

the messenger

Mid-America Reformed Seminary

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WHAT'S HAPPENING TO PASTORAL LEADERSHIP?

PART 2

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THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

“ADVENT THOUGHTS FOR OUR TIME”



Much has happened since I last wrote a President's Message to our readers. Here at the Seminary, we've had to deal with several challenges, particularly in terms of personnel. As always, the Lord has been and is taking care of us, and we are happy to go forward in his service. We always remember that whatever evil the enemy may purpose for us, God always turns it to our good. In that respect, just to note some particulars, we are grateful for the encouraging golf outing and fundraiser that we had and for the CME Conference, both of which, especially the latter, exceeded all our expectations, even though we were operating, personnel-wise, at a diminished capacity. The Lord provides.

We've also seen hardship on the national level. Shootings and killings of various sorts continue to occur in our deeply troubled nation. One that has had an unusual impact on society broadly, including the church, even our churches, has been the death of Charlie Kirk. One of my children put it well: the death of any political figure for his views is tragic; when that figure is not an officeholder but an influencer or pundit, it's especially jarring. The question always hangs in the air: Who's next? Who among us who express views publicly that some don't like may become a victim of an assassination?

Thankfully, the response to Mr. Kirk's death has not been vigilantism, rioting, or the like as we've witnessed in recent years as a reaction to developments opposed by many. Many instead participated in services of mourning and prayer, a better response than violence in response to violence. Mr. Kirk's memorial service was also quite unusual. Never in my lifetime have I seen politicians testify as clearly to the gospel as some did at Kirk's service. It seems like a throwback to the nineteenth century in some respects. Other addresses were quite political, as expected at such a memorial, since Mr. Kirk was a significant political commentator and activist.

The memorial service was like what Mr. Kirk himself had become in more recent years: more religious in his interactions, especially on campuses, than previously, while remaining quite decidedly politically conservative, in fact, an ongoing supporter and promoter of the President and his whole MAGA agenda. He, of course, had every right to do that in a society like ours, as does a liberal like Ezra Klein, just to pick someone on the opposite side from Kirk, and to remain free from any legal strictures in doing so, operating under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. And anyone, right or left, should be able to do so without being shot and killed.

Surely, we have experienced, as Carl Trueman has been alleging, some sort of dehumanization that many are starting to realize, a loss that extracts a high cost and that more, even some secularists, are lamenting; Trueman ruminates on these developments, arguing that perhaps a new humanism is in the offing, there even being some notable conversions (Russell Brand not least among them), pointing toward a better day than the one that expressive individualism has landed us in.

One thing that we, as confessionally Reformed and Presbyterian, can do that's helpful and needed in the present moment is to remind everyone that the gospel is always clearly to be distinguished from so much of what some maybe currently associating with it. The gospel, as the heart of the Christian faith, is the life and death of Christ for His people. The Christian faith is never the Bible's doctrines plus some political views on the left or right. All of this is especially appropriate in the Advent/Christmas season when people may be more open to distinct Christian witness than at some other times of the year.

This is important to note because one could hear Mr. Kirk on campuses, under his "Prove me wrong" banner, defend some aspects of Christianity and in the next breath defend MAGA distinctives as if they were all the same thing, not pausing to say before the political part, "now Christians may have different views than mine about what I'm saying now." It was often presented as a package deal, as if theological teachings smashed together with rightist political views properly make up one grand thing called the Christian faith. The Bible defines the Christian faith, and that is what we should be holding forth as the church's witness to the world, now and in every season.

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

Dr. Alan D. Strange
President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

As we enter this season of Thanksgiving and look toward Christmas, our hearts are once again drawn to gratitude, for God's faithfulness and for the many ways He continues to bless Mid-America Reformed Seminary. This issue of *The Messenger* offers abundant cause for thanksgiving.

Our feature article, written by Dr. J. Mark Beach, continues his thoughtful series on pastoral leadership. In it, he calls the church to recover a biblical vision of the minister's calling to serve Christ faithfully and to shepherd His flock with humility and care. Dr. Beach's reflections will challenge you to prize a form of leadership shaped by the Word and empowered by the Spirit.

We also give thanks for two significant milestones in the life of the Seminary: the dedication of our newly expanded building and chapel (a tangible reminder of God's generous provision) and the inauguration of Dr. Alan Strange as our new president, marking the beginning of a new chapter in devoted service to Christ's church. Readers can watch both the inauguration and the building dedication on our YouTube channel.

