

Mid-America Hosts OPC Timothy Conference

Fanning the Flame

When the Apostle Paul wrote words of advice to the young pastor Timothy, he reminded him to “fan into flame the gift of God” (2 Tim. 1:6).

Paul’s exhortation to Timothy provides the biblical basis behind the OPC’s annual Timothy Conference.

The need for such a conference became apparent after an article by Ross W. Graham, General Secretary of the OPC’s Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, appeared in the December 2006 issue of *New Horizons*.

Graham noted that by 2011, the average number of OPC ministers reaching retirement age “will jump to ten per year” with a probability of 12 to 15 ministry vacancies per year by 2012.

“By any measure of the situation,” he wrote, “the loss of a dozen pastors per year will be a significant challenge for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.”

The OPC’s Committee on Christian Education, through its Subcommittee on Ministerial Training (SMT) responded to that approaching challenge by implementing the Timothy Conference.

Churches and sessions seek out and recommend young men who exhibit pastoral gifts. The Conference informs and challenges these young men to consider if God is calling them to the great task of gospel ministry.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church held its annual Timothy Conference at Mid-America on April 16-17.

Designed to encourage and inform young men who may be considering the ministry, the Timothy Conference featured speakers explaining various aspects of God’s call to ministry.

Rev. Bruce Hollister described the responsibilities and privileges of “The Office of Minister.” This session conveyed what it means to hold an office and explained the distinctions among pastors, teachers, and evangelists. Rev. Hollister described various pastoral tasks, such as preaching, catechizing, praying, visiting the sick, and so forth. He emphasized the importance of the office of minister for the well-being of the church and the witness of the gospel.

Rev. Alan Strange spoke about the importance of “The Call to Ministry.” He listed extremes to avoid and some false reasons for assuming a call to ministry.

He noted from Matthew 23:11 that Christian ministry is “a call to perpetual service” and quoted from *Called to the Ministry* by Edmund P. Clowney: “Advancement in the kingdom is not by climbing, but by kneeling.... The stairway to the ministry is not a grand staircase, but a back stairwell that leads down to the servants’ quarters.”

Rev. Strange noted that desire, graces, and gifts are all elements of a genuine biblical call, which is confirmed by external recognition and confirmation from a cross-section of spiritually-minded people and proven leaders in Christ’s church.

In “The Process Toward Ordination,” Rev. Danny Olinger outlined ordination steps within the OPC.



Timothy Conference participants

“Men are brought under care of a local presbytery,” he summarized. “They then proceed to get licensed. Hopefully, they engage in ministerial internships at OP churches during the process also. Finally, with license in hand, they are eligible to receive a call.”

Dr. A. Craig Troxel emphasized the importance of “keeping one’s heart” while “Preparing for the Ministry Now.”

He noted that Scripture speaks of the heart’s three spiritual ‘chambers’: “What you *know*—the mind, what you *love*—the desires, and what you *choose*—the will.”

A *mind* constantly renewed by God’s Word, *desires* constantly purified by God’s Spirit, and a *will* tender to God’s will are what mold a spiritual man who cannot be easily disregarded, even if young.

Dr. Troxell encouraged participants to be well-rounded persons by reading widely as well as continuing to pursue personal interests, manual labor, and sports.

Dr. David VanDrunen explained different aspects of seminary education in his presentation entitled, “Seminary Education: What and Why.”

The sixteen Timothy Conference participants, ages 16-23, attended several classes at Mid-America. On Thursday evening, they visited the Art Institute and enjoyed deep dish pizza in Chicago. New Covenant Community Church (OPC) of New Lenox, IL, provided lunch on Thursday and Mid-America provided lunch on Friday. Participants concluded their visit with dinner at President Venema’s home.



Development Report



Philanthropy or Stewardship?

by Keith LeMahieu

North Americans are an unusually generous lot. The most recent statistics compiled for the United States (Canadian statistics are fairly proportional to the US) show that giving to charitable organizations in 2007 increased one percent over the previous year to \$306 billion (or 2.2% of GDP). Of this charitable activity, 75% is generated by individuals with religious organizations receiving about one-third of reported donations. Data compiled on religious giving by the Barna Research Group indicates that Roman Catholics average 1.5%, mainline Protestant 2.8%, and evangelicals 4%. I would guess that giving in our circles is likely more encouraging—at least I hope so.

