

THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

The Couperus Family: Eight Suitcases and Faith by Glenda Mathes



*Albert & Hanneke Couperus with their daughters,
Michaela, Grace, Kate & Zara*

worked for 16 years as a physical therapist. In God's providence, the family sold their home—despite a depressed market—and obtained most of the necessary funding within three weeks of being accepted for study.

Albert's longtime desire for ministry had increased over the last couple of years. After seeking confirmation from family, friends, and church leaders, the Couperus family decided to pursue seminary training. "We chose Mid-America with the blessing of our session. It felt like the best fit for us, and we follow in the footsteps of two Kiwis who were recent students: Andre Holtslag and Erik Stolte. They were both very instrumental in us attending here."

"I see Mid-America as one of the seminaries in partnership with our churches back home to train and test men in preparation for pastoral ministry," he adds. "We now have five Mid-America alumni serving in the RCNZ, so it is definitely a relationship that is growing."

Although language is not a barrier, the family finds many things very different. "Everything seems bigger here, from food portion sizes to the traffic," says Albert. "It's also a lot hotter, and I'm told that winter will be a lot colder, but the girls are very excited about the prospect of snow and we are enjoying the experience."

Albert's aim for his seminary education is "to put down as deep roots as possible into God's Word." Lord willing, he hopes to eventually serve in the RCNZ.

"The Lord has continued to blaze a path forward for us," he says. "We have heard many stories how paperwork and administration can tie up people in the US, but we have not really experienced this. It is very obvious that this is where the Lord wishes us to serve Him at present."



A group of New Zealand pastors and their wives

When the Albert Couperus family arrived in the US, they carried only eight suitcases. But they thank God for His provision. "We have been provided with a lovely house to rent, and basically all our furnishings have been donated," says Albert. "We have been blown away by the generosity of God's people here. The Seminary has been absolutely fantastic in making us feel welcome!"

Albert and Hanneke have four daughters: Michaela (10), Grace (9), Kate (6), and Zara (4). They are from the Reformed Church of Wanganui (RCNZ), on the west coast of the North Island, New Zealand. Albert previously

Partnering with New Zealand

by Glenda Mathes

President Venema's New Zealand childhood formed Mid-America's longstanding ties to the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ). Those bonds strengthen as professors teach and alumni serve there, and as Kiwi students attend Mid-America.

"I believe the relationship is closer than ever," says Erik Stolte ('11), the second New Zealand student at the Seminary and now minister elect at the Reformed Church of Dunedin. Rev. Andre Holtslag ('07) was the first New Zealand student in 2004 and was ordained at the Reformed Church of Dovedale in 2008. Current student Albert Couperus is the third. Three additional alumni serve RCNZ congregations.

"I appreciate the warm, loving depth of our people," says Rev. Leo de Vos ('88), the first graduate to arrive when he became pastor of the Reformed Church of Wainuiomata shortly after 9/11 in 2001. "New Zealanders give sacrificially to the Lord and are generous to one another in loving service."

Rev. Peter Kloosterman ('99), pastor of the Reformed Church of Masterton since 2005, is grateful his seminary education focused on preaching as the means of grace. "God's grace is relevant and vital for the lives of God's people no matter where they live. Sin in different cultures has a different expression, but the grace of Christ is the same throughout."

Rev. Peter Moelker studied at Mid-America in the late 90s and was installed at the Reformed Church of Avondale in 2010. "Since both the RCNZ and Mid-America are involved in the great task of proclaiming the truth of Christ in a world that loves the lie, we cherish our partnership in the gospel."

Rev. Holtslag anticipates Dr. Venema's October visit to speak at Reformation conferences: "I hope his time here will be useful in further cementing ties between us."

Seminary Retreat

by Rev. Alan Strange

Every academic year starts with a retreat at a nearby lakeside retreat center. The purpose of such is to afford new students and their wives, whether first year or transfer students, opportunity to begin to get to know upperclassmen and their wives and for the community as a whole to hear a speaker on a theme appropriate for ministerial students. The retreat is on Tuesday of the first week of school, the day following New Student Orientation and Registration and before the first day of classes on Wednesday.

As we gathered this year at the retreat center, we enjoyed a day of great beauty and warmth. After the initial welcome and coffee time, and a devotional word brought by Rev. Strange, the student body broke up in groups according to counselor assignments. Each student is assigned a faculty counselor with whom he meets weekly for prayer, as well as at other times, as needed. Each group chose a spokesman who then introduced all in that group to the others. This is the first time for the community to come together in this way and the occasion usually abounds with humor and bonhomie.

