

## Exploring Educational Ministry to Prisoners



*Mr. Hoekstra, Mr. Hoek, and Dr. Kloosterman*

### Ministry at the Gate

Of the 700,000 prisoners released each year, 10% are Christians. That statistic, in light of biblical injunctions to care for those of the household of faith, prompted Immanuel URC's consistory to adopt a post-prison acclimation ministry.

Jon Hoek, clerk of Immanuel's council and coordinator of the church's prison ministries, notes that thousands of ministries conduct Bible studies and worship services in the correctional system, but very few minister to Christians after their release. A prisoner becomes a baby Christian, but the "baby" is abandoned at the gate.

Released prisoners often are overlooked and overwhelmed. The thoughtful application of Reformed doctrine demands ministry to released believers.

"This is low hanging fruit that is falling to the ground," says Mr. Hoek. "If we don't do it, Islam and the cults will," he adds, noting that as visitors left after Mid-America's presentation, an Islamic prayer mat was being spread on the floor.

While the contemporary church utilizes gimmicks to attract "seekers," believers in prison hunger for the solid teaching of the Reformed faith. They have read the Bible, but they need to learn how its parts fit into the unified gospel.

"These men don't want watered-down religion," Mr. Hoek says, "they are asking for systematic theology."

Dr. Nelson Kloosterman and Rev. Mark Vander Hart were part of a group that visited the Danville Correctional Center in Danville, IL, on March 6. Their purpose was to explore the possibility of Mid-America offering to inmates theological education via distance learning. The professors were accompanied by members of Immanuel URC in Demotte, IN, including Mr. Don Hoekstra and Mr. Jon Hoek, who are active in the church's prison ministry. Joining the group at the site were Rev. Manny Mill, Executive Director of Koinonia House National Ministries (which focuses primarily on post-prison acclimation), and Senator Randy Hultgren, Illinois State Senator representing the Wheaton district (who is a Christian committed to prison reform).

Rev. Vander Hart presented the "perfections of Scripture," describing the broad biblical storyline (creation, fall, redemption, new creation), and how Christ is found in all the Old Testament. He briefly summarized the types of biblical studies on which seminary education focuses.

Dr. Kloosterman then explained what is involved in the three other divisions of seminary study: ecclesiastical studies, doctrinal studies, and ministerial studies.

Rev. Vander Hart says, "The audience of men, including the prison chaplain and about 40-50 prisoners, responded very enthusiastically." He adds, "Some of them asked, 'When can we start?'"

Mid-America hopes to explore how a seminary style educational program might lead to some type of certificate of studies.

"We concluded that this was a very positive experience," says Rev. Vander Hart, "extremely challenging in terms of what the prisoners desire over against the

logistics of putting in place an adequate and comprehensive program that will enable qualified men to serve the cause of God's kingdom and the gospel of Christ."

Churches may recognize trained men as workers; perhaps some men would eventually become pastors. Mid-America hopes to explore the issue further by looking at models of similar programs within the correctional system.

Dr. Kloosterman relates that since a recent Board meeting included "significant discussion" about Mid-America offering its excellent training in broader service to the church, "this invitation seemed a natural and providential opportunity to explore doing just that."

Mr. Hoek sees the goal of providing inmates with a solid Reformed foundation as twofold: it would enable Christian inmates to stand firm in the face of false teaching rampant within the correctional system, and it would equip released prisoners to live within a church and community as mature Christians.

"The discussion is not primarily about evangelism," he says, "but about caring for elect brothers and sisters in Christ."

"As the church 'outside' the prison walls becomes more aware of the church 'inside,'" says Dr. Kloosterman, "the time is ripe for visionary thinking about providing within the prison system church leadership training, Christian discipling, and personal formation through biblical instruction. This could become a significant mission field of service."





# Development Report



## “Do Not Be Anxious”

by Keith LeMahieu

*Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on (Matthew 6:25a).*

It has become more difficult in the past year to heed Christ's admonition to “not be anxious.” If your nest egg is invested in a vehicle that has historically yielded a reasonable return, you have probably seen as much as 50% of that investment evaporate, and signs for a quick economic turnaround are not encouraging. It is easy to be anxious, and our anxiety influences how we think about money.

