

the messenger

Mid-America Reformed Seminary

An Interview with Dr. Berry by Kelvin Tiemstra



How would you describe what you do?

So what I do is I try to use the skills and abilities that I learned in medical school and residency, and have developed through experience, to help people have a greater degree of mental health and stop them from using drugs and alcohol. And I do that both through treating patients directly at a very large patient practice, teaching medical students and residents, and doing some research into doing that more effectively.

How does your faith in Christ intersect with and inform your work in behavioral medicine?

One of the things that attracted me to working with addiction in the first place was that, in working with these people, it was almost like seeing sin incarnate, in that we can't hide from the destruction that the substance use has caused in this person's life. So it really forced me to confront the nature of our fallen world in very real ways, and also forced me to confront my own fallen nature and the sins I struggle with. And at the same time it gave me a degree of hope, in the sense that I saw these people get better.

And with addiction specifically there has been an historic spiritual connotation to the treatment, such as in the 12 step programs. Unlike in some of the other areas of medicine, people would often talk about the problem in spiritual terms and be open to spiritual solutions in ways that I didn't see in other areas of medicine. As a Christian I found that very attractive.

At the end of the day, whatever they have done they are made in the image of God, and they have value, and so I am going to look at them as somebody who is absolutely redeemable where a lot of people would not give them the time of day. So I pray for them and try to have a space where I can be non-judgemental and help them move through recovery.

What are the most pressing issues that impact the work you do on a daily basis?

Recognizing my limitations. Recognizing that I can't change anybody, I realized early on in my career that if I felt that their life and their health depended on me that I was going to get burned out real quickly. So one of the things I learned early on was to remind myself that I am not God - all I can do is offer the tools that I have learned through my training and experience. But at the end of the day, I get to go home and not take them with me. I get to enjoy my family and my life and my church, and let them be responsible for the decisions that they made.

What should the Christian understand about addiction?

I think that the Christian should understand that it is a disease. However that needs to be tempered by the reality that it is not just a brain problem. There's biological, social, and spiritual manifestations of this disease, and for the Christian, they should consider each of those domains when they are thinking about how best to treat somebody.

Spring Conference Report by Cristian Garcia

"Understanding the Insanity of Addiction" was the title of the conference held at MARS by Dr. James Berry. The conference was a very interesting experience for attendants as well as for Dr. Berry himself who was speaking for the first time to a Christian audience.

Dr. Berry focused on four areas: a description of the current epidemic problem, introduction to the disease model of addiction, delineating the spectrum of care, and offering Christian considerations.

On the description of the current epidemic problem, Dr. Berry emphasized the present problem of addiction. The leading cause of death in the US is addiction to different opioids (approx. 70,237 deaths just in 2017), surprisingly due to the prescription of pain pills.

In introducing the disease model of addiction, Dr. Berry identified three aspects that can develop an addiction: psychological, social and biological aspects. A deficiency in any of these three aspects can mean that the person is moving towards a development of addiction. How people are raised, the environment in which they grew up, and genetic dispositions can be a trigger to addiction.

In delineating the spectrum of care, Dr. Berry offered a wide range of care treatments that usually are offered to persons with addictions. The first step of treatment is, of course, acceptance of the problem of addiction. Dr. Berry also offered some examples of treatments available to people dealing with addiction in the three areas mentioned above.

Finally, Dr. Berry's Christian considerations presented the audience with four images found in Scripture:

1. Incarnation: God is with us
2. The cross: He suffered for us
3. Resurrection: God transforms our suffering into something beyond suffering
4. Feast: God has promised us that we will dwell in eternity with Him.

After the talks some of the attendants were able to have a time of Q&A addressing different concerns.

The President's Message: "Unable to Do Any Saving Good"

by Dr. Cornelis P. Venema



"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:1)

When you read the Canons of Dort, you will immediately notice that the third and fourth main points of doctrine are treated together (the fourth main point treats the doctrine of "effectual calling" by the regenerating and converting ministry of the Holy Spirit). This is so for an obvious reason. How you understand the plight of fallen sinners has everything to do with the way you understand God's saving work. If sinners are simply wounded or spiritually sick, but not wholly dead, they will not require an amazing work of God's intervening grace in Christ. Nothing less than spiritual rebirth, resurrection from death to life, and new creation will do. It does not take the same kind of work to resuscitate someone whose pulse is

weak and whose breath is short, as it does to grant new life to a dead corpse.

In conformity to the language the apostle Paul uses in Ephesians 2:1-3, the third main point of the Canons starkly portrays the dire condition of fallen sinners.

[A]ll people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin; without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform. (Art. 3)

In this article, the Canons echo the Scriptural diagnosis of the depravity of all fallen sinners in Adam. By virtue of the original sin of Adam, as well their own actual sinfulness, sinners are spiritually lifeless or dead, unable to discern the truth of God's Word, unwilling to seek God and embrace the promises of the gospel, hostile or at enmity toward God, and subject to the tyranny of the devil, the world, and their own sinful flesh (Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 2:13; John 3:19; Rom. 6:22; 8:7-8; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 4:17-19).

