a virtue. Why follow the old paths when the new seem so much more captivating?

Two problems surface, however, when seminaries stray from a strict adherence to the confessions: forgetfulness and disloyalty. If a seminary is unwilling to conform to the confessions, it forgets its reason for being, namely, to serve the church's testimony to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Equally serious, such unwillingness reflects a disloyalty to the churches that support the seminary and entrust their students to its instruction.

In addition to the benefit of serving the churches, a seminary's adherence to the confessions contributes to what I would call the "catholicity" of its instruction. The confessions belong to the church corporately, and they express the historic consensus of the church's reading of the Word of God. Believers do not read the Bible in isolation from others. They read the Bible in concert with the church throughout its long history. The confessions are an expression, accordingly, of the catholic Christian faith. When their teaching is honored, sectarianism and individualism are avoided.

When a seminary hews closely to the church's confessions, it will avoid the temptation to embrace novel views that have not passed the test of time. It will also resist the tendency to elevate the eccentric views of contemporary theologians above the churchly consensus expressed in the confessions. Such a seminary will aim to provide the churches with pastors who keep their focus upon the church's historic testimony to the gospel, and not the latest theological fashions.

*We praise the Lord with Rachel & Josiah Luttjeboer on the healthy birth of their daughter, Jayda Ann, on May 12, 2014.*

## Alumni Updates

**Brian Blummer** ('11) and Stefanie Bruinsma were married on November 17, 2012. Their ceremony took place at Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church, Stefanie's home church, with a reception following in Cedar Lake, IN. Stefanie and Brian continue to live and work in the Chicagoland area, involved for now only in lay capacities. They are members of Oak Glen United Reformed Church and plan to stay near Chicago area friends and family.

**Nick Alons** ('06) continues to serve the URC of Prince Edward Island in eastern Canada. He and his wife, Allison, are welcoming (DV) their fourth child into their home in late July. Baby Alons will join Levi (6), Elizabeth (4) and Julianna (2). Nick has been pastor of this church for almost six years. The council of the URC of PEI is currently planning a Women's Retreat for the middle of September as an outreach opportunity.

**Andre** ('07) and Anita **Holtslag's** daughter, Laura, was married to James Williams on Saturday, June 21. They will reside in New Haven, Connecticut, while James continues his studies at Yale University. They worship with the OPC brothers and sisters at New Haven.

**Michael Shipma** ('98) graduated from the Institute for Christian Studies in May, 2014, with a Master of Worldview Studies degree. He currently serves as an assistant pastor at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.

**Matt Timmons** ('05) is serving an independent Reformed church in Ashland, OH. He is also teaching Bible and theology classes to prison inmates at Richland Correctional Institute. These classes are designed to equip the men to lead in church settings once they get out of the prison. He is in his third year, and many of the men will be getting out soon.

## Another Fiscal Year is Complete by Keith LeMaheiu

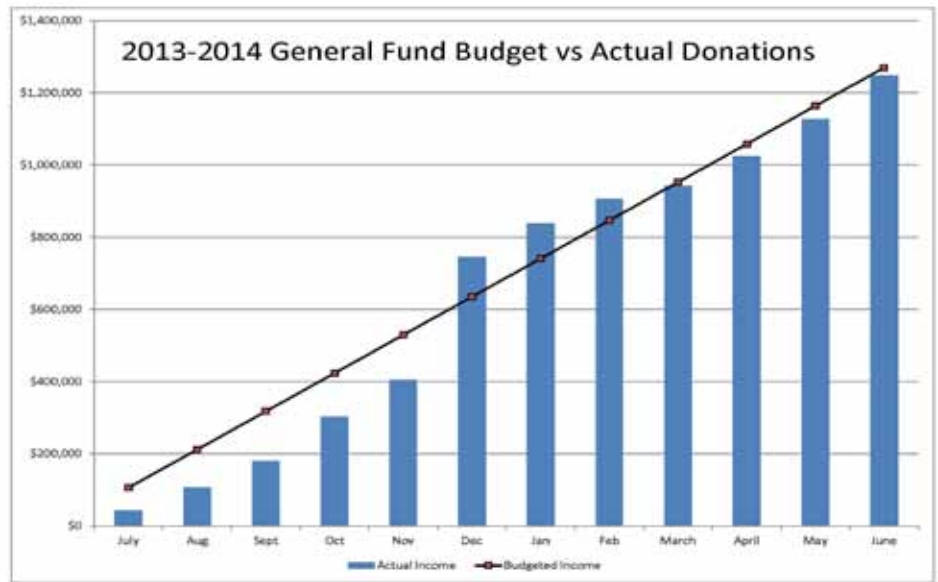
Our fiscal year ended on June 30, and that is an opportunity to look back and ask, “How did we do? Were our budget assumptions accurate? Did we meet our goals?” You likely received a letter in May indicating we had a significant financial need to address by our fiscal year-end. I want to take this opportunity to update you on where things stand, but before I do, I would be remiss not to thank you on behalf of the board, faculty, staff and students for your generous response to our appeal. It is most encouraging to see how God uses you to accomplish His purposes.