The speaker for the day was Rev. Al Bezuyen, an alumnus of Mid-America and pastor of Trinity URC in St. Catharines, Ontario. Rev. Bezuyen gave two engaging talks on pastoral theology, particularly sharing with us some insights that he has gained as he has studied in that discipline recently at a Canadian university. Various recreational activities followed a delicious lunch, and the day was one enjoyed by all.



Summer Internships by Rev. Mark Vander Hart

During the summer most of the students are scattered around North America, serving in various Reformed and Presbyterian churches. This work is part of the field education that belongs to the Master of Divinity degree. This past summer fourteen students served in these churches that ranged from New Hampshire to California, Washington state to Ontario, from the American Midwest to Central America. This article will draw attention to two students who were out in summer assignments.



Brian Zegers, his wife Karen, and their three daughters were in the Toronto area. The New Horizons United Reformed Church was the church with which they were associated this summer (Rev. Mitch Persaud, pastor). Brian was very much involved in outreach to the large Muslim community of that area, a mission formally under the oversight of the Zion URC (Sheffield, Ontario).

Brian and Karen found that developing relationships of friendship with Muslims was very important. Building a bridge to Muslim people was preparatory to any type of discussion about religion and personal faith. Brian's interest in evangelism was strengthened by this involvement with Toronto-area Muslims. Such exposure this summer was invaluable.

Caleb and Erika Smith were in Vienna, Virginia, where Caleb served the Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The Smiths experienced something that few seminarians experience: they lived in the same house as one of the Grace OPC pastors. Rev. Dan Clifford and Rev. Chad van Dixhoorn (with whom Caleb and Erika lived) pastor the Grace congregation. The van Dixhoorn home was large enough so that each family had enough space!

Caleb's internship ran along rather traditional lines: leading worship, involvement with VBS, Bible studies, and pastoral care with a variety of people, sometimes in tragic situations. The Grace OPC internship is carefully structured in that it requires specific readings to be done and sees to it that the seminary student is exposed to the various parts of pastoral ministry. Caleb reports that this internship was very encouraging, all part of the necessary preparation for the office of minister and pastor.

Scholarship Recipients

Albert M. & Eleanor Rodenhouse Scholarship
Andrew Minatelli

Gerrit & Kathryn Schiebout Tuition Scholarship
Justin Beach
Josh DeWitt

Tuininga Scholarship
Joel de Leon

Roger Vander Veen Memorial Scholarship
Brian Zegers

Iowa Falls Foreign Student Scholarship
Pablo Landazuri

Kay Ribbens - Vogelzang Scholarship for International Students
Paul Austin

Russell E. Horton Ministerial Scholarship
Joel Worries

Carrie Van Surksun Venema Memorial Scholarship
Albert Couperus

Bartel Zandstra Memorial Scholarship
Tim Scheuers

Albert & Janet Vedders Memorial Scholarship
Jeff Scott

Nelson Sterken Memorial Scholarship
Roberto Rossi

Richard & Edna Darby Memorial Scholarship
Caleb Smith

8th Annual Golf Outing

Saturday, September 8 dawned clear and cool, with light breezes and temperatures rising to the low 70's – a perfect day for Mid-America's eighth annual golf outing. This year's outing was hosted by Lincoln Oaks Golf Course, a beautiful venue in Crete, IL. Mid-America was pleased by an increase in the total number of golfers and a record number of first-time participants.

The winning team for this year's outing consisted of Mid-America student Roberto Rossi playing with Lou Karr, Jamie Drew and Don Stienstra with an 8 under par 63. Each player received a \$75 Visa gift card. Coming in with a 7 under par score of 64 was the team of Grant Dykstra, Joel Worries, Rick Worries and Rich Tameling. The second place team received a \$50 gift card from Gus Bock's Ace Hardware.

There were six different competition holes this year. Darren De Boer won the longest drive competition. Mark La Reau's drive captured straightest drive honors. The longest putt was drained by Ed Stouwie, and Mid-America student Caleb Smith won for hitting a par 3 drive closest to the pin. Subaru of Merrillville donated a three-year lease on a new Subaru Legacy for any golfer who hit a hole-in-one, but once again none of this year's golfers claimed the prize. The classic longest drive was a new challenge added this year and was won by Paul Beezhold. To win this honor the golfers were required to hit their drive with a wooden driver manufactured 35 years ago.