In this issue, we also highlight the ministry of Rev. Vern Picknally in our alumni spotlight, whose story beautifully illustrates how the Seminary's mission continues to bear fruit in congregations both near and far.

As you read these pages, may you be encouraged to give thanks for God's goodness and strengthened in your confidence that He will continue to bless the work entrusted to us for His glory.

Mid-America Reformed Seminary

the **messenger**
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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:

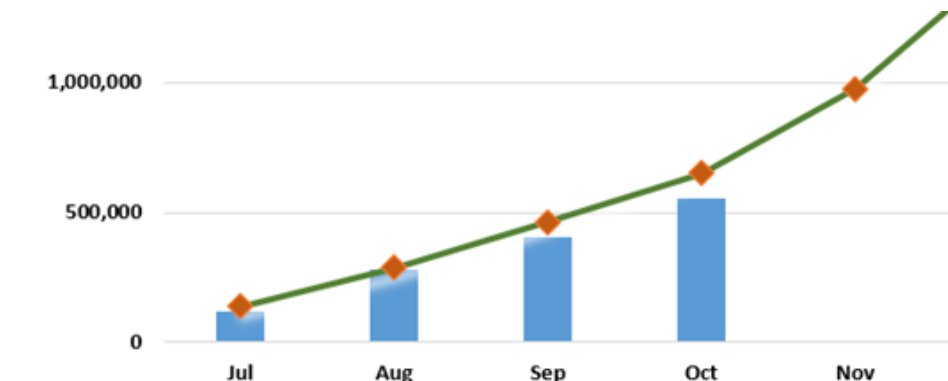
“A SEASON OF NEWNESS: GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AT MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY”

As we enter the Advent season, we recognize themes of anticipation, preparation, and the “breaking into our world” of God’s kingdom reign. This Advent also finds us reflecting with deep thanksgiving on a year marked by remarkable newness: new leadership, new facilities, and renewed evidence of God’s faithful provision through His people.

The year’s most significant “newness” occurred with the inauguration of Dr. Alan D. Strange as our second president, representing not merely a change in leadership but a confirmation of God’s faithfulness to Mid-America and our mission. His vision for theological education – rigorous, Reformed, and relentlessly committed to serving the church – has already begun to shape our community, energizing faculty, students, and supporters alike.

This year has also brought tangible signs of “newness” through our *Foundation for the Future* capital campaign. The new chapel, updated classrooms, enlarged commons, and additional offices now serve the ultimate purpose of equipping the next generation to rightly handle the Word of truth and shepherd God’s people.

Accordingly, thanks to your generous faithfulness, Mid-America exceeded its fiscal-year operating budget (June 30, 2024, to July 1, 2025) by over \$150,000. Furthermore, the total amount given to the *Foundation for the Future* campaign was \$813,441. Whether you consider them large or small, every gift participates in this work of God and invests in the future of the church! To you who have given this year, sacrificially or



out of your surplus, we extend our heartfelt thanks! Your partnership makes our mission possible.

As we pivot and focus on our current fiscal year (July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026), we see in the graph above, which shows giving in the blue and budgeted on the line, that, as of the end of October, we have an operational shortfall of just under \$150,000. Year-end giving has historically been critical to carrying us through the remainder of the fiscal year; therefore, this shortfall, combined with anticipated needs, calls for a total of \$975,000 to be raised by the end of 2025. Simultaneously, while giving to the *Foundation for the Future* campaign has totaled over \$5.5 million since its inception, our remaining balance is \$880,000. Thankfully, due to the generosity of you and previous generations, we owe this last figure to ourselves, as we were able to borrow from endowments, saving ourselves from high-interest construction loans.

The apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians that we are “God’s fellow workers” and that the church is “God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:9). New leadership, new facilities, and renewed financial health all point

beyond themselves to the unchanging mission: preparing servants to preach Christ crucially, faithfully, and winsomely to a world desperately in need of the gospel.

As we look toward 2026, we do so with gratitude for what God has accomplished and with confidence in His continued faithfulness. We invite you to continue partnering with us in this vital work as you consider your year-end giving. A popular option is a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from your IRAs, which directly meets your Required Minimum Distributions (RMD). For more complex giving options (e.g., donor-advised funds, estate planning, property, or other non-cash options, and income for life gifts), consider our partner organizations: The Barnabas Foundation in the United States and Christian Stewardship Services in Canada. We would be happy to help you connect with them or discuss any other giving and advancement topics you may have. Please feel free to reach out to us at advancement@midamerica.edu or by calling the Seminary at +1 (219) 864-2400 and speaking to Dan Fletcher, Vice President of Operations.

