

# THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

## An Internship in Hell's Kitchen

by Rev. Paul Murphy



Hell's Kitchen – what a great place to plant a church! It's the location of Messiah's Reformed Fellowship (MeRF, Pastor Paul T. Murphy) in New York City, situated just west of Times Square in Midtown. It is where Seminarian Daniel Ragusa spent this past summer.

Dan worked with one of the deacons of the church, Kelvin Morales, who also interned. The internship primarily involved outreach to the neighborhood. Two

or three days a week Dan and Kelvin would hit the streets to reach residents. They would set up a book table on the street and offer free books: Bibles, CCEF booklets, and various evangelistic pamphlets. The goal was to engage passersby in conversations hoping to share the gospel. There were many discussions involving evangelism, apologetics, and neighbor love. Grace Reformed URC in Jersey City also utilized Dan and Kelvin to go door-to-door, inviting their neighbors to worship. Other responsibilities included teaching a new members class to first generation Christians, leading midweek Bible study, and filling the pulpit ten times at MeRF and four times in sister URCs. Pastoral visits were also made to the hospital and with those in the new members class to follow up with any questions.

Interns are often required to do anything and everything and this summer was no different. One of MeRF's female members was going through an acrimonious battle/separation/divorce with her husband, who required her to move out of their apartment. She requested help to protect her and insure nothing nefarious happened. Upon arrival Dan was verbally assaulted by the husband, accused of being in a cult, and threatened with trespassing. The police were called, a lawyer appeared, and tense times ensued. Although the situation de-escalated, the movers never arrived, so Dan, Kelvin, and the police officers eventually moved all her belongings out of the apartment. As they say, "There are a million stories in the Big Apple," and this was a memorable one. This was not your average internship!

Supervision by Pastor Murphy included a weekly Monday meeting with Dan and Kelvin. Exhorting and teaching were reviewed and helpful suggestions rendered. Then all three discussed Sunday's events. Each adopted the perspective of an unbeliever or first time attendee. What did they hear? How were the music, the sermon, and the conversations? Were they accessible, understandable, free of jargon, would anyone be able to 'enter into' the worship and fellowship at MeRF? Was the singing vital and vibrant or rote and lugubrious? What did they see? Were they welcomed warmly? Or were people cliquy and to themselves? Were visitors invited and encouraged to the question and answer session to inquire further? Were they invited to have a bagel and coffee afterwards and engaged in conversation? As they say: "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." The purpose is to become all things to all people in order to win some (1 Cor. 9:22).

## Summer Assignments

Mid-America students were busy this summer learning to apply what they were taught in the classroom. The following is a list of where students labored over the summer.

Jeremy Baker: OPC Fellowship (under Calvin OPC; Phoenix); Yuma, Arizona

Joshua Dykstra: Oak Glen United Reformed Church; Lansing, Illinois

Joshua Flinn: Northshore Reformed Church (RCNZ); Auckland, New Zealand

Joel Fregia: New Covenant Community Church (OPC); Joliet, Illinois

Tad Groenendyk: Bethel United Reformed Church; Woodstock, Ontario

Bob Holda: Bethel Orthodox Presbyterian Church; Oostburg, Wisconsin

David Jouf: Living Springs Community Church (RCA); Glenwood, Illinois

Darryl Kretschmer: Lakeview OPC; Rockport, Maine

Ryan Noha: Hope Presbyterian Church (OPC); Grayslake, Illinois

Daniel Ragusa: Messiah's Reformed Fellowship (URC); New York City, New York

Bradley Robinson: Midlane Park Associate Reformed Presbyterian; Louisville, Kentucky

Peter Van't Hoff: United Reformed Church; Lynwood, Illinois

Arjen Vreugdenhil: Dutton United Reformed Church; Caledonia, Michigan

Ruben Zartman: El Pacto de Gracia URC Fellowship; Chicago Heights, Illinois

## The President's Message: "Mid-America and Planning for the Future?" by Dr. Cornelis Venema

In recent issues of *The Messenger*, I have addressed the topic of the church's role in seminary training. It remains my intention to continue this series on the mutual service of church and seminary, turning my focus to the seminary's role in service to the church. However, I want to interrupt my treatment of this topic in order to raise a pressing question that the seminary faces at this point in its history: how should Mid-America plan for the future?