The main burden of the Canons in this third point is to show that fallen sinners are incapable of doing any saving good. Though some sinners may be more depraved than others, they are all unable to contribute anything to their salvation by what they know through the "light of nature" (Art. 4) or what they do in obedience to the law of God (Art. 5). Only God's grace in Christ, which becomes beneficial to our salvation through the invincible work of the Holy Spirit, can save any lost sinner.

While the Arminian or Remonstrant teaching regarding the lost condition of fallen sinners was similar to that of the Canons (both parties opposed Pelagianism or the teaching that sinners can do what is required of them to be saved without a prior working of God's grace), we will see in a following article that the differences between them became most obvious in the way they viewed the work of God's grace in granting sinners faith and repentance in response to the call of the gospel. For our purpose here, we need only recognize that, if lost sinners are truly dead in trespasses and sins, they require a gracious work of God that is truly and effectively saving.

J. I. Packer expresses this point well:

For to Calvinism there is really only *one* point to be made in the field of soteriology [the doctrine of salvation]: the point that *God saves sinners*. *God*—the Triune Jehovah, Father, Son and Spirit; three Persons working together in sovereign wisdom, power and love to achieve the salvation of a chosen people, the Father electing, the Son fulfilling the Father's will by redeeming, the Spirit executing the purpose of Father and Son by renewing. *Saves*—does everything, first to last, that is involved in bringing man from death in sin to life in glory; plans, achieves and communicates redemption, calls and keeps, justifies, sanctifies, glorifies. *Sinners*—men as God finds them, guilty, vile, helpless, powerless, unable to lift a finger to do God's will or better their spiritual lot.

The point is also made in a familiar hymn: "Amazing Grace! how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see." No matter how great my sin, greater still is God's grace toward His own in Christ.

The Last Quarter

by Mike Deckinga

In our February edition of *The Messenger*, I had the privilege of updating you on our year-to-date financial figures. Through a series of graphs, I sought to shed light on the discrepancy we are experiencing between the budgeted needs of our institution versus the actual revenue we have realized through contributions.

In this article, I hope to accomplish the same thing (sans graphs).

We are in the last quarter of our fiscal year. In other words, we are in the home stretch. We are in a critical moment, financially speaking. Although this past February was the strongest February for contributions in the last 4 years, we still have come up short of our need. U.S. donations increased by 10%, and Canadian donations decreased by 15%. That said, we were able to receive the full \$44,000 grant from the Canadian Foundation, which is an excellent thing. The overall impact on our revenue is this: the Canadian Foundation is \$104,080 behind budget, and U.S. gifts are behind budget by \$22,468, for a *combined budget shortfall of \$136,548*.

What does this mean? While available cash is sufficient for now, if this keeps up, it won't be available later. The spring and summer months are usually the most lean. We rely so heavily on strong December donations to carry us through. Since calendar year-end donations did not propel us to a place of overall financial strength, we are looking at the prospect of running out of resources in the next few months.

I humbly ask that you consider a gift to the Seminary's General Fund. To those of you who have contributed already – *Thank You!* You gift has helped sustain this institution and provide for the needs of our students. We appreciate so much the investments you have made towards the advancement of our Lord's kingdom. Would you please consider an additional gift *regardless of size* this month? To those who have been following our work, as well as our financial position, but have not been yet able or desirous to help, I invite you to participate! *Any gift – regardless of size – will bring us one step closer to honoring our financial commitments this year.*

We really need your help.

Questions or comments can be directed to mdeckinga@midamerica.edu.

Our Graduates by Jared Luttjeboer

We thank God for the hard work of these students and pray for them as they go on to new places and ministry. On May 9, at 7:30 pm at Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Lansing, IL, Mid-America will graduate the following nine students.

After graduation, **Andrew Pinson** and his wife Zyra (who is expecting), along with son Aiden, plan to head back to the Phoenix area and reunite with the United Reformed Church there. In Phoenix, Andrew plans “to continue as a student in the school of Christ and lean on Him for guidance as He molds” him in Kingdom work.

Andrew is grateful that he has grown in his understanding of Christ’s love for him. Furthermore, the professors at Mid-America, in their different ways, have shown Andrew what it means to follow Christ and to point the students to Christ and his work.

Ryan Swale hopes to serve as a minister in the United Reformed Churches (URCNA) upon graduation. Along with his wife, Caroline, Ryan is especially grateful for the practical training Mid-America provided for him – namely, the preaching opportunities through the Ministerial Apprenticeship Program (MAP), the mentorship of professors, and their pastoral perspective as those who have served in pastoral ministry themselves. Ryan and Caroline have an (almost) two-year old son named Ezra, with another son on the way.

Lord willing, **Nathaniel Rademaker** and his family (wife, Sharon, and six children with one on the way) will be returning to his home county of New Zealand in July of this year in order to start a vicariate (in his words, “essentially a year-long internship under a senior minister in our denomination,” that being the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.) During the vicariate he will be attending his candidacy and ordination exams.