May the One who began this good work bring it to completion for His glory and the good of His church!

In grateful partnership, The Office of Advancement

INAUGURATION

For only the second time in its history, Mid-America Reformed Seminary celebrated a presidential inauguration. On Thursday, October 2, 2025, faculty, staff, students, board members, ecclesiastical and academic guests, and friends gathered at First OPC South Holland for the installation of Dr. Alan Strange as president.

Following an organ prelude by Dr. Pamela Compton and a processional—Mouret's Rondeau—joined by Dr. R. Andrew Compton on trumpet, retiring board president Rev. Todd Joling offered words of welcome. Emeritus faculty member Rev. Mark Vander Hart then led in the invocation.

The opening hymn, "God Is Our Refuge and Our Strength," was followed by Scripture readings from Proverbs 29:18–27 and Colossians 1:24–2:5 by Dr. R. Andrew

Compton. Newly elected board president Rev. Harry Zekveld then administered the inaugural oath to Dr. Strange and offered prayer.

The noble strains of Bizet's *Agnus Dei* filled the sanctuary with luminous beauty, elevated by the sonorous and exquisitely controlled soprano of Maria Luttjeboer, accompanied by Dr. Pamela Compton on organ. Rev. Zekveld returned to deliver a charge to the new president on behalf of the Seminary's supporting churches, followed by greetings from representatives of the student body, faculty, alumni, board of trustees, and visiting ecclesiastical and academic delegates. Fittingly, President Emeritus Dr. Cornelis Venema closed this portion of the service with warm and encouraging remarks.

After prayer by Dr. Marcus Mininger, Dr. Strange delivered his inaugural address, "The Necessary Vision," based on Proverbs 29:18. The service concluded with the hymn "O God Beyond All



Praising," followed by an organ and trumpet recessional—Paul Manz's arrangement of "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty." Attendees exited to Michael Burkhardt's "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow" and gathered downstairs for a reception of light refreshments, greetings, and congratulations for the new president.

Dr. R. Andrew Compton
Professor of Old Testament Studies,
Registrar, MTS Program Director

DEDICATED WITH THANKSGIVING

Mid-America Reformed Seminary has existed in its current building since 1995. But as its enrollment has inched upward, several years ago it was decided to expand the building, enhance some of the current portions, and add more offices and meeting areas. On Wednesday evening, October 1, a good number of area supporters joined the Seminary community to dedicate the building with the addition of a chapel-auditorium and the other enhancements. The Seminary is deeply appreciative to the supporters, from far and near, who have enabled these additions to the building.

The event took place in the chapel-auditorium. The group singing proved that the room has excellent acoustics. This new addition is the place where chapel exercises are

held (usually three times a week) and where guest lecturers will speak. The other building enhancements include additional offices and a meeting room for Faculty and Board meetings.

The dedication program included group singing, the reading of Scripture passages (Psalm 127 and Hebrews 11:8-16). Rev. Mark Vander Hart, professor emeritus, spoke on the theme of "Teaching Divine Truths in the Spirit of Thanksgiving." He used Romans 1:18-32 as a starting point, noting that God's truth, wisdom, and power can be seen in the "elegant book" of creation, which should cause us to honor God and give Him thanks. But this revelation is seen more fully and clearly in the other book of revelation, the Bible. The Seminary community does not dedicate only a building but also itself in service to God in the spirit of thanks. During the dedication program, Maria Luttjeboer



sang "The Holy City," reminding us of the divine city that is above and still to come.

Following the formal program there was a time for fellowship and refreshments in the expanded cafeteria.

Rev. Mark Vander Hart
Associate Professor of Old Testament
Studies, Emeritus

GOSSIPING THE GOSPEL: CONFERENCE RECAP

Blessed be our God, who is “able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20). On October 3-4, the Center for Missions and Evangelism annual conference took place in Lansing, IL. Over three hundred people were in attendance (our largest attendance yet!). Most notable was the number of young people in attendance. Several churches brought their youth groups or college-age kids; it was great to meet them and see their interest in sharing the gospel with the lost.

