

the messenger

Mid-America Reformed Seminary

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THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

"A THEOLOGY FOR ALL SEASONS"



I often get asked these days about how I am doing in the aftermath of my wife's death. My honest answer is that I am up and down. But I cling to Christ, who is my Fortress and Rock. I miss my wife greatly, but am also thankful that I know where she is, with Christ, as Paul said, which is far better than to be in this sin-cursed world. It's not the best yet—that's the new heavens and new earth of the renewed creation that comes to pass in the aftermath of the return of Christ and the general resurrection. But it's better than this world that, though God made it good, has been affected by the Fall and the curse upon man.

I recently enjoyed a spiritual retreat with an old friend, who is also a competent counselor. We talked about the life of my late wife and me (he was the best man in our wedding), reflecting on a variety of things, including C.S. Lewis's *Grief Observed*, which we read together. There are many things that I appreciated in that book; for example, how our memories can reshape things so that our loved ones can

come to exist in our hearts in ways that betray their fullness in life, including their peccadilloes. We can also let our grief distort things so that we become victims and give way to self-pity and remorse, in which frame of mind, almost any bad thoughts, words, or behavior can seem justifiable.

The rawness of Lewis's loss is evident, and his honesty is appreciated. It helps all of us going through grief to see how devastating the process can be and to hear Lewis not sugar-coat the agony but express it in all its horror in only the way that he seems particularly gifted to do. One can see Lewis's evolution from his early bewilderment and sense of betrayal to a better place in his relationship with the Lord in a way that is quite encouraging; thankfully, he did not edit his earlier statements but leaves them there for fellow sufferers to realize how bad it can feel in the gall of affliction, even as Psalm 88 serves as a signpost for how alone in the dark we can feel in our misery and suffering as Christians.

At the same time, one can see, from a Reformed theological perspective, that some of Lewis's agony is unnecessary. How can I say that? Well, his theological deficiencies (he caricatures Calvinism at one point in the book) prompt misapprehensions on his part. He is not sure where Joy Davidson, his recently deceased wife, is, suspecting, it appears, that she must, at best, be in some place akin to purgatory. So, he thinks of her as still suffering, as he is. He cannot regard her, as Paul did for departed believers, as being "with Christ" already and thus being truly in a "better" place. He argues that God evidently does not always do good, but we know that He always does good for us (Romans 8:28).

I could say more here in critique, as well as in appreciation, of what Lewis says. What's my point? Especially as one still working through the grief? My point is that whatever we suffer in such loss as we experience in the death of close loved ones, that suffering is ameliorated by a theology that itself is biblically sound and not deficient. In other words, a real practical Calvinism is not something to be scorned in such misery but is a great blessing to us in it, furnishing us with comfort that lesser theologies cannot.

Knowing all that we know theologically as those who are Reformed, by God's grace, does not mean that we will avoid grief and agony. But it does mean that in the midst of our misery, we have a balm that errant theologies do not and that this provides comfort and soul-satisfaction that may elude others. This is a theology that affords the dying comfort, as it did my late wife, and that enables those who mourn them to continue walking with the Lord, even in death's shadow. What we believe really works. To all our supporters, this should be a real encouragement, as well as to all the faculty, staff, and students: what we are about here at Mid-America, in propagating and defending the Reformed faith, is exactly what we should be doing, for the good of all and the glory of Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan D. Strange". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "A".

Dr. Alan D. Strange

President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary

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Mid-America Reformed Seminary

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Our Mission

Mid-America Reformed Seminary seeks to serve Christ and His church by assisting in the formation and preparation of servants for the Kingdom of God. Our primary purpose is to train men for the gospel ministry of Jesus Christ. Guided by this focus, we are also committed to providing solid theological training for others among God's people whose life calling may be enhanced by theological education.