Nathaniel is grateful for all the professors of Mid-America for the way in which they have taught him. “All the courses are essential for the ministry, but the courses that have really shaped my thinking the most would have to be the doctrinal and exegesis classes. These are essential to biblically Reformed preaching.” Nathaniel remarks that the Lord has been good to him and his family while attending school here in the United States, and comments that “I could not have undertaken this journey without the love and support of my wife and children.”

One of our Canadian graduates, **Kelvin Tiemstra**, also hopes to be serving in the URCNA subsequent to graduation. To that end, he intends to seek candidacy, as well as, Lord willing, serve as an intern after graduation to gain more pastoral experience. One thing he is appreciative of during his time here at Mid-America is the accessibility and knowledge of faculty. Having small class sizes “really helped in building relationships with professors, as well as fellow students.” Kelvin is also thankful for the summer internships available through MAP. “The internships really helped to solidify the concepts learned in class,” wherein the close comradery of faculty and student during lectures will prove to be a useful resource for years to come. Kelvin recently got married to his wife, Emily, in the summer of 2018.

Pittsburgh native **Jonathan Key** anticipates finding a yearlong, pastoral internship and pursuing licensure to preach in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). Jonathan is “currently waiting on God to make the time and location of that next step in” his life clearer. He is grateful for the time and care that the faculty and staff have invested in his life. He says not “only did I receive training and preparation in the Reformed faith, but they helped me to grow as a Christian in unique, tremendous ways.” Jonathan will marry his fiancée, Lorissa Haveman, late June.

Nathan Voss, from the Chicago region, expects to attend Calvin Seminary for one semester this fall in order to pursue ordination within the Christian Reformed Church. His desire is to serve the church as a Minister of the Word and “to shepherd a congregation in standing upon the authority of God’s Word.” One aspect of his seminary education that he is most grateful for is the theology that is put into practice. He says it “was a blessing to not only learn God’s Word and increase in knowledge but learning how to apply that knowledge to my own life and to that of the church.”

In the more immediate future, **Bryce De Zwarte** aims to intern in a church over the summer while preparing for candidacy in the Fall. “If all goes well in that examination, I pray that the Lord will grant me a call to a local church in the United Reformed Churches in North America.” Bryce is grateful for the way in which the professors in each of the courses applied the content of their theological fields to the pastoral ministry and how they have emphasized that “what we believe concerning Christ and His Kingdom should reorient the believer in every area of life.”

Another one of our graduating Canadian students, **John Ysinga**, hopes to take his candidacy exam in the URC in Classis Southwestern Ontario in the fall of this year and then look for a call to a full-time ministerial position in the United Reformed Churches in North America. John was greatly appreciative of the proper mix of theological expertise and a firm grasp of real world pastoral life and situations, and “love for the members of congregations that the faculty at Mid America exhibit.”

After graduation, **Jonatan Azpilcueta** will be doing an internship and, when finished, plans on doing his ordination and licensure exams in the PCA. He says if “this is God’s will, my goal is to preach Christ faithfully in a pulpit,” and also to be a good husband to his wife Linda, and father to his three children, “reflecting to them the love and grace that has been given to me at the cross.” During seminary, Jonatan had the privilege of seeing how his professors exemplified great wisdom and humble hearts, as well as the love of Christ and the training to preach about His love to others.



*Back row (left to right): Bryce DeZwarte, Andrew Pinson, Nathan Voss, John Ysinga, Nathaniel Rademaker;
Front (left to right): Jonathan Key, Kelvin Tiemstra, Jonatan Azpilcueta, Ryan Swale*



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◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

Vander Hart in Myanmar

by Rev. Mark Vander Hart



*Rev. Mark Vander Hart with
alumnus Rev. David Khobal*

I had the privilege of traveling (February 1-11) to Yangon, Myanmar, to speak at Biblical Reformed Seminary (BRS). The Seminary is led by Mid-America alumnus, Rev. David Khobal. The Union of Myanmar is the name of the country formerly called Burma, a country that is comprised of many different tribal and lin-

guistic groups. The religion of the majority of Myanmar's people is Buddhist, but there are significant numbers of Christians and Muslims.

The time difference between here (Dyer, Indiana) and Yangon is 12 hours, 30 minutes (ahead of us!). This meant long times on an airplane! February is "winter," which meant sunny days, no rain, and temperature highs in the low 90s F (low 30s, Celsius). Yangon has changed a great deal since my last teaching trip there in 1999. The infrastructure has improved: more hotels, restaurants, better roads, less air pollution, etc.

I was invited to give 21 lectures on liturgics, the doctrine of Christian worship, at the Seminary's "Festival of Life." The lectures covered Old Testament and New Testament teachings and practices of worship, the history of Christian worship from the early church until modern times, and some cur-

rent worship practices. The audience was comprised of pastors and church planters from several parts of Myanmar, along with some BRS students and spouses. Those in attendance can carry back to their villages and congregations a better understanding of how God is to be worshiped, not according to our feelings or intentions, but as revealed in His Word.

Saturday, February 9, was graduation day for BRS! Fifteen students graduated from the Seminary. I addressed the graduates and others present with the challenge of Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus' great 'dominion commission.' We are called to make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them and teaching them to observe everything that He commanded us. This challenge is great, but the risen Jesus Christ, King of all, promises to be with His church until the end!