Research by John and Sylvia Ronsville (published in a report entitled *The State of Church Giving*) shows that in 1933, in the middle of the Great Depression, charitable giving was at 3.2%. In 1995 it was still at 3%. By 2004, however, when Americans were over 500% wealthier than those living during the Great Depression (figures adjusted for taxes and inflation), charitable giving among Protestants dropped to 2.5% of income. Like many of you, my siblings and I were raised in a modest home, with parents of modest means, and with friends

Our parents were no strangers to need in the 30s and 40s, yet these folks built exceptional churches and Christian schools.

whose families mirrored my experience. Our parents were no strangers to need in the 30s and 40s, yet these folks built exceptional churches and Christian schools. Today we live in beautiful homes, while our churches and schools struggle to provide adequate facilities for their ministries.

The Christian community a generation or two ago was characterized more by John Wesley's approach to resources. He said, "Gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can because all that we have is given to us by God, and since we have been entrusted with these possessions, we are responsible to use them in ways that bring Him glory." Wesley summarizes a biblical model of stewardship.

This stewardship model seems to have given way to a philanthropy model which sees giving as a way of using *our* possessions to help others. The philanthropic model is humanistic, while the stewardship model has God at the center. The humanistic philanthropic model seeks to prosper society and its institutions, while the stewardship model advocates generosity as a way of seeking first the kingdom of God. In other words, for the Christian, our stewardly giving is a reflection of our hearts—"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt 6:21).

Giving is an act of worship. It is a matter of the heart. George Barna says the Christian should not give away 10%, but rather should surrender 100%. This is what Martin Luther meant when he said the Christian life involves a conversion of not only the head and heart, but also the purse. Giving is one of the vital signs of a healthy Christian life.

I hope Mid-America's approach to encouraging you to support our work of preparing the next generation of pastors has been stewardly rather than philanthropic. I hope we have encouraged you to give from your heart rather than for some pragmatic reason. We continue to need the financial support of God's people, especially now as contributions to our work are down significantly. Will you give a gift that expresses the gratitude of your heart for the gift of Christ and His Word that teaches, rebukes, corrects and trains us in righteousness so that we may be equipped for every good work?



Board Report

At the Board of Trustees meeting held on May 14 & 15, Rev. Wybren Oord, on behalf of the Board, thanked Mr. Harry Van Gorp and Rev. Bruce Hollister for their years of service on the Board.

The Board conducted reappointment interviews and unanimously reappointed to four-year terms Dr. Cornel Venema as President and Professor of Doctrinal Studies, Prof. Mark Vander Hart as Associate Professor of Old Testament Studies, and Prof. Alan Strange as Associate Professor of Church History.

While conducting exit interviews with graduating seniors, Board members were encouraged by their candor regarding their Mid-America experience.

Board nominees were approved for voting by the society (ballot enclosed).

The Board received Rev. Alrick Headley's resignation and appointed Rev. Ron Scheuers to fill the two-year term.

Development Director Keith LeMahieu reported on a new class and his continuing development work. Although giving is somewhat down, we still see God's hand in providing for our needs.

The financial report was discussed and a new budget was approved with a one percent increase over last year. The Finance Committee and the administration are being good stewards in these uncertain economic times.

The Board discussed increasing Seminary visibility and attracting students as well as making educational offerings more accessible to the broader community.

CHANGEeffects gave an interesting presentation on how it is helping the Seminary develop an identity and materials for promotion not only to prospective students, but also to churches, colleges, and the Reformed community. This has exciting potential.

-submitted by Mr. Paul Anema,
Board Secretary

Commencement 2009

At Mid-America's 24th Annual Commencement, Seminary friends and family members celebrated God's continuing faithfulness and this milestone in graduates' lives. The Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree was conferred on six men who have completed their seminary education and will enter full-time ministry. Graduates are: Michael Bentley, Simon Lievaart, Peter Lindstrom, Chris Moulton, Zechariah Schiebout, and Gary Zekveld.

Rev. Patrick Edouard of Covenant Reformed Church (URCNA) in Pella, IA, spoke from Colossians 2:8-10 on "The Minister's Completeness in Christ."

He told graduates that although the journey toward learning will never be complete, their faith, message, and spiritual reservoir were already complete in Christ.

Rev. Edouard encouraged graduates to remain faithful, saying, "Never alter that completeness in order to accommodate the spirit of the age."

Dr. Cornel Venema, President of the Seminary, gave the charge to the graduates using 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 as his text.

He urged each graduate to remember his identity, task, and "final examination."