A newly ordained MARS graduate, Rev. Eric Heida, ably led the worship time, along with the help of several young people from his church. Rev. Mark Vander Hart opened the conference with a great talk from God’s word, challenging us to have a heart like that of our God for the

lost. Dr. Andrew Compton challenged us to think biblically and helpfully about the role of our sisters in Christ in the body of Christ without compromising on women’s ordination on the one hand, yet not neglecting the good gifts God has given the women of the church to use for His glory.

After lunch, Eric and Donna Hausler spoke about doing prison ministry together, and what it looks like to be a Reformed church that is multi-ethnic. Eric Hausler then challenged us to be bold for the gospel of Jesus Christ. The panel discussion was lively—lots of great questions! And after dinner, Rev. Ted Powers gave a great talk on a strategy for inner-city ministry.

Saturday, Rev. Ken Anema spoke on seeing God’s story in our story, and I had the privilege of wrapping up the conference on “Walking in Wisdom Toward Outsiders.”



All the talks are available on YouTube. Though the food was again great this year, the fellowship was even better. Next year (October 2-3), we will focus on “Being a Welcoming Church” in the name of Christ. Come and join us!

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

BOARD REPORT

The Board of Trustees met on October 2, convening onsite, with two joining via Zoom, two being out with excused absences, and, thankfully, none was missing due to illness.

Retiring President Rev. Todd Joling opened with scripture and prayer, and, while absent, the Board welcomed Rev. Jacques Roets, the newly elected Trustee filling Rev. Joling’s seat.

Undertaking the election of officers, President Rev. Harry Zekveld, Treasurer Mr. John Boekestyn, and Vice-All Mr. Tim Beezhold were elected, with Dr. Edwin Kreykes being re-elected as Secretary. Rev. Joling turned the meeting over to newly elected President Zekveld, with the Board warmly thanking Rev. Joling for his many years of service to the Seminary.

Making his first report as the

President of the Seminary, Dr. Alan Strange painted a broad picture of the state of the Seminary, with subsequent reports providing additional depth. Of note:

Enrollment – For 2025/26, a solid enrollment cross-denominationally, totaling 35 students.

Institutional Assessment – Mid-America’s assessment for accreditation culminated with ATS awarding a ten-year accreditation, the longest period they issue.

Vice President of Advancement – A search committee has convened, and the Seminary has numerous high-quality candidates for the position. Meanwhile, the staff works diligently to keep events, visits, and advancement activities moving, assisted by dedicated, experienced former staffers who held the position.

Long Range Planning – The committee reports they are on target to present a

draft of the being-developed plan at the May 2026 meeting of the Board.

Financial Position – Mr. Dave Rambo from Eifel Rambo Advisory Group met with the Board, summarizing their report by issuing the highest attestation to the integrity of the Seminary’s financial state.

Center for Missions & Evangelism – At the time of the Board meeting, final preparations were underway for the 2025 Fall CME Conference with keynotes by Rev. Ted Powers, Rev. Eric & Donna Hausler, and Rev. Ken Anema. Response and registrations for this year’s conference were at an all-time high.

The Board will reconvene for their next meeting on May 13, 2026.

Dan Fletcher
Vice President of Operations



WHAT'S HAPPENING TO PASTORAL LEADERSHIP?

PART 2

by J. Mark Beach

In our previous article, we made the case that pastoral leadership is not optional, that it sometimes requires courage, and that, with courage, it takes initiative. We also explored models of pastoral leadership: one being a transactional model where the minister is regarded as hired help, not a spiritual leader. He is to “do for us,” as we pay him to do. He must stay within the lane we circumscribe for him. A different model, the biblical one, is a transformational model. This model will not be circumscribed by the *status quo*; rather, the Word of God prophetically calls all God’s people—ministers, elders, deacons, the whole flock—to account, to discipleship, to a devout and growing walk of faith with the Lord. Pastors lead; sheep follow.

Now, people who know me well know that I prefer to be clear and direct rather than vague and around about. I certainly believe in being tactful, but I don’t believe in forever beating around the

bush or hem-hawing. Thus, to be clear and direct, this series of articles aims to correct what I perceive as a “hired help” model of the office of minister, wherein the pastor is contracted to perform a set of duties (biblically mandated and important duties, to be sure), submit to the eldership who, collectively, are the leaders and body of authority in the church, and lend assistance to them if needed or when asked for. The problem of the “hired help” model exists on several levels: (1) The congregation itself may view this as natural and obvious, “Of course, the pastor is hired to help us and do what we expect him to do. We pay his salary.” (2) The eldership, the office-bearers who have oversight over the flock and the church’s affairs, may likewise share this view. “The pastor is under our oversight and authority; he is required to do what we say.” And (3) the pastor himself may view himself in this role as well. “I have duties to perform, principal among them being preaching

and teaching, and that circumscribes my calling for the most part. I’m willing to help elsewhere, if I have time.”