When I say "at this point in its history," I do so in the awareness that Mid-America is now thirty-four years old. Though that might not seem like a long time, I can recall reading some years ago that Christian institutions, including seminaries, tend to derail about fifty years or so after their founding. For a variety of reasons, they lose their grip on their original purpose and vision. In some cases, the school suffers from historical amnesia or forgetfulness about the reason it was established in the first place. Sometimes the school fails to be vigilant to ensure that its leadership (board members, faculty, staff) remain faithful to its confessional commitments. Or it may be that the generation that established the school, and supported it generously, failed to cultivate a commitment and enthusiasm for the school among members of the next generation. The list of possible reasons for a seminary's failure to thrive into the future is a long one.

One of the obvious reasons, however, is that the seminary did not also plan wisely for the future. Rather than intentionally reflecting on the steps needed to ensure that the seminary looks ahead, it chose instead to "rest on its laurels." The seminary forgot the truth of the adage that "a failure to plan is a plan to fail."

Now it has to be admitted that Reformed people are understandably leery of the whole idea of planning for the future. Since God is the sovereign Lord of history, who has "foreordained whatsoever shall come to pass," it seems inappropriate to plan ahead. Indeed, planning for the future may be viewed as an unseemly attempt to do what James says may not be done by God's people: "Come now, you who say, 'today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit'—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. . . . Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that'" (James 4:14-15). These words remind me of a minister-elect who appealed to this passage, when he was asked, "Do you have any specific plans for your ministry?" His answer amounted to something like, "No, my single plan is to be faithful."

Though this answer has a ring of authenticity about it, after all, didn't the apostle Paul say something like that in 1 Cor. 4:2? It does not pass muster. James does condemn a kind of proud and self-reliant planning for the future. But at the same time, if you read his words carefully, he commends a humble and God-reliant planning for the future. We may say, "we will do this or that," but it must be undergirded by the conviction, "only if the Lord wills"!

In the interest of full disclosure, I need to mention that my interest in this subject is both personal and vocational. It is personal, because I and some of my faculty colleagues at the seminary are not, as they say, "getting any younger." Therefore, we need to be focused upon the cultivation and securing of several new faculty members within the next decade. We also need to have a plan for what is sometimes called "presidential succession." Though I love my work and the school I am privileged to serve, Mid-America will need a new president in the years to come. But it is not only the cultivation and appointment of new faculty that requires our attention. We also need to be focused, laser-like, upon the challenge to articulate clearly and effectively our purpose and vision as a school. We may not make any lazy assumptions about the future. Rather, we need to address responsibly the challenges before us.

I conclude with two requests: one, pray for us as we seek to plan for the future; and two, please convey to us your ideas regarding Mid-America's future. And as we make plans, let's not forget that we do so *Deo volente*, God-willing.

## Evening Class

by Dr. Alan Strange

The Fall Evening Class will be taught on Tuesdays in October & November (October 13, 20, 27 and November 3), from 7:30-9:00 PM, by the Rev. Dr. Alan D. Strange, Professor of Church History. Dr. Strange will teach a survey of church history, highlighting some of the key moments in the life of the church that have been formative in shaping who we are as a people that are Christian and Reformed. The text for the class will be the new book by Dr. Robert Letham, *Gamechangers: Key Figures of the Christian Church*. All interested in taking the class are urged to purchase this book. Parties should register online at [midamerica.edu](http://midamerica.edu) or call the Seminary at 219.864.2400, and specify whether you wish to attend on campus, or view online.