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DEVELOPMENT REPORT:

“FUNDED, FRUITFUL, AND FAITHFUL”

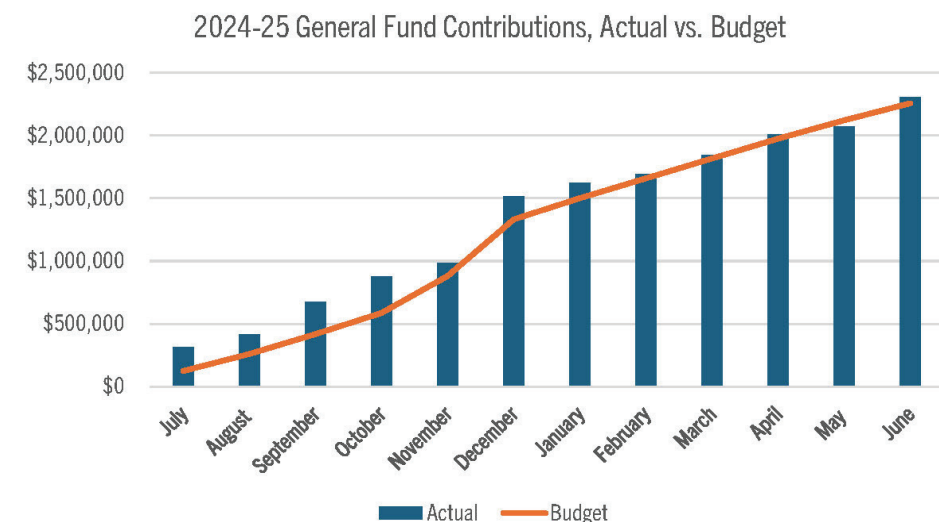
The 2024-25 fiscal year is in the books. Our accounting department has been hard at work closing the books and preparing for our forthcoming audit in a few weeks.

We're happy to report that contributions this year were again very strong, and through God's gracious provision of your generous stewardship, we finished slightly ahead of our budgeted goal. Thank you!

As we turn to contributions to *Foundation for the Future*, Mid-America's campus expansion campaign, there's also reason to give thanks. This year, gifts totaled over \$800,000, outpacing the previous year's total of \$525,000.

There are also several other things to be thankful for as we close out 2024-25. In February, we were reaccredited for the maximum accreditation provided by the Association of Theological Schools, which is ten years! Last May, we graduated nine students, many of them sustaining their classis/presbytery exams and accepting calls to pastor congregations. In June, Dr. Alan Strange began serving as our President, having filled the role as Interim President since July of 2025. We've enjoyed getting to know a portion of our incoming class as they take Summer Greek, and we look forward to the arrival of our remaining first-year students – 17 students in total! We also anticipate the return of our current students, who have been serving their internships throughout the summer, putting into use the tools they've gained in the classroom.

Looking ahead to the 2025-26 academic year, we ask that you



prayerfully consider supporting our important work again, or if you've never partnered with us before, we invite you to do so. At their spring meeting, the Board of Trustees approved a budget increase of 9%. This is double the increase from the previous year. This is largely attributed to a COLA adjustment for faculty and staff (4%) and increased occupancy costs as our expanded campus is now operational in all areas. We also have a remaining funding need for *Foundation for the Future*. This multi-year effort is nearing completion! We have finally established a plan to wrap up the existing audio/visual elements of our chapel space, but it comes with additional unforeseen costs. Couple that with the amount we borrowed from ourselves in other areas of our program, and we're looking at an additional \$800,000 needed to see us across the finish line.

Also looking ahead to 2025-26, we're reminded of a significant update that can't go unmentioned. As we enter our 44th year of service to Christ's church, we're incredibly grateful to God for keeping us not

only funded, not only fruitful, but most importantly, faithful. The update is kind of a "non-update," but we ought not take it for granted. When you examine Mid-America Reformed Seminary, you'll find an institution just as committed now as we were in 1981 to the supreme authority and complete truthfulness to the Word of God, the historic reformed creeds and confessions, our conviction that Christ builds His church by His Spirit and Word, and providing the best possible pastorally focused training for men seeking to minister vocationally. We don't need to spend much time reminding you that many institutions were founded on these core values but have since lost their way. By God's grace, our seminary – *your seminary* – has not wavered.