In our anxiety, we naturally assume a defensive position. We've all heard the metaphor about “circling the wagons.” Circling our personal financial wagons usually means that

we postpone a major purchase or we cut back on our normal financial activity. It often means we also reign in our charitable giving, especially if charitable giving is coming from discretionary income. It seems common sense that when discretionary income decreases (or when one worries it *may* decrease), discretionary expenditures decrease also.

It's easy to be faithful when times are good, but the real test of our faithfulness comes in difficult times.

The present economic calamity we are facing has had a dramatic impact on organizations that depend on charitable giving. Mid-America Reformed Seminary is no exception. We are seeing a rather stark decrease in charitable giving to the Seminary, which is quickly depleting reserve funds used to provide a financial cushion when our income does not meet our expenses. Our budget deficit from giving to the general fund is quite significant. To avoid a serious financial problem we need to increase our revenue in the spring and summer months. If we don't, our “rainy day” fund will likely be depleted.

Mid-America has always operated on a very sparing budget. In May, our Board of Trustees will likely approve a new budget (which begins in July) with little or no increase. This budget includes no cost of living increase for Mid-America faculty and staff. We believe this is prudent given present economic realities. But as much as we cut our budget to the bone, we still need your help. Please don't “circle the wagons” when it comes to giving to your church or to the work of preparing men to shepherd the church. It's easy to be faithful when times are good, but the real test of our faithfulness comes in difficult times. How will we score on this test? Can you resolve to make the preparation of spiritual shepherds a priority so that this important work will continue?

*Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matthew 6:31-33).*



## Visit Mid-America!

Colleges with students interested in education at Mid-America may want to plan a group visit to the Seminary.

A group from Providence Christian College in Ontario, CA, recently visited the Seminary. The above picture, taken in front of the Chicago skyline, shows (L-R): Tim Scheuers (junior), Jeff Munive (sophomore), Dr. Scott Swanson (Assistant Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies), Clay Smith (junior), and Aaron Hodson (senior).

The guests arrived on a Monday evening. To get a first-hand feel for the Seminary experience, they attended classes on Tuesday morning. They experienced the camaraderie of the Seminary community during lunch with faculty and staff. In the afternoon, they met with members of the faculty and administration in the chapel. They learned about admission requirements and prerequisites as well as the different academic aspects of a seminary education and the practical issues involved in attending seminary, such as financial aid and housing. Any questions or concerns raised by the students were answered and addressed.

Before returning home on Wednesday, the group visited the Museum of Science and Industry, feasted on Chicago style deep dish pizza, and took a driving tour through the city of Chicago.

If you are interested in planning a group visit to Mid-America, please contact Keith LeMahieu, Director of Development: 219-864-2400 or 888-440-6277, ext. 102, or [klemahieu@midamerica.edu](mailto:klemahieu@midamerica.edu).

Friends of the Seminary are cordially invited to its 24th Annual Commencement  
May 15, 2009  
7:30 p.m.  
Calvary Community Church  
16341 South Park Ave.  
South Holland, IL.





# Seniors Anticipate Service

After three busy years of classroom instruction and pastoral experience, six seniors hope to graduate on May 15 and anticipate being called to kingdom service as ministers of the Word and sacraments in Christ's church.

## Michael Bentley

Michael worked for 14 years as a graphic designer before seminary and has done graphic design for churches and businesses while attending seminary.

Michael and Stacy's children are Adam (9), Katie (7), Anna (4), and newborn Samuel. Michael seeks ordination in the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Michael appreciates the faculty's "relentless dedication" to "the Church and their task to train men to lead it."

He also has learned from his fellow students: "I will miss their humor, their devotion, and their company."

"We leave here not as men who have simply wrestled with books," he says, but as men who have wrestled with our faith and emerged with a reverence for Christ and the office of pastor."

## Simon Lievaart

Simon is from Alberta and attended Redeemer University College in Ontario. During college, he gained an "interest and passion" for theology and missions.

He and Jodi have a son, Joash (2). Simon seeks ordination in the United Reformed Churches in North America.

What stands out about his Mid-America experience is "the joy of learning."

"There is a wealth of knowledge placed before us," he says. "The well of theology runs so deep that we never reached the bottom on every issue. The Scriptures are a mine so filled with precious stones that there is much left to discover. At Mid-America, my eyes were opened to how deep and wide, how beautiful is the unspeakable gift of salvation in Jesus Christ."

## Peter Lindstrom

Peter taught for 15 years at Christian Liberty Academy, in Arlington Heights, IL, before being led to Mid-America by a desire to study under "godly and Reformed men who are serving in churches and have a passion for training men to be heralds of His Word."