## Summer Greek

by Glenda Mathes

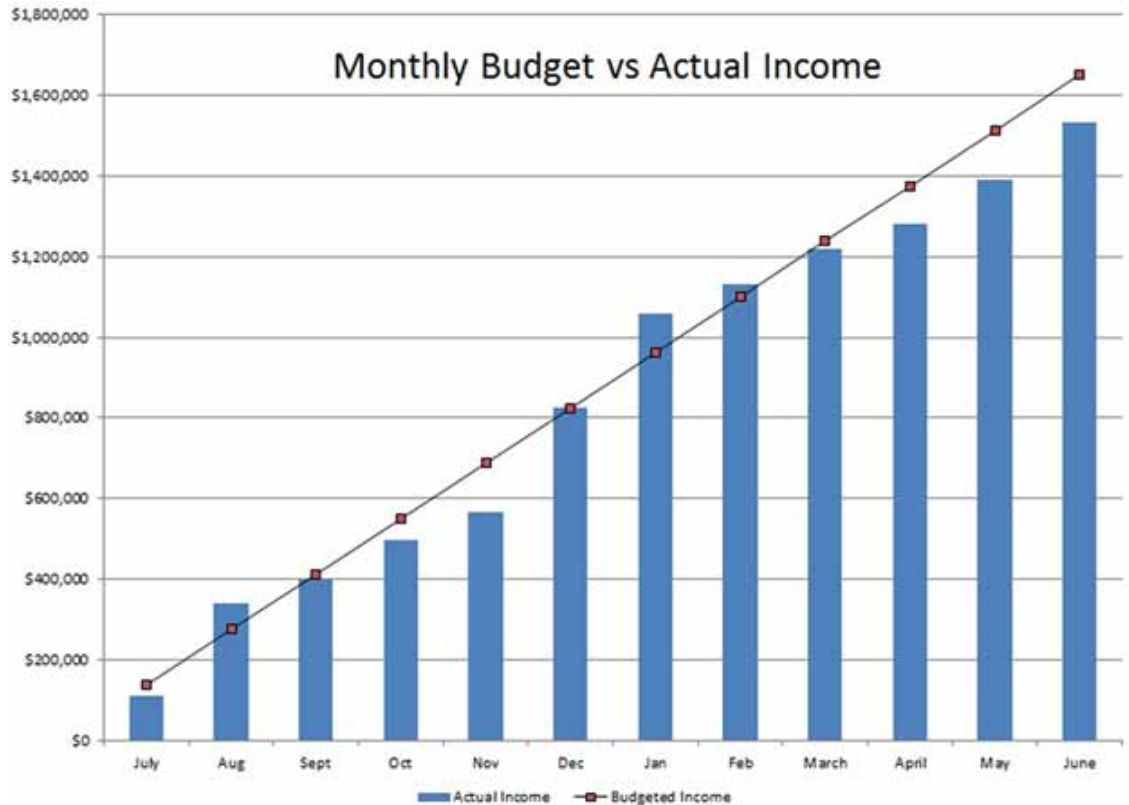


Greek instructor Shawn Goodwin understands that the summer course is intensive and exhausting and grammar can be difficult. "I try to keep the classroom environment as fun as possible, while still covering the material necessary. My hope is to get the students to joyfully read the New Testament in Greek. One way I try to accomplish this is through introducing different memorizing techniques. Another way is through showing them how reading the New Testament in Greek helps us understand the Scripture in new light."

## Mid-America Finishes Fiscal Year by Keith LeMahieu

Like most academic institutions, Mid-America's financial year starts on July 1 and ends June 30 the following year. We are so grateful for those God uses to help the seminary meet its financial obligations. Mid-America's friends share our commitment to the mission of preparing the next generation of pastors who will faithfully preach God's Word and shepherd His people. This mission is as important as ever. Our enemy prowls around like a hungry lion seeking those he may devour, and it is our privilege to prepare those whom our Savior uses to defend His people.

We reported earlier this year that changes in the world currency markets were having a significant, detrimental impact on Mid-America's budget. When we wrote to you in April, we reported that the Canadian exchange rate had dropped to 78 cents against the American dollar. The exchange rate has not improved. What this means to Mid-America is that for every dollar we receive from our friends in Canada, approximately 20-25 cents is lost as donations cross the border. The average from Canadian donors over the past four years has been just over \$600,000. The four-year average of Canadian donations in U.S. dollars is approximately \$592,000. Due primarily to the exchange rate, Canadian donations in U.S. dollars dropped to a little over \$470,000 this past fiscal year. The good news is that contributions from U.S. donors increased by \$100,000 over the previous year. This increase included estate gifts received from friends who named Mid-America in their will. The graph illustrates actual income vs budgeted expenses.