Thank you for your support during the 2024-25 academic year, and as mentioned earlier, we invite you to partner with us again this next year. Your support is vital as we seek to faithfully serve Christ, rooted in our past with an eye to the future. The story of Mid-America is still being written – you can help! Your stewardship encourages and humbles us, and we boldly ask that it not only begin or continue, but that it increases for the glory of Christ and the advancement of His bride, the church.

INTERNS, INTERNS, INTERNS: TRAINING PASTORS AND MISSIONARIES FOR THE FRONT LINES

The Apostle Paul told Timothy to “entrust to faithful men” the things Timothy had learned from Paul, both in word and deed (2 Timothy 2:2). Many things needed for pastoral ministry can be taught in the classroom, but there are also many other things that cannot simply be ‘taught’ but also must be ‘caught.’ This is where internships come into play, and why we give thanks to God for His blessing upon our students this summer as they prepare for various types of pastoral ministry. In this article, we will focus our attention on the CME (Center for Missions and Evangelism) sponsored internships.

What is unique (and very exciting!) about the CME internship program, is that our seminary students are being mentored by church planters or missionaries who are actively in the midst of some form of that work. Even if the student is planning to become the pastor of an established, ‘brick and mortar’ church after seminary, it is still an excellent experience for them to work in the trenches of church planting and missionary work. There is a very real sense in which *every pastor today is a missionary in one sense or another*. The nations have moved into our back yards, and there is wonderful opportunity before us to reach them for Christ—and draw them into our churches. Last summer we sent one of our students to Italy to work with a full-time missionary there. This year, we had three students work with active church planters. All three of these men were a blessing to the church plants they served, and it was very encouraging to hear what their pastors had to say about them.

One of our students (and proud, new father!), Dane Bothun, spent the summer working with Rev. Paul Mourreale at Covenant Reformed Church in West Plains, MO. Dane

was able to fill the pulpit, lead in worship, teach Sunday School and work with the youth in the church plant. He also went on visits with the pastor and engaged in hospitality and outreach.

Another student, Kelvin Morales, worked with Rev. Austin Reifil at Indy Reformed Church in Indianapolis, IN. He was able to exhort the congregation from 2 Peter, and lead catechism services on the Belgic Confession. He and pastor Reifil met every week to discuss sermon prep, preaching and other church life matters. Kelvin was also able to engage in forms of outreach, including leading a study for a group in Fort Wayne, IN, that is interested in beginning a new URCNA there.

Greg Ritzema is another student who did a CME sponsored internship this summer. Greg recently switched from the M.T.S. program to the M.Div. He has done a part-time internship in Daytona Beach, Florida, where I am planting Salt and Light Reformed Church. Greg has spent time meeting new people and inviting them to church. He has led Bible studies, played piano during worship, helped with hospitality and even helped us in our search for a meeting facility. Work-wise, the highlight of his summer was going to a week-long camp with me and 150 teenagers, including kids from our church plant. But the standout highlight of his summer was the birth of their daughter!

Learning from competent church planters and missionaries is certainly valuable, but it is also expensive! Another unique feature to the CME internship program is that we help fund the program to the tune of c. \$6,000 per student for the summer. Established congregations, we have learned, are usually able to fund their own internship program. But church planters and missionaries are obviously on very tight budgets and cannot afford interns; and of course, most seminary students are broke! Thus, the CME internship program raises funds to partner these promising young men with capable missionaries and church planters.



Pictured above: Dane Bothun and Rev. Paul Mourreale



Pictured above: Kelvin Morales and Rev. Austin Reifil



Pictured above: Greg Ritzema with his wife Abby and newborn daughter, Anastasia

As we look to the future, we are trusting the Lord to raise up not only more and aspiring ministers to pastor and plant faithful churches, but more and more men who will serve as mentors to our students. We also pray that God would put it on the hearts of His people to give to the CME internship program as we labor together to raise up the next generation of faithful servants in the church.

Dr. Eric Watkins
Director of the Center for Missions and Evangelism

WELCOMING A RECORD-SETTING INCOMING CLASS: NEW STUDENT PROFILES



Ethan Acevedo (M.Div.; Reformed Baptist) started Mid-America studies in January 2025. He is a December

2024 graduate of the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, where Ethan earned a B.S. in Integrated Ministry Studies. Already at Moody, Ethan was preaching and evangelizing on Chicago's busy downtown streets, laboring alongside MARS students Dane Bothun and Jared Strong, and alumnus Jeremy Chong. Ethan is married to Mekayla, and they are members of Christ the King Reformed Baptist Church, where the pastors include MARS alumnus Stephen Corbitt.



