

THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

Nursing Home Ministry

by Rev. Mark Vander Hart



Students Aaron Warner, Bob Holda, Steve Carr & Daniel Ragusa at the Dyer Nursing Home

Mid-America Reformed Seminary students have had a ministry to the residents of the Dyer Nursing Home and Rehabilitation Center (DNHRC) for many years. Located just a couple of blocks from the seminary itself, students in the past had gone as individuals or in small groups to visit residents in a more or less pastoral capacity. They would typically spend some time getting to know the residents, seek to pray for them, and share gospel comforts and exhortations from God's Word. Over the past two years, that ministry had dwindled significantly. This year, we have begun that ministry afresh. Since November, 2014, the Seminary student

body has provided a monthly chapel service for the residents at DNHRC.

We meet with residents in the Dining Hall from 2-3pm on the second Thursday of every month, after checking in with the Activities Director, Natalie Porcaro. During that time, we read an opening passage of Scripture (typically a Psalm or text related to the message to be delivered), ask for God's blessing on our time in prayer, sing 3-4 hymns with the residents (large print handouts of the hymn lyrics are provided for the residents), and then provide a 10-15 minute gospel-centered message from God's Word. After that message, we sing a final hymn and pray together. The entire 'service' portion of our time lasts about 30 minutes. For the second half-hour, each seminarian that has attended walks around and greets the residents, asking about them and whether or not he can pray with them in those moments. Residents often offer up prayer requests to us and are typically open to praying together. These are very encouraging and uplifting times for both them and us. At 3pm we check out with the Activities Director.

Bob Holda coordinates these visits, serves as DNHRC's contact person with the seminary, and leads the music portion of the service with guitar and singing. Aaron Warner, Steve Carr, and Bob Holda have provided the messages to date. Justin Beach has also been in attendance on multiple occasions. Each student has been greatly encouraged by providing gospel comforts from God's Word in the lives of those who suffer in particular ways. It is both humbling and uplifting to see them in the very apparent difficulty of their lives continue to take strength and hope from the promises of God and the bold declarations of His Word. The opportunities to proclaim God's Word clearly and boldly have helped the students who have exhorted at DNHRC continue to develop the skill of staying focused and simple in our expression of the unspeakable glories and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Prison Ministry

by Rev. Mark Vander Hart

Mid-America students for years have been ministering in non-church settings in this area. For example, several inmates at the Illinois State Prison (Stateville) have joined the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Orland Park, Illinois). Once per month, this church conducts a Bible study at Stateