

THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

Alumni Conference by Greg Bylsma



From April 8-10, thirty-three of Mid-America's alumni were blessed to gather together at the seminary for Mid-America's first Alumni Conference, "Church and Kingdom: Addressing Contemporary Challenges." The conference was held by the alumni association with the goal, "To promote a unified fellowship among the alumni family and to cultivate the interests and advancement of the seminary." By God's grace, the

stated goal of the alumni association was marvellously reached.

One of the greatest ways in which this blessing was experienced was through the fellowship enjoyed. Can I say that my highlight was great seats at a Cubs game without sounding unspiritual? And yet the key was not the Cubs game, but the blessing of meeting together with former classmates and professors, sharing news and prayer requests (and prayer!), and then having times to talk together about the work of Christ's kingdom and how Mid-America serves within that kingdom. Discussions held during the alumni presentation centered upon how we as alumni could work with the seminary to see Mid-America's sphere of influence grow. Whether it is in training future ministers, current and future office-bearers, or helping interested members deepen their understanding of Scripture, Mid-America has a wealth of resources to bless others with, and alumni were eager to see those shared more broadly for God's glory. Through the fellowship, teaching and discussion shared more than one alumnus came to say, "You know, I'm getting excited about Christ's work through Mid-America again." Amen!

Of course another aspect of the blessing enjoyed was in the lectures themselves. Attendees were blessed with five lectures, each addressing aspects of thought and Scriptural teaching surrounding the concepts of church and kingdom, and each presented by a different professor from Mid-America. They were, to say the least, "meaty" lectures! Academic thinking caps had to be dusted off, but the spring cleaning was well worth it. Attendees found their understanding of the Christian's role in all of life clarified, confirmed, and deepened as time and again we saw that when Christ calls the Christian, He calls the whole Christian. To listen in on these lectures, please visit www.midamerica.edu.

In conclusion we give thanks to the Lord for His particular blessing upon Mid-America's first Alumni Conference. May the focus and encouragement of the conference continue to be a blessing to alumni, Mid-America as an institution, and the church of Christ as Mid-America presses on in her calling to train churchmen for the church.



Alumnus Reflection

by Vic Bernales

I am grateful. Six years after graduating from the Seminary I was privileged to return to its halls, to sit under my professors again, and to interact with my fellow alumni-ministers.

Not only that, the road to the conference was really amazing! I first received the information about it in February. Being some 10,000 miles away from the Seminary, I did not pay much attention to it nor entertain the idea of going. But when another email came with a very pointed question and quite an alluring statement saying, "What, you haven't registered for the Alumni Conference yet? This inaugural conference is going to be a hum-dinger!" my attention was caught.

So I asked myself, "Why haven't I registered yet? What keeps me from signing up?" I realized that the most difficult hurdle in going is my airfare ticket. So I prayed about it. Then the Lord slowly reinforced my desire to go.

It was during this time that I shared my longing with three brothers in the US and the hurdle I had to deal with. All three were eager to help. In two weeks the obstacle was overcome. My airfare ticket was purchased and I was set to go.

The conference was indeed impressive! I couldn't ask for a better venue for it. The speakers are more than qualified. The devotional and prayer time were meaningful. One lesson from the conference that really touched me the most on a personal level is that being a child of God and a servant of Christ I can lose everything in this world without any substantial loss. As one who serves in the mission field, this lesson enables me to continue laboring for the sake of Christ and His kingdom. I am thankful for the opportunity to join the conference!

Be Strong in the Gospel by Rev. John A. Bouwers

(The following is a summary of the 2014 commencement address of Rev. John Bouwers, from 2 Timothy 2:1-19. Rev. Bouwers graciously agreed to prepare this summary, which takes the place of the regular column, The President's Message)

In our tradition, appeal is often made to the opening verses of this letter of Paul to Timothy to emphasize the importance of a thorough seminary education. Thank God for Mid-America Reformed Seminary. We reflect together with gratitude on what has been entrusted to our graduates through the diligent labors of faithful men. But now we also look forward.

There is no higher privilege than to be called to preach the gospel of Christ! What could be more glorious than proclaiming the way of life and blessing, of peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ? But the work to which you believe you are being called is hard work. You must endure hardship.

Paul writes from prison during a time of growing hostility against the church. This is the second time he has been imprisoned for the sake of the gospel; he knows his own race is almost finished. He writes to Timothy, "Don't be ashamed, Timothy. Don't cower in fear. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus!"

Paul summarizes the work you see yourselves being called to in these three paragraphs as a matter of realizing, remembering and reminding.

"Think over what I say," Paul says. He wants Timothy to have a comprehensive sense of the challenge. Beyond the walls of the Seminary, we pray you will come to an experiential realization of just how all-encompassing this task is as you apply yourselves to the work: like a soldier, like an athlete and like a hardworking farmer.

It's not the glamor of a soldier that Paul is emphasizing. It's not a soldier during peace time, decked out in his colors. It is a soldier engaged in warfare, in the thick of battle. It is the picture of blood, sweat and tears – of whole-hearted, single-minded, undistracted devotion. We do not battle against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. A minister is called to do battle as a soldier of his commanding officer, Jesus Christ.

As an athlete, you are called to "strive for masteries" (KJV). You haven't "arrived" now that you've completed seminary. You cannot be content with mediocrity, with merely getting by. Like a diligent athlete, continue to strive to grow in understanding, in Scriptural commitment, in confessional knowledge, in pastoral sensitivity, in evangelistic effectiveness, in prayerful devotion. Run for the prize.

As a hardworking farmer you will need to put in long hours, and learn to live in utter and complete dependence upon the Lord's blessing for fruit upon your labors. You must sow and water, but God alone can give the increase. We are utterly dependent; and that's humbling. Even more importantly, prayerfully see to it that you share in and live off of the gospel that you preach; that's non-negotiable.

With such a demanding composite picture of the burden of ministry, we ought all to be inclined to ask: who is sufficient for these things? How is it possible? To which Paul's answer is, simply, the gospel: Remember Jesus Christ. In good times, and in bad, in the exhilarating blessing of ministry and in trials, when things go well, and in the face of opposition, remember Jesus Christ. Remember where your help comes from, remember where your peace with God rests. Apart from Christ you can do nothing and are nothing. Remember Jesus Christ. Let your ministry be full of the savor of Christ. Christ-centered, Christ dependent, Christ exalting.

So then, when you have a sense of the weight of the task, and as you derive your confidence and encouragement from the Christ whom you preach, the work to which you are being called is rather straight-forward: Keep reminding them of these things. The gospel of Christ never gets old, the Word that you've been given the tools rightly to handle, remains living, active and powerful. Keep reminding them, keep opening the Word, keep pointing to Christ and those who are His will come, and will be built up, and will be blessed.

2014 Commencement

by Rev. Alan D. Strange

Mid-America's Twenty-Ninth Commencement was held on May 15. Five Seniors received the M.Div. degree in a ceremony held at Bethel CRC in nearby Lansing, IL. Faculty, Staff, Board, family, and friends congratulated the new graduates, who heard an excellent address from 1991 Mid-America graduate, the Rev. John Bouwers of Immanuel Orthodox Reformed Church (URCNA) in Jordan, Ontario.

Pastor Bouwers spoke from 2 Timothy 2, encouraging the graduates to be good soldiers (and athletes and farmers) for Christ, workmen who need not be ashamed. President Venema was the appointed faculty member to give the charge this year and he exhorted the graduates from 2 Timothy 4:13 to not forget the books, if Paul needed them, the rest of us who minister surely do. Besides the awarding of the degrees themselves (including the hooding ceremony), the service also included an invocation by Professor Vander Hart, a litany led by Professor Beach, the Nicene Creed led by Professor Strange, and a Prayer for God's Blessing on the graduates led by Professor Mininger. Two hymns were sung and a ladies trio sang, in addition to a processional, recessional, and other organ music by Nancy Venema. The graduates formed a reception line to receive greetings as guests visited and enjoyed refreshments.



Graduates: James Roosma, Andrew Knott, Joel Worries, Jeff Munive, Tony Domanik

Summer Assignments by Rev. Vander Hart

This summer the Mid-America seminarians who are in the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) program will be spreading out in many directions to work in churches as seminary interns for ten weeks. We are very thankful for how the Seminary can connect with churches from several supporting denominations so that the academic side of seminary training is linked to actual field experience in a congregation. As you can see in the list below, Mid-America students will serve in churches all across North America and even overseas. Pray that the students may learn a great deal about the Lord and His Word, but also about God's people and about themselves, as men who offer themselves to serve the coming of God's kingdom and church.