Micah Allen (M.Div.; OPC) graduated from university in the spring and then married Abby this summer. Both

newlyweds come from the area of San Antonio, Texas. Micah graduated from Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, Arizona, studying Psychology and minoring in Philosophy. Micah found Presbyterianism while at university, and has remained ever since. He considers his "home church" to be Calvin OPC-Phoenix, where Michael Babcock and David Innes are pastors.



Andrew Barbour (M.Div.; URCNA) arrived with his friend and fellow church member, Reid Selmer. Andrew grew up in Idaho, where he and his family attended Christ Reformed Church in the

city of Nampa. He and his wife, Brittany, were married in 2020, and they have two sons: Theodore (2.5) and Edwin (< 1). Andrew studied English and Writing at Boise State University while working in an animal health warehouse to support his family. Andrew's service to the church has included teaching high school catechism.



Geoffrey Doyle (M.Div.; RCNZ) was raised in Wellington, New Zealand. At seventeen he began attending the Reformed Church of Silverstream. Through the faithful mentorship

of his pastor and other church-members there, God created a deep love for the Lord, God's people, and the Reformed faith. Geoff is married to Elza, and together they have four daughters: Fritha (12), Molly (10), Vera (7), and Phoebe (3). Geoff worked in architecture for sixteen years prior to seminary, and was self-employed for the past seven years.



Joseph Gilbert (M.Div.; OPC) married Catriece, and they have three sons: Elijah (3), Israel (2), and Josiah (5 months). Joe grew up in Lexington, Kentucky, and graduated this past

spring from Reformation Bible College in Sanford, Florida, completing a Biblical Studies degree. Previously a Reformed Baptist, Joe now senses having more

Presbyterian convictions and looks forward to joining an OPC congregation. During seminary, Joe is excited to use past work experience to teach a course in personal finance for a classical Christian high school.



Elzo Honorato Neto (M.Div.; URCNA) was born and raised in Brazil and came to embrace the Reformed faith in high school while wrestling with theological and philosophical questions. He met his wife, Ann, while they were

studying abroad in Ireland, and they have one child: Theodore (1). The family comes from Welland, Ontario, Canada, where they were members of Trinity URC under the care of MARS alumnus Pastor Daniel Hamstra. Elzo worked in data analytics and engineering while studying the humanities at Athabasca University.



Joshua Hoogerdijk (M.Div.; CanRC) was swayed to MARS by his friend, alumnus Bryce Klassen. Joshua and Bryce attended Providence University College together, where Joshua earned his B.A. in Psychology. Joshua then went

on to Providence Theological Seminary and completed an M.A. in Counseling and Biblical Studies. Because of this seminary training already in Manitoba, Canada, Joshua starts seminary with his languages largely completed and some experience opening and exhorting God's Word. He longs to study at MARS to deepen his sense of need for God's sustaining grace and broaden his view of God's people.



Renee Kim (MTS; non-denominational) and **Harrison Lee** (M.Div.; non-denominational) met at a Korean youth group and were married after seven months of courtship. Renee grew up in Vietnam as the

daughter of missionaries, and she graduated in 2024 from the Moody Bible Institute, studying Education. Renee and Harrison were introduced to each other through MARS student, Hannah Hwang.

Harrison, Renee's husband, is a transfer student from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He already serves as a director of youth and young adult ministries for the couple's Chinese church in Villa Park, Illinois. Harrison briefly played semi-professional soccer in Europe, and he sensed passion for ministry as a History student at Wheaton College. Harrison graduated from Wheaton in 2024.



Ajay Kumar

(M.Div.; RPC-India) and his family are members of Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church in Dehradun, India. He is married to Sandhya, and they have two sons: Prakash

(11) and Joshua (4). Ajay graduated from Presbyterian Theological Seminary-Dehradun in 2020, having studied Theology. Ajay has served as deacon in his church and helped in several pastoral functions, including teaching the catechisms to young adult and adult groups alike. Ajay also taught 7th-10th grade English and Social Studies at a private school in his hometown. He and current MARS student Abraham Kakileti were classmates for one year at PTS-Dehradun.