What is missing from this model is that a pastor is *Christ’s servant before he is the church’s servant*. Also missing from this model is that a pastor will answer to Christ on Judgment Day, not to the church or the eldership. In addition, what is missing from this model is that authority is not grounded in the eldership, not as such, but in the Word of God to which we must all submit. Finally, what is also missing from this model is the prophetic calling the pastor has as *Christ’s servant*, to exercise authority and leadership *from the Word of God*, calling himself, the flock, and the eldership to reform, to greater devotion, sometimes to repentance, so that we conform more and more to the Word of God. The minister, as a pastor, exercises oversight, too!

I have a genuine concern that a generation of ministers is being lured away from their prophetic calling (which includes exercising spiritual leadership from the Word of God) by an erroneous set of notions about their own lack of authority and the elders' own unqualified authority. That is, the hired help model is not helping the church to be scripturally faithful to its head, Jesus Christ our Lord. I worry that pastors, some pastors at least, are being encouraged to step back in their leadership role *as pastors* of the sheep, or they have been flat out stripped of this role by design, or some of them are maneuvering themselves into this passive role where they deliberately assume the role of hired help. Pastoral leadership, in each case, is being parked down some side alley and forgotten. Meanwhile, either by design or as an inevitability, a certain domineering elder or dominant families take the reins and announce, "I'll drive." There is leadership, to be sure, simply not *pastoral leadership*.

Now, in order not to be misunderstood, I want first to make clear that I am not suggesting that this is true of all Reformed pastors who are inside "our circles." Second, my comments, in what follows, are not to be construed in any way as advocating for a "lone wolf" pastor, or some remake of the pastor as "bully." Nor are my remarks designed to encourage a model of pastoral leadership in which the pastor becomes a "one-man army" for, say, getting back to practicing church discipline or doing evangelistic outreach. Nor, further, am I pleading for a passive, sit-on-their-hands eldership. That has never served the church well. And, last, I know that exceptions apply, that specific churches may have situations that call for allowances, or otherwise that their pastor may not be equipped to take on certain duties at once. (A short article like

this cannot address all circumstances.)

That said, what I am pleading for is a wholesome, biblically balanced approach between the work of the pastor and that of his fellow shepherds (the elders), so that the work of ministry is appropriately shared, the elders are properly trained and equipped, the pastor is engaged in the multiple facets of pastoral ministry, and the flock is well cared for, along with the lost being sought out and disciplined.

Specifically, then, my remarks are aiming to correct two incomplete models of pastoring:

(1) *The pastor who seldom pastors at all or strives to minimize it* (as much as he can get away with). He loves his study, preparing sermons and getting teaching-lessons ready (playing on the internet!), while he ignores, as one example, visitation ministry. He does not get out among the flock under his care. But how can this be? In being a pastor, he inevitably needs to get out and about and in and among them. To borrow a metaphor, a good pastor cannot help but smell like sheep, for it comes with getting to know his flock. He smells like sheep because he enters into their hurts and struggles. He encourages, instructs, corrects, nudges, and weeps with his people. He laughs, dines, and shares life with them. This is not, then, the work of elders to do while the pastor ignores it. This is work for the pastor to do, and to lead and train elders on how they can do some of this work, too. We should always remember that elders, who have an oversight role in the church as co-shepherds, and rightly participate and take on this work to varying degrees, do so in their off-hours from their regular full-time jobs.

(2) *The pastor who pastors faithfully enough, but only as a hireling, as hired help, as performing duties under contract.* Under this model, the pastor is contracted to perform many needed and requisite duties, but he is forbidden to be a leader himself. His place is on the periphery of leadership. His role, especially where it gets difficult and

messy, and needs theological acumen and pastoral sensitivity, presence, face-to-face encounter, courage, and wisdom (often in cases of discipline ministry, often in cases of marital break-up), is to sit on the bench, look on from the sidelines, and remain passive. I would suggest this model lacks biblical support! Oddly, under model one above, it is the pastor who acts as a sort of bully. His pulpit work is too important to be occupied with the mundane work of personal care for sheep. He pressures the elders to pick up all the slack of pastoral neglect.