Paul Austin	Presbyterian Church Durham, England	Jeff Munive	Covenant United Reformed Church Pantego, North Carolina
Jeremy Baker	Westminster Orthodox Presbyterian Church Hamden, Connecticut	Daniel Nicholson	Orthodox Presbyterian church-planting Northwest Indiana
Justin Beach	New Hope Presbyterian Church (PCA) Wheaton, Illinois	James Oord	United Reformed Church Nampa, Idaho
Steve Carr	First Reformed Church in the US Yuba City, California	Bryan Punter	First United Reformed Church Chino, California
Albert Couperus	United Reformed Church Wellandport, Ontario	Daniel Ragusa	Reformed Bible Church (URC) West Sayville, New York
Joshua Dykstra	Hudson Valley URC New Hampton, New York	Peter Van't Hoff	Grace Reformed Church (URC) Leduc, Alberta
Joshua Flinn	Immanuel Covenant URC Abbotsford, British Columbia	Arjen Vreugdenhil	Zion United Reformed Church Sheffield, Ontario
Robert Holda	New Covenant Community (OPC) Joliet, Illinois	Aaron Warner	Reformed Bible Church (URC) Pompton Plains, New Jersey
Andrew Knott	New Haven United Reformed Church New Haven, Vermont	Ruben Zartman	El Pacto de Gracia URC Fellowship Chicago Heights, Illinois
Darryl Kretschmer	Providence Presbyterian Church (OPC) Madison, Wisconsin		

Board Report by Rev. Jon Blair

The Board of Trustees met on May 15-16 at the Seminary campus. Rev. Richard Kuiken presided as President of the Board.

Among the highlights of the meeting were the interviewing and reappointment of the Rev. Marcus Mininger as Assistant Professor in New Testament Studies. In addition, the following staff members were reappointed: Florence Kooiman, Office Manager; Keith LeMahieu, Director of Financial and Promotional Development; Grant Dykstra, Financial Officer; Tracy Whitfield, Administrative Secretary/Receptionist; and Bart Voskuil, Associate Librarian.

Nominations were approved for replacement of Board members whose terms expire this year. The following were recognized for their years of service on the Board: Dr. David Beezhold, Rev. Jon Blair, Rev. Rick Greene, Mr. Jeff Huizenga, Mr. Gerry Rozema, and Rev. Ron Scheuers.

Board members also had the privilege of attending the Seminary's 29th Commencement exercises on Thursday evening. The hospitality of the faculty and staff was excellent and the fellowship rich, and much thanksgiving and praise to the Lord were given for His continued blessing upon the Seminary.

Sharing in the Victory by Keith LeMaheiu

Another academic year concluded and we are approaching the end of our fiscal year (June 30). It was an exciting year as we watched students mature in Christ and their ministry skills. Our graduates now pursue those areas of ministry to which God is calling them. Undergraduates will spend their summer under the tutelage of ministers and elders who will help them discover their ministry "voice."

Our enthusiasm is not just for students who presently populate our campus. We are thrilled to see recent graduates pursuing further academic study or being ordained to gospel ministry here and abroad. Alumni from around the world were back on campus for an alumni conference and we learned about the many ways God is using these men to build His church. It is easy to think Satan is prevailing, but the Lamb has conquered and the King of Kings is gathering and preparing His army of victorious saints for the great wedding feast! What a blessing to participate in preparing men for such things.

This preparation involves much more than teaching and administration on the seminary campus. Your prayer and financial support is equally important. Operating fund revenues are down this year and we urgently need your help to balance our budget before year end. Would you please send a generous gift to help sustain our operating fund and continue this exciting work?





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◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

Evening Class by Dr. J. Mark Beach

On four successive Thursdays in March the general public was invited to an evening class taught by Dr. Beach on the practice of forgiveness. Each class was well-attended, and included two one-hour sessions.

Of principal concern for Dr. Beach was to ground the practice of forgiveness in God's forgiveness of us in Christ. Dr. Beach examined first what he called pre-stages to forgiveness, namely the deep hurts that occasion the need for forgiveness and the hate that attends it as well, usually further damaging the person who has been wronged. From here Dr. Beach explored the third and fourth stages of forgiveness, where forgiveness

actually begins. The third stage is key, for here the victim of someone's wrongdoing must travel the difficult road to "revision" the wrongdoer. That is, the wounded soul must turn from malice to love. This is nothing less than turning from desires for revenge and cultivating instead a heart of compassion toward the person who has hurt you. Dr. Beach showed that without this reorientation of disposition, i.e., this gracious reframing of the wrongdoer, forgiveness is impossible—even if the wrongdoer is heartbrokenly repentant. The fourth and last stage of forgiveness is reunion expressed in varying levels of reconciliation. Dr. Beach noted that this side of glory, this stage of forgiveness is not

always attainable—sometimes it is perhaps not even wise in particular cases (especially where children have been the victims of terrible abuse).

Among other topics treated were the biblical mandates and motivations to the practice of forgiveness, including a thorough analysis of the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer, along with the obstacles that beset our practicing forgiveness, and last the many benefits to the practice of forgiveness.

Dr. Beach commented that he has never taught an evening class that has had more immediate practical implications for beleaguered believers.