Petrus Lourens

(M.Div.; URCNA) is the youngest of three and the son of a pastor. He married Mariska, and they have two children: Lienke (10) and Simon (8). They immigrated to

Africa in 2015. Since 2020, they have attended Bethel URC in Calgary, Alberta, Canada where MARS alumnus Keith Davis is their pastor. Petrus previously served Bethel as an elder. He also worked as a Network Engineer in the healthcare sector. This past year, he studied online at The Master's University in preparation for seminary.



Adam Nicholson

(M.Div.; URCNA) was born and raised near Mid-America Reformed Seminary. He sensed a desire for seminary already in high school and became Brian Blummer's youngest recruit to

visit campus. Adam is a graduate of Grove City College, where he earned his B.A. in History with minors in Philosophy and Classical Studies. Shortly after graduation, he and Mairead were married, and their membership is in Adam's home church, Redeemer URC with MARS alumnus Pastor Steve Swets.



Reid Selmer

(M.Div.; URCNA) arrived with his friend and fellow church member, Andrew Barbour. Reid has been married nearly ten years to Kellie, and they have three children: Gideon (7), Lucy (5), and

Gus (2). The Selmers arrive from Nampa, Idaho, and their home church is Christ Reformed Church, where MARS alumnus Nick Smith is pastor. Reid previously studied Construction Management at Boise State University, and he worked as a county highway district project manager for about four years.



Jason Thomas

(MTS; Kingdom Network) is a retired lineman of the Chicago Transit Authority. After seminary, he hopes to teach his passion for church history. Jason was employed 26 years

with the Transit Authority, having served before that in the United States Navy. He was converted as an adult, and his church contexts have been as varied as Jehovah's Witness, Western Rite Orthodox, and Nazarene. He is thrilled to be Reformed, worshipping at Ross Community Reformed

Church with Pastor Tom Archer. Jason is married to Jessica, and they have two adult children.



Gerard Winkelaar

(M.Div.; URCNA) has been steeped in reformed teaching and doctrine since childhood. He and Janelle married in

2007, and they have four sons: Asher (12), Emmett (11), Davis (9), and Felix (6). The Winkelaars come from Parkland URC, Ponoka, Alberta, Canada, now reuniting with friends and fellow church members, Micheal and Jacolene Hakze, who began at MARS in 2024. Gerard managed his brother-in-law's tire and rim shop in Ponoka prior to seminary.



Edison Wong

(MTS; REC-Malaysia) was raised in Sibul, East Malaysia, and later moved to Kuala Lumpur to pursue a Bachelor of Mechanical

Engineering. His home church is the International Reformed Evangelical Church of Klang Valley under Rev. Amos Chaw. He worked for a year as a Junior Engineer specializing in fire alarm and suppression systems before beginning formal theological training. Edison's desire is to return to Malaysia for Reformed church planting and ministry. He reunites with his friends Canaan Chaw and Lee Le Pey, who began at MARS in 2024.

Brian Blummer
Director of Enrollment
Management



WHAT'S HAPPENING TO PASTORAL LEADERSHIP?

by J. Mark Beach

The apostle Peter was a leader—he was a pastoral leader. Yes, he was an apostle, too, but also a presbyter or elder, a co-elder alongside other elders, who, of course, were not apostles (see 1 Pet. 5:1). In Acts 5, Peter presides over what is perhaps the severest case of church discipline we find on the pages of the Bible. I'm referring to the episode with Ananias and Sapphira. This is a sobering, even scary, story.

We read about a notable couple

who wanted to make a notable gift to the church. Notable, too, is that they seem to have been driven partly by greed and partly by vainglory. When they sold a piece of property and gave the proceeds of the sale to the church, Peter detected deceit. He accuses them not of miserliness or prideful pretentiousness, the vainglory of devotion masquerading as piety; rather, he faults them for lying to the Holy Spirit (5:3). Their sin was primarily a lying to God, secondarily to the church (5:4). At that, Ananias drops dead—soon his wife, in repeating the lie,

will suffer the same fate (5:10).