We reported in May that revenues were approximately \$200,000 behind the prior year. I included a graph showing a growing disparity between budget and income. You will see an updated graph showing budget vs. actual general fund donations below. Thanks to your generosity we made significant progress and came very close to making budget. This was possible because giving in May and June was up 50% over average May/June giving for the last four years. The net result is that actual fiscal-year operating income was slightly under budget.

What does this mean? First, our immediate financial needs have been met. Second, cash reserves were diminished and remain less than what they should be. Third, a diminished reserve fund means revenue for the remaining summer months must be strong to maintain sufficient operating cash flow. Finally, the seminary must see strong giving in November and December to replenish operating reserves since approximately 20% of annual operating revenue is received during these two months.

So, are these numbers good news or bad news? Our God is a God of grace and generosity! He graciously supplied our need again this past fiscal year. “The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.” (Prov. 16:9)

We should rejoice at His goodness to the Seminary this past year. God supplied total donations of a little more than \$1,500,000 covering not only the operating fund, but also student aid, international student aid, scholarships, the library fund and the building fund. That can only be considered good news. God is good, and we are very encouraged by our year-end results. Our Father in Heaven knows about budgets and cash reserves even better than we and urges us to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to us. Please continue to pray liberally and give generously that together we fulfill our Lord’s Great Commission.



## Golf Outing by Keith LeMahieu

This year marks a milestone for Mid-America’s annual golf outing as we celebrate 10 years. For the third year the outing will be hosted by Lincoln Oaks Golf course located in Crete, IL. The course is easy to find and plays well for golfers of all skill levels.

This late summer outing usually provides wonderful weather, and golfers enjoy sweet fellowship and friendly competition. Tee time is scheduled for 8:30 am with a shotgun start. The outing follows a scramble format, and prizes are awarded to the first and second place teams and to individual golfers for a variety of competition holes. The outing is just \$100 per golfer fees, cart, gifts, refreshments, and a buffet lunch.

Sponsorship opportunities are available for golfers and non-golfers alike. To register use the outing brochure sent by mail or register online at Mid-America’s website. We look forward to seeing you there!

## Summer Greek Classes Underway



Each summer Mid-America offers courses in Greek. The classes run from June through mid-August for three hours each morning, four days a week. Students begin with the Greek alphabet, and seven weeks later they can read much of the New Testament in its original language.

This year five students are taking summer Greek, being taught by Mr. Shawn Goodwin. Prof. Goodwin comes to us from Bethel Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Wheaton, IL. He is a language-lover and brings a natural enthusiasm to the classroom, which helps encourage students. He holds a Master of Arts in Biblical Exegesis from Wheaton College and a Master of Arts in the Bible and the Ancient Near East from Hebrew University in Jerusalem.



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## ◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

### Back to the Baltics by Rev. Mark Vander Hart



I was privileged to make my eighth teaching trip to the Baltic region (Latvia and Lithuania) from the end of May to early July. While I was in this area, I taught a course on the Pentateuch at the Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary (BRTS), and I engaged in reading the Greek Bible (principally in the Gospel of Mark and 1 John) with a few students. Several mornings and evenings each week were taken

up in classroom work.

BRTS has also expanded in recent years to include two new programs. In addition to training pastoral students, the Rīga seminary has a program for lay-leaders (e.g., Bible study leaders, women's group leaders, or perhaps office-bearers). The third program that this school offers is what might be called a "Bible school," namely, courses that are open to anyone who simply wishes to increase his or her knowledge of the Bible, church history, Reformed doctrine, and ministerial studies.

The approach to teaching at BRTS is modular, a concentration of classroom time that usually lasts for one to two weeks. All courses are recorded digitally, which allows Lithuanian students to benefit from the lectures, although they remain in Lithuania. Provisionally, I was

able to travel twice to Lithuania this time to preach and to encourage Reformed believers there. The Christian community in the Baltic region is hungry for what we all need: the strength that comes from the gospel of Jesus Christ and a growing knowledge of His Word.