In our circles, there exists (in some churches at least) an "abstract" and "as such" conception of the eldership's authority. I would suggest we reconsider this approach. Elders do not have authority *as such*, no more than the pastor does. Authority belongs solely to Jesus Christ, the head of the church, and solely through his Word. The Confessions do not trump the Word of God, even less the Church Order; and neither the pastor nor the eldership may trump the Word of God. Elders do not rule in the name of the eldership. "We, the elders, declare ... *thus and so*." In discipline cases, the grounds for excommunication may never be: "*Brother John Doe has not heeded the admonition of the elders, and therefore we move to excommunicate him from Christ's church.*" We need to add a most critical phrase, "*Brother Doe has not heeded the admonitions of the Word of God, conveyed by the eldership.*" An eldership that thinks it has authority in the abstract, divorced from strict obedience to Scripture, is departing from *godly* and scriptural practice. The flock is under Christ's care through His Word, not under an eldership divorced from that Word. Elders may not assume authority that fails to be from the Word of God, or otherwise, what may be taken from it by good and necessary inference.

All of this demonstrates that the Word of God is the sole source of

authority in the church (also the consistory or session room), and it further demonstrates why it is quite wrong to think of the pastor as hired help. When this view prevails, the prophetic Word has been emasculated. There is no room left, not in principle, for the Word *to teach, to reprove, to correct, to train in righteousness* “that the man of God [elders, too] may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17 ESV).

The preached Word, as well as the Word administered in face-to-face counsel and discipleship, calls every believer to submit to it. No exceptions! An eldership is not above the Word of God, and it exercises legitimate authority only when it submits to it. Therefore, it must submit to it relative to the office of the pastor as well, for the pastor’s duties may not be so circumscribed as to eliminate what is biblically mandated of him and the office he holds. Remember, Paul instructs the young *pastor* (the pastor!), Timothy, to exercise leadership in discipline, even in the cases of elders: “*As for those [elders, see v. 19] who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear*” (1 Tim. 5:20 ESV). Such is the instruction for timid Timothy! He is to be no pastor on the sidelines! The point is repeated in Titus 2:15: “*Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.*” Get that? The pastor is not to be sidelined! (The pastoral letters are addressed to pastoral leaders! They are not hired help!)

In some churches within our circles, the implementation of these texts may seem challenging or unfamiliar! Why? “*Well, because the pastor is our man, our pastor, our servant, our hireling. Where does he get off telling an elder thus and so?*” Well, the Word of God is the authority, and he must exercise it! This shows that a pastor does not have abstract and as such authority either. He is a

servant of the Word, Christ’s Word, and that Word requires him to warn the church of errors and threats (1 Tim. 4:6, 11; cf. 6:2). He is to

“...what I am pleading for is a wholesome, biblically balanced approach between the work of the pastor and that of his fellow shepherds (the elders), so that the work of ministry is appropriately shared...”

dissuade errant teachers (1 Tim. 1:3f.; Titus 1:13). He is to “wage the good warfare” (1:18). He is to urge and instruct about prayer (1 Tim. 2:1-3, 8), about women’s adornment (2:9), about proper conduct in worship (2:11ff.), exercising supervision over qualifications of elders and deacons (3:1ff.; 8ff.). He is to set “an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (4:12; cf. 2 Tim. 2:22; Titus 2:7, 12). The pastor is called to command and teach proper conduct and order in the household of God, and propagate sound doctrine (1 Tim. 3:15; Titus 2:1). He is not laboring outside boundaries by being involved in the enrollment or non-enrollment of widows (5:9ff.); he is likewise not laboring outside his boundaries in being involved in matters of members providing for needy relatives (5:8, 16); he is involved in sticky cases, as when a charge is brought against an elder (5:19), and the discipline that might follow (5:20); he is involved, indeed, he is charged with, keeping (seeking to implement) the rules of instruction he has received (5:21).

Pastors are called to guard the good

deposit of the faith (2 Tim. 1:14). They are to act as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, taking their share of suffering for Him (2:3; cf. 3:12). They are to intervene or interfere so that quarrels and quibbling about words may not infect the body of Christ, and also not allow false teachers to lead the flock astray (2:14; 2:23ff. 3:6ff.; 4:3; cf. 1 Tim. 4:1ff., 5:19-20; 6:3ff.; also Titus 3:9-11; 1:10-15; 1 Thess. 5:12-15; Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:1-3).