This remarkable incident, as earlier noted, is the severest case of church discipline recorded in Scripture. It stands there as a monument to God's holiness. It serves not as an exhibit of the normative procedure for church discipline—rebuke followed by the guilty dropping dead. Instead, it serves to show us what happens to sinners who think they can deceive God, not repenting of (but doubling down on) their sin. It illustrates the final outcome for all sinners, under

the discipline of God's Word, who deceive themselves in thinking they can stand righteous before God without true faith in Jesus Christ. It also illustrates the final outcome for all sinners who do not repent. Indeed, it is the final outcome for each of us, except that we repent and find life in the Lord of life. All church discipline, if it does not end in repentance (in seeking God's mercy), culminates in death.

Our interest here, however, is not church discipline as such, but how Peter exercises leadership amidst a most difficult, unpleasant situation. What sort of shepherd would not wish to avoid this affair? Well, of course, this is a divine censure, a warning siren for the whole church. It is uniquely this, to be sure. But it also portrays for us how the chief undershepherd of the church, Peter, a fellow elder with others (a first among equals), *exercises leadership*—leading the church (in this case, discipline), setting the example in not ignoring a scandal, confronting deception and ungodliness (masquerading as piety), and doing that even if it costs the church future financial advantage. The particular case is clear enough: truth-telling must be protected, fake piety must be exposed, even if it means a decrease in the membership rolls. Leadership travels the hard road of obedience.

How much easier, isn't it, to look the other way? How much easier in the consistory room to mutter to each other about this couple's deception, their duplicity. *"Ah, what a shame."* *"I know! Why the deception? We'd all understand if they didn't want to give the church the full amount of the sale of their property. We'd understand."* *"Yes, too bad."* *"Yeah, it is what it is."* *"Mr. Chairman, should we talk to them about this?"* *"Well, I don't know, brothers. Maybe we do better to let sleeping dogs lie. But we should definitely monitor the situation. They've been valuable members. But it's kind of sad, isn't it?... Well, what's the next*

item of business?"

Yes, it is much easier to regret and ignore the whole affair, to retreat rather than lead.

"Pastoral leadership takes initiative—it is courageous. It aims to cultivate and nurture maturity in Christ—genuine faith, genuine repentance, genuine love for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"

The modern practice of church leadership seldom rushes in where Peter dared to tread. Peter, however, as a leader, believes that deception may not be allowed to coexist alongside genuine devotion. This reveals the principle that inspires the practice—the biblical principle of authenticity before God. It is the authenticity of faith and the authenticity of seeking first God's kingdom and its righteousness. It is the authenticity that confesses that we are the chief of sinners, rather than trying to pretend that we qualify as the most devoted. Faithful shepherds, following Peter's example, also care about authenticity.

Consequently, pastoral leadership takes initiative—it is courageous. It aims to cultivate and nurture maturity in Christ—genuine faith, genuine repentance, genuine love for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, genuine love for one another, and genuine love for the lost. Even church discipline, as illustrated above, is woven into and forms part of the tapestry of the ministry of the Word, and that Word is applicable in all contexts, especially the Sunday sermon and face-to-face

instruction. Disciples of Christ are always under the discipleship or discipline of the Word.

From Acts 5, not surprisingly, the effect of this exacting and punitive church discipline, under Peter's pastoral leadership, was that "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events" (5:11). What else?

Acts 5 shows us that sometimes pastoring sheep is a messy business—stressful, difficult, showing up our deep need for strength and wisdom wrought by the Holy Spirit. No shepherd/pastor wakes up in the morning and invites this misery into his life. But neither does he, as a faithful servant, push it into a corner. Co-elder Peter, as Christ's servant—an apostle, yes, but also a shepherd, an elder of the flock of Christ—knew he was not permitted to look the other way, sit on his hands, and wait for some other brother to "make a motion." No, sometimes what is right, as in "right to do," may rock the boat and create controversy or disagreement. This applies to corrective ministry, educational ministry, pastoral counseling, liturgical leadership, consoling the suffering or dying, as well as discipleship and outreach ministry.