Following the outing Mid-America provided a lunch to all the golfers. We thank the participants and all the generous sponsors for making this event possible. Mark your calendar for next year's outing scheduled for September 7, 2013.



Ageless Innovation by Keith Le Mahieu

The Wall Street Journal recently published an article by Dr. Russell D. Moore, Dean of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, entitled, "Student-Loan Debt and the Future of Seminaries: How Churches can Strengthen Their Recruitment of Ministers." Dr. Moore cites a study by Auburn Theological Seminary that finds ministerial students carry so much debt that many are unable to finish their studies or upon graduation are unable to live on the modest ministry salary they receive.

The heart of Dr. Moore's article is that "the sorts of questions raised by student debt and ministerial career instability may help reattach ministerial education to its real-world moorings: education with churches in mind, not just theology." He says, "Protestant communities must abandon the current system in which future pastors discern, almost in isolation, a call from God and then seek out training ad hoc." While Dr. Moore acknowledges there will always be those whom God calls to ministry as a "second career," he says the normative pattern is for churches to identify and mentor students from a young age who exhibit gifts and a calling for ministry. He further argues churches have a responsibility to guide these students to theologically solid and affordable preparation for ministry. The result is that churches would no longer have to rely solely on the current pool of unknown seminary graduates when seeking to call a pastor, and it would develop pastors who are "genuinely equipped to preach, counsel and lead."

Dr. Moore also argues that seminaries closely related to the church will be most likely to flourish while churches that show an interest in the preparation of students with ministry gifts will be more likely to support these students financially. In the process, congregational life will benefit from these relationships. In other words, the relationship is mutually beneficial as churches carefully observe and encourage their ministerial students to develop ministry gifts.

Most seminaries are a business for training students of theology. The students are their customers, and to grow the business they must grow the number of customers they serve. To grow their customer base they must cater to the desires of their customers. Accreditors tend to focus on institutional growth as a measure of institutional viability. Accreditors want to know about student placement services and how many students obtain "jobs" upon graduation as a measure of institutional effectiveness. Frankly, it is often difficult to make accreditors understand Mid-America's measure of institutional viability and effectiveness is how many graduates love Christ and His church, how effectively they undergo classical or presbytery examinations and how well they love and pastor those people God has placed under their care.

While Dr. Moore argues for a fundamental change in the way seminary education is done, Mid-America is that model. Mid-America's "customer" is the church. Mid-America will not admit students without a recommendation from their pastor and the church. Mid-America partners with the church in preparing students for gospel ministry through the Ministerial Apprenticeship Program. The church and her people engage their 4th commandment obligation through the support of the seminary. If readers of the Wall Street Journal want to see a model of what Dr. Moore is suggesting, they need look no further than Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

If Mid-America is to maintain a robust program for preparing future generations of pastors, your continued support is crucial. Thank you for making Mid-America innovative by helping maintain a biblical model of seminary training that has proven effective for centuries.



Orientation & Registration by Rev. Alan Strange

A certain excitement and anticipation accompanies the beginning of a new school year. The first day of that year for us involves New Student Orientation and Registration. It begins with the Registrar welcoming all the new students and their wives to campus, opening with devotional and prayer. Dr. Venema, our President, though on sabbatical, would not miss the opportunity to add his word of welcome, to tell the students that this was their calling for the next three or four years, but also to remind them to “stop and smell the roses” with their wives and families while living here. This area, for those who may not know, is culturally renowned, having premier museums, opera companies, and a world-class orchestra, all having some free admissions or performances.

The Registrar, Alan Strange, returned to speak about the nature and responsibilities

of theological education. Ample time was given for refreshments, after which students returned to hear from Dr. Beach, who urged them to be diligent personally and academically, and from Professor Mininger, who encouraged the students to see what a privilege theological education is and to humbly engage it. During this time, speakers had frequent reference to the Student Handbook, with Florence Kooiman pointing out a number of practical things as pertains to Seminary life and especially the business office. Brian Zegers, Student Body President, welcomed them all on behalf of the rest of the student body and the Registrar concluded the Orientation time.

A delicious lunch followed with faculty, new students and wives, and staff. After lunch, returning students joined the new students in registration for Fall classes. The New Student



Rev. Strange helps Darryl Kretschmer with registration

Orientation continued after this in the Library, with Associate Librarian Bart Voskuil orienting them to the collection and to the physical plant in the library. Rev. Mark Vander Hart concluded the Orientation with a walk-through of our Ministerial Apprenticeship Program. Another year has begun!



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“Christ from the Old Testament”
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