The pastor’s work, as is obvious, is multifaceted, difficult, hazardous, and stressful. It is not supposed to be the repose of the study, cordoned off from life out beyond, while the elders are assigned all the heavy lifting. Sermon preparation and its execution are, indeed, the foremost part of his work; but even that work improves when a pastor is attentive to the abovementioned duties and labors.

Consider with me the tasks and duties that comprise the minister’s calling: (1) *Preaching*: This often requires fresh preparation for two sermons each week. (2) *Teaching*: Effective teaching necessitates dedicated study and preparation time. This includes Bible studies and catechism classes. (3) *Visitation Ministry*: This has assorted facets and dimensions for an assortment of needs. (4) *Pastoral Counseling Ministry*: The pastor often addresses issues like discouragement, personal crises, and marital difficulties. (5) *Outreach and Discipleship Ministry*: This can include strategic community involvement, one-on-one discipleship encounters, and instructing individuals in the faith. (6) *Corrective Ministry*: This aspect focuses on guiding those who have strayed from the faith (going after lost sheep). Then, too, there are additional tasks: (7) *Instructing and training elders and deacons* for their specific roles. (8) *Preparing for and leading meetings of the church council and eldership* (this is the historic

Reformed practice, in any case; the leader leads). (9) *Carrying out duties assigned by Classis or Synod* and attending meetings of the same. Last (10) *Special ministry or ministries based on pastoral gifts*.

This is quite a list, and I could elaborate at length on each task. It shows us why no pastor is sufficient for these things, even as it shows us why we need to pray for, *and pray onward and forward*, our pastors. Ministers have much to do, and they can't do it all. They shouldn't be expected to do it all. (I'm pleading for balance, not lopsidedness.) God never intended for ministers to be *Lone Rangers*. A pastor is not to be a one-man-army, whether it be cleaning up the membership rolls, or sponsoring an annual conference for bringing vocational service under godly principles. God has ordained pastors/ministers to labor first and principally in the ministry of the Word, but not exclusively so. However, note that a more experienced minister should be able to prepare for preaching services twice as fast as an inexperienced minister.

Be that as it may, this list also shows us why God saw fit to ordain co-shepherds (elders) to labor alongside the minister for the care of the flock (Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23). Elders, like pastors, may also labor in teaching (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9), in visiting the sick (James 5:14-16), welcoming newcomers, and exercising oversight over the flock (1 Pet. 5:2-3; Titus 1:8, 9). They exercise, with the pastor—not to his exclusion—oversight over one another as well.

A common practice is for the pastor to report monthly to the eldership about his work. This is sensible and proper, for the minister is in full-time service and needs to be held accountable. However, elders, too, must be

held accountable. This means each elder needs to report on his work as an elder to the eldership *and the pastor*. (Again, ministers are not hirelings; they have oversight as well.) Alongside this practice, consistories and sessions would do well to implement the practice of a bi-annual meeting between the elder and the pastor—that is, bi-annually, each elder meets with the pastor to go over his district (better, his *parish*), to report on those under his care, to assess how those members are doing, their spiritual state, their needs and struggles, their burdens and tears, how the church might come alongside them, or where there might be disciplinary issues emerging, needing immediate attention, or who is lonely, sorrowing, or who is in ill-health, who are doing well, how members' gifts might be used, etc. The pastor should not sit on the sidelines while the elders do their work. He should be involved in their work. He should be aware of what is going on. By meeting together with his elders, each individually, the pastor can offer counsel and encouragement to each elder personally, bring concerning matters before the whole eldership, or they can come with recommendations for action. Further, this enables the pastor to be made aware of the needs, hurts, problems, worries, and struggles of parishioners in order to strategize together and work for solutions. The pastor/elder dynamic is not to be that of elders ruling over the pastor as hired help for the church or of the pastor acting the role of bully, barking orders to elders. Biblically, they answer together to Christ. They mutually help one another.

Such a model of the pastor/elder dynamic is light-years away from the hiring model. I would encourage us to move beyond the limiting hiring approach.

Churches that have unintentionally sidelined their pastors should reconsider their approach, for churches need pastoral leadership. The pastor is Christ's servant. He needs prayer, and he needs an active, well-trained, and dedicated eldership laboring alongside

him to equip God's people for works of service (Eph. 4:12).