You cannot read the Gospels and come to the conclusion that the Great Shepherd of the sheep, Jesus Christ our Lord, was a *look-the-other-way* prophet, a *let-someone-else-worry-about-it* priest, or a *sit-on-his-hands* king. In short, He was not a *peace-at-any-price* savior. No, no, no! Our Savior was unafraid to exercise His threefold office of Prophet, Priest, and King, applying it to a varied set of pastoral settings and issues, even if it produced controversy and opposition. But observe, it also produced the healing of hearts, the consolation of souls, the reforming of lives, and the rebirth of salvation.

Similarly, Peter, His servant, having once denied Christ (three times, no less), takes very seriously his recommissioning in triplicate—to feed Christ’s lambs, to take care of His sheep, and to feed His sheep (see John 21:15-17). The flock is not cared for when wolves are permitted to roam among them, whether as false teachers or bullying members. Their fruits are bitter, poisoning love for Christ, one another, and the lost. Rather than flee leadership, Peter takes up the mantle of the pastoral/shepherding office—rod and staff in hand—and pastors the flock. All pastors and elders in Christ’s church are commissioned with this task. We must all heed this commission. But do we?

It is noteworthy that Peter’s leadership, at least as displayed on the pages of the New Testament, and evident in Acts 5, does not align with various models of leadership presented in contemporary literature, where a transactional model prevails. It is rather commonplace to think of leadership on a contractual, performance-based set of expectations. The transactional model of leadership is basically a contract. *“You, sir, are hired to perform the following duties.... Our expectations are as follows... and our expectations involve this list.... Our needs, to be met, are.... Your duty, sir, is therefore to meet those needs. Here are the services you are to provide. We will remunerate you as follows....”* (After each ellipsis, fill in the blank.) Note: the duties and expectations can be well defined according to biblical standards. The trouble comes in viewing the pastor not as a spiritual leader, not as an elder among elders, as a first among equals, not first and foremost as a servant of Christ, but as a hireling, a hired hand to do for us, under a contract. Consequently,

his leadership (if it exists) comes under this transactional set of expectations, designed to please those paying for the services. That is, the task of the pastor is to satisfy the stated expectations—and, oftentimes, unstated expectations. This is a hired-help model and breeds inertia and status quo spirituality.

By contrast, a transformational model of leadership is not satisfied with the status quo. Instead, this sort of leader, now applied to the church, seeks the betterment of the flock under his charge. Such a leader, a genuine shepherd, looks to improve and advance the well-being of the people. He is not content with allowing bad habits of heart to go unchecked, prejudices to go unchallenged, and fake devotion to lazily coast along. One need only read Christ’s letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor to realize that most churches need some heartfelt repentance and reform (see Rev. 2 and 3). Faithful, transformational, pastoral leadership pursues and presses for renewal, urges greater love for, and dependency upon, God and His grace. Such leadership encourages what is good and biblically on point, exposes and opposes the idols of our hearts. The goal beckoning is transformation after the image of Christ. Pastoral leadership of this sort is driven by being Christ’s servant, not a hireling; and such leadership will almost inevitably provoke opposition, but it will also bring blessing. Like Jesus’ ministry, pastoral leadership will be both welcomed and spurned.

Think of it like this. Christ our Lord was the best example of a servant-leader. We read in the New Testament that the apostles took care to appoint elders in all the churches (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). A pastor (the better word is “shepherd” = sheep herder) is, by definition, a leader. Circles, by definition, are round. Squares, by definition, have four equal sides. Bachelors, by definition, are unmarried adult males. And pastors, by definition, are leaders. Shepherds lead; sheep follow. Let us be clear: Shepherds are not cowboys; the church is not

cattle. Shepherds do not herd the sheep like cowboys by driving them. Shepherds lead the way with the sheep following. Shepherds go out ahead of the sheep; he calls them; the sheep are beckoned. The sheep know the shepherd’s voice; they follow. Perhaps that is why we joyfully repeat the opening verse of Psalm 23, “The Lord is my shepherd. He *leads us* on the right paths.” He continues to lead us on the right paths, principally, through pastors—and alongside of them are fellow elders—and both of those offices are exercised, always, through the Word of God. Always!