Mid-America needs a strong finish to the 2015 calendar year to avoid problems in the second half of the fiscal year. The Canadian exchange rate remains a significant concern (it is at 77 cents as I write this in late July) and it is important we find ways to make up that significant difference.

The Board of Trustees passed a 7% budget increase for the fiscal year just begun. There are significant fiscal challenges before us in the coming year, but God's grace is abundant and we know He is concerned for us as He is for the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. Please continue to pray liberally and give generously that together we may fulfill our Lord's Great Commission.

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## Mid-America to Tee it Up Once More by Keith LeMahieu

Not long after I came to Mid-America, someone suggested we should organize a golf outing. I gave up golf when I married (primarily because I was a lousy golfer), but with the help of a few golfing folks we planned and executed our first outing in 2004.

Our 11th annual outing will be held this year on September 12 at the Lincoln Oaks Golf Course in Crete, IL. Over the past ten years the weather for this late season outing has been mostly wonderful and the fellowship has been outstanding. We hope you will join us for this year's outing. You can register by going to the Mid-America website or calling me at the seminary. See you there...





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A higher purpose.

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## Upcoming Events:

SEPT. 12: Golf Outing

OCT. 13, 20, 27 & NOV. 3: Evening Class

NOV. 5: Dinner in Grandville, MI

NOV. 12: Dinner in Munster, IN

NOV. 10-11: Fall Lectures

Details can be found at [midamerica.edu](http://midamerica.edu)

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## ◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

### Faculty Update by Glenda Mathes

During a sabbatical from August 1-January 31, 2016, **Dr. J. Mark Beach** will be working on several writing projects.

**Rev. Marcus Mininger** has submitted the final three chapters in the body of his dissertation and must still write its introduction and conclusion. His article, "Christ and Culture," which appeared in the June 2015 issue of *New Horizons*, was a condensed version of "Eschatology and Protology, Christ and Culture: Marriage as a Biblical Test-Case," which was published in the *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 25 (2014). In that same issue, he reviewed *Paul's Letter to the Romans* by Colin G. Kruse.

This spring, **Dr. Alan D. Strange** taught a course for the OPC's Ministerial Training Institute, addressed the Presbytery of the Midwest (OPC) on "The Mosaic Covenant," and was the missions speaker for Classis Michigan (URC).

He conducted conferences in Dyer, Cincinnati, and Puerto Rico. He presented materials for two committees at the 2015 General Assembly of the OPC. He wrote two feature articles and several book reviews that appeared recently in *New Horizons*. His apologetics essay appears in *Correctly Handling the Word of Truth* (Gerry Vischer, ed.). Additionally, he's working on many book reviews, two book proposals, and his dissertation proposal.

In March, **Rev. Mark D. Vander Hart** spoke at the "Growing Reformed Churches" conference at First URC of Chino, CA, and at a promotional dinner for the Reformed Heritage Christian School in Kalamazoo, MI. In April, he attended the Board meeting of ITEM, Inc., in St. Louis, MO. In Latvia and Lithuania from May 29 to July 3, he taught on the post-exilic prophets, Hebrew, and Greek. At a church camp in

June, he lectured on spiritual strength in time of struggle. He preached in three Reformed churches and attended the Synod Collegium of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Lithuania.

This fall, **Dr. Cornelis P. Venema** anticipates teaching in Riga, Latvia, and speaking on "two kingdoms/natural law" at the Calgary URC and to a combined meeting of Classis Eastern US (URC) and the Presbytery of New Jersey (OPC). This year's *Mid-America Journal of Theology* contains his essay on the question of corporate or individual election in Paul's argument in Romans. *By His Spirit and Word: How Christ Builds His Church* was recently published. Another book, *The Lord's Supper and the 'Popish Mass': A Study of Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 80*, will soon appear, and he continues work on *Christ and the Covenants: Essays in Reformed Covenant Theology*.