"God has used the Seminary to develop my thinking to interact pastorally with the culture in light of God's Word," he says. "I hope to serve a church in which God calls me to teach and lead faithfully His people."

Peter and his wife, Callie, and their children—Lonna (10), Elijah (9), Audrey (8), Paul (6), Isaac (4), Baruch (2), and Julia (1 mo)—are members of Covenant Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Hammond, IN.

## Chris Moulton

Chris taught for 16 years before seminary. He and Carole have four adult daughters and several grandchildren. They are from Emmanuel URC in Hanford, CA.

He says, "I have a heart and passion for evangelism so I prayerfully desire to be in a church that lends itself to the same."

"I wish my heart and mind could retain every word that was taught in class and read during our three years at Mid-America," he says, "but even though my memory is faulty and my understanding is far from perfect, the knowledge gained is much higher than I, or any of us, ever deserves. My prayer is that God will use it to His glory to minister to His people."

## Zechariah Schiebout

Zech and Rachelle have two daughters: Miriam (2) and Abigail (10 mos). He was an electrician for five years before attending seminary and has done some electrical work during his seminary career. His home congregation is Covenant Reformed Church in Pella, IA, and he



Class of 2009 (L-R): Gary Zekveld, Michael Bentley, Zechariah Schiebout, Simon Lievaart, Peter Lindstrom, Chris Moulton

seeks ordination in the United Reformed Churches in North America.

Zech appreciates the humility and "servanthood" emphasis of Mid-America's faculty, Board of Trustees, and staff.

"Their first ambition is not to be widely published, acclaimed, or exalted, but to serve today's and tomorrow's church through faithful teaching, preaching, and godly living," he says. He also values the Seminary's "broad, Reformed perspective," which is not limited in ecclesiastical expression, but stresses "Reformed tradition as a whole."

## Gary Zekveld

Gary is from Covenant Christian Church, Wyoming, ON, where he will intern this summer before seeking ordination in the United Reformed Churches in North America.

He and Hannah were married on January 17, 2009.

Gary felt led toward ministry during high school and college, and he became convinced while volunteering for a year at Hope Centre in Toronto, ON.

While expressing his gratitude for Mid-America's "emphasis on well-rounded, Christ-centered preaching," Gary appreciates many other aspects about the Seminary, such as "the small student body, relaxed atmosphere, and close communication with the professors; the constant challenge to critically engage a diversity of authors and theologians; and the professors' evident and contagious love for Jesus Christ, His Word, and His Church."



## New students this term

Two students began studies at Mid-America this semester; one a recent college graduate new to the Seminary and the other a former missionary who previously attended Mid-America.

Andrew De Young graduated from Trinity Christian College in December with a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration. Although he entered

Mid-America's Annual Spring Evening Class will feature Rev. Mark Vander Hart teaching on the book of Job. Sessions will be held at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 2, 9, 16, and 23. Cost is \$10. To register, please call the Seminary at 219.864.2400 or register via email at [registration@midamerica.edu](mailto:registration@midamerica.edu).

college with the goal of a banking career, he was increasingly led toward ministry, particularly during a theology class on the books of Acts through Revelation.

"I always had an interest in theology," he says, "which led me to a theology minor in college. Through the many classes to fulfill my minor, I felt God pointing me in the direction of the pastorate."

Andrew is from Orland Park, IL, and a member of Trinity Lutheran Church (Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod) in Tinley Park, IL.

Roberto Rossi is a familiar face to many of the staff and faculty. He studied summer Greek and attended classes at Mid-America a few years ago, but left to pursue ministry opportunities, including two years of mission work in Ukraine.

Roberto first heard the gospel while attending a Reformed church about 13



*Roberto Rossi and Andrew DeYoung began studies this term.*

years ago, and God filled him with a passion for full time Christian ministry.

Roberto graduated from Moody Bible Institute in 2003 and served as youth director at Crete Reformed Church in Crete, IL. He and Carrie have two children: Matteo (6) and Lydia (3).

"I love Mid-America," he says. "The faculty is incredible. They are very personable and desire to see the students grow in Christ and His Word. They have pastoral hearts; yet their scholarship is exemplary."



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Tel: 219-864-2400  
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Mid-America Reformed  
Seminary Association  
229 Seminary Drive  
Dyer, Indiana 46311-1069