All of this leads us to affirm and defend the importance of the pastor’s role in exercising leadership in the church. Although the biblical portrait of pastoral leadership goes against the grain of some recent models of the pastor’s work, where a transactional (hired-help) model prevails, this needs to be resisted and remedied. The pastor, as a minister of the Word and shepherd of the flock, is authorized by Christ Himself to lead the flock—preaching, teaching, nurturing, unto transforming those under his care—all with the aim that Christ’s bride may be presented to Him without spot or wrinkle. Nothing less defines the pastoral office. And that shepherding care finds its power and authority in the Word of the Savior. Enlivened and driven by the gospel, the church lives in accord with her gospel-creed, for the sheep know the Great Shepherd’s voice—a voice administered by pastoral leaders.

Next time, the Lord willing, we will further explore leadership in the church, examining the role of elders and the pastor together, as well as the need for the church to want and pray for servant-leaders who love the Lord, love the flock, and are courageous to lead the church in troubled times.



Dr. J. Mark Beach
Professor of
Doctrinal &
Ministerial Studies

ALUMNI PROFILE: NATHANIEL RADEMAKER

I studied at MARS from 2016 to 2019. Since graduating, my family and I returned to NZ to serve in the RCNZ. After a year-and-a-half vicariate and Presbytery exams, I was called to serve the Reformed Church of Whanganui, NZ. I was ordained in January 2021 and have served 4 1/2 years in this Church.

The Reformed Church of Whanganui is small; we are currently 70 members (communicant and baptized). I can genuinely say the church is like a loving family. God has been so good to us as a church family over the past few years, as we have seen an increase in membership through outreach into the community. Repeatedly, I have been reminded it is God who grows His Church as we see how God has been preparing people to hear the gospel before we have even proclaimed it to them. This has been so encouraging to me as I seek to be faithful to God's calling.

My wife Sharon has been an amazing blessing, not only by being a fantastic helpmeet to me as Pastor, but she has also been such a gift of grace to the whole congregation. She is the church librarian, involved in leading Women's Fellowship, and is a great mentor to the younger women in the congregation, among other things.

We have 7 children: Marielle (17), Luana (16), Rachel (14), Lucas (12), Emma (10), Raphael (8 born in the US), and Josiah (4). All the children love to serve in the church in whatever way they can. We are grateful to God that we can serve Him and His people together as a family. It truly is a blessing! Marielle and Luana play the piano in church, help run the sound desk, and are both active in the youth group.

Each year in the ministry is full on! There are always fresh challenges and encouragements. Every step of the

way stretches and grows us in our trust and dependence upon our gracious Lord.

The longer I am in ministry the more I appreciate and value my time studying at MARS (yes, even the exams). I look back with fondness on my time at Seminary. The bonds of friendship forged there with fellow students and Professors are an ongoing blessing as we continue to strive to encourage one another in the ministry.

I also continually grow in my admiration and gratitude for the professors whose teaching and wisdom have prepared me well for ministry in ways that I am amazed they had the foresight to train me for. They gave me the tools I needed to preach God's Word weekly. They prepared me well for pastoral situations that I didn't even know they had prepared me for until I went through various circumstances in the work of ministry. It was only afterwards, as I reflected on what I had been taught at MARS, that I could see the professors had equipped me for that

moment. Whether it was preparation for a difficult pastoral situation, or for leading Session and Presbytery meetings, or even for establishing good patterns of prayer and personal devotions, and so many other situations besides. For that, I am ever grateful to MARS for their dedication to training men specifically for ministry in the Reformed Churches.

Here in the RCNZ we love our MARS graduates! I just counted: out of our 17 current serving ministers, 9 are MARS graduates. We are always grateful to be able to send our students to MARS where they get thoroughly trained for ministry in the Reformed Churches. We continue to appreciate MARS training as we have a Kiwi representing the RCNZ at MARS currently in Geoff Doyle.

Nathaniel Rademaker
2016 Mid-America Alumnus





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