The only thing left for the church to ask is this: Do we want prophetic leadership leading us forward into greater obedience and service to Christ? How that question is answered will prove pivotal for a church either moving forward or compromising its witness by sins of omission. If a given congregation is satisfied with itself, if it is confident that it is pleasing God because it is pleased with itself, it will not likely welcome any change. But, truth is, most churches can benefit from ongoing reform. Examples: Some churches need to learn to welcome newcomers—even more, how to include and enfold them into the life of the church. Some churches need to learn hospitality so that it is a place where members can gladly bring their lost co-workers. Churches can learn to communicate the gospel to well-seasoned believers and the lost simultaneously. Churches can learn to pray for and better come alongside broken members. A pretended sympathy tinged with censure is not Christlike. And churches can learn to fellowship with fellow members through the gospel as the family of God *through Christ's blood*, as opposed to making family bloodlines the near-exclusive arena of friendship.

So, do we want leadership, pastoral leadership, bringing us into blessed conformity to Christ? Or will we inadvertently follow the path of the Laodiceans, living in bland lukewarmness? Christ may contemplate spitting us out of His mouth (Rev. 3:16). The church needs pastoral leadership because we all need the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14).



Dr. J. Mark Beach
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Recommended reading for elders: John R. Sittema, *With a Shepherd's Heart: Reclaiming the Pastoral Office of Elder*; Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: Restoring the Eldership to Its Rightful Place in the Local Church*; Jeramie Rinne, *Church Elders: How to Shepherd God's People Like Jesus*.

ALUMNI PROFILE: VERN PICKNALLY

I graduated from MARS in 1999 and have had the privilege and joy of serving three congregations in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. My first call was to Bethel OPC in Carson, ND (now in Mandan, ND). I went to Carson, first, as stated supply in November of 1999 and then was ordained and installed as pastor in April of 2000. Interestingly, my installation was delayed 2 weeks due to an ice storm. I served Bethel OPC for about 12 years. In September of 2011, I left my comfort zone and accepted a call to be the organizing pastor (church planter) at Fremont OPC (later Bethel Reformed OPC) in Fremont, MI which is about an hour north of Grand Rapids. I then became Bethel Reformed's first pastor when they became a new and separate congregation in February of 2016. After almost 14 years, I was just recently installed as pastor of Christ Presbyterian OPC, in Janesville, WI, on September 26th. Dr. Venema participated in the installation by giving the charge to me from 1 Corinthians 4:1-5. I am looking forward to getting to know the saints here in Janesville and serving the Lord here in their midst. I should mention that the congregation and elders at Christ Presbyterian speak highly of the many MARS students and professors who have served them in their time without a pastor.

Ministry at CPC has been busy and blessed. The congregation has grown some even in their time without a pastor. In my first month, since being installed, there was the birth of two children in the congregation (both on the same day) and there was a marriage as well, and the baptism of an adult who is professed her faith. The Lord has been blessing this congregation. The elders here are diligent and godly men who are endeavoring to and have been shepherding the flock here well. I



look forward to serving alongside these men. The congregation is also involved in door-to-door evangelism, sharing the gospel at a local laundromat where they pay for people's laundry and then talk to them about Jesus as they wait, and they reach out at a Men's Shelter as well by providing a meal and gospel conversation. I am looking forward to see how the Lord will use me and His church here in the years ahead.

I remain thankful for my wife and helpmeet, Olena, who has served by my side this whole time. In January, Lord-willing, we will celebrate 30 years of marriage together. Olena is originally from Ukraine, so the ongoing war there is often on our minds. Her parents and sister currently live in Michigan and her brother lives in England so they are out of harm's way. Yet, she has many cousins in Ukraine that we pray for. We have been blessed with three adult children: Vera, Ivan, and Nadia. In January of this year, we were blessed with our first grandchild, Katherine, born to Vera and her husband, Tyler. Another

blessing is that our youngest, Nadia, is to be married this January. We are thrilled with the man that the Lord is providing for her.

I still stand amazed that the Lord chooses to use me as under-shepherd to care for His sheep. When thinking about the fact that the flock is 'His' flock, purchased by Christ's own blood, this humbles me and, at the same time, gives me great joy. Mid-America Reformed Seminary remains in my prayers. I did not learn all I needed to know at MARS, but no seminary can do that. I was, however, equipped and taught by faithful godly shepherds to shepherd the sheep. I was given the tools needed to serve Christ in His church. So, I pray that the Lord will continue to use MARS for many more years for the training of men for gospel service. To God be the glory.

Vern Picknally
1999 Mid-America Alumnus



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