The graduate's identity will be as a pastor who is a servant of Christ and a "steward"

of the gospel. The pastor's task is to be a faithful steward who preserves and proclaims this gospel. As a steward of Christ, each man's "final examination" will be when he must ultimately answer to and be judged by Christ.

Other participants in the ceremony were Prof. Strange, who led in prayer, Prof. Vander Hart, who led the reciting of the Nicene Creed, Dr. Beach, who led the

reading of a litany, and Dr. Kloosterman, who introduced the speaker.

Adjunct professors Brian Allred and Charles Telfer were with the faculty. Dr. Peter Wallace was unable to attend.

A time of refreshment and fellowship followed the ceremony.



Mid-America's 24th Annual Commencement:
Michael Bentley, Simon Lievaart, Zechariah Schiebout, Rev. Patrick Edouard (speaker),
Peter Lindstrom, Gary Zekveld, Chris Moulton

Summer Assignments

Summer service is a wonderful way for students to immerse themselves in practical aspects of ministry and for churches to benefit from seminarian assistance and expertise. Most assignments are for ten weeks. Students, assignments, and supervising pastors are:

Brian Blummer - First Reformed Church; Lansing, IL - Rev. Ken Kuiper

Richard Bultje - Bethel United Reformed Church; Calgary, AB - Rev. Joel Vander Kooi

Corey Dykstra - Providence United Reformed Church; Strathroy, ON - Rev. Harry Zekveld

Jimmy John Hall - Covenant Reformed Church in the US; Sacramento, CA - Dr. Frank Walker

Curtis Moleterno - Calvary OPC; Boardwalk Chapel; Wildwood, NJ - Rev. Jim Zozarro

Joseph P. Mosley - Immanuel United Reformed Church; DeMotte, IN - Rev. Tom Wetselaar

Jephthah Nobel - Zion United Reformed Church; Sheffield, ON - Rev. Christo Heiberg

Erik Stolte - Lynwood United Reformed Church; Lynwood, IL - Rev. Keith Davis

Matthew Van Dyken - Orthodox Reformed Church (URCNA); Edmonton, AB - Rev. Bill Pols

Aaron Verhoef - Reformed Bible Church (URCNA); Pompton Plains, NJ - Rev. Rich Kuiken, Rev. Dale VanDyke

Steven Williamson - Bethel URC (with Associate Reformed Presbyterian); Woodstock, ON - Rev. Greg Bylsma



Preaching Forum

Christ and Christians: Moving from Text to Sermon



An April 13 & 14 forum on preaching scriptural narrative, "Christ and Christians: Moving from Text to Sermon," was initiated and sponsored by Mid-America's students.

"The students find preaching the narrative materials of the Bible to be a special challenge," says Dr. Beach, "especially how to keep the focus on Christ and to treat these materials in a way that avoids simplistic moralism, but is robustly practical in application for today."

Three professors presented material, primarily sermons, demonstrating exegetical issues that emerge in biblical narrative. Dr. Beach (Judges 14), Dr. Kloosterman (Acts 6:1-7), and Prof. Vander Hart (Joshua 2) encouraged students to consider the centrality of Christ and application to believers' lives while examining the text in its context.

Although students receive excellent classroom instruction from professors, they rarely hear professors apply that instruction by preaching sermons. Students appreciated the edification of the exposition as well as the direction in using proper methods for keeping such sermons on track by preaching God's grace to believers in Christ.

Korean Pastors Conference

On Thursday, April 30, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Mid-America hosted a number of Korean pastors and their wives who are serving churches in the broader Chicagoland area. With the assistance of Dr. John Kim, these Korean-language ministers were introduced to the curriculum and programs at Mid-America, with a view to making available to these brothers and sisters the instruction and services of the Seminary.

After welcoming these guests to a special chapel service, the various members of the faculty introduced the courses that they

teach and provided an explanation of the theological curriculum and orientation of the Seminary's degree programs. A number of helpful questions provided further opportunity to showcase the resources available through the Seminary, including a growing number of digital and audio-visual resources, as well as an expanding library collection.



Pastors and wives from several local Korean congregations participate with students in a chapel service at Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

Awards

Two graduating seniors swept the academic awards this year. At the closing convocation on May 6, Gary Zekveld and Zechariah Schiebout each received two academic awards. Mr. Zekveld received awards in Ecclesiastical Studies and Doctrinal Studies, while Mr. Schiebout received awards in Biblical Studies and Ministerial Studies.



The Messenger
is published bi-monthly by
Mid-America Reformed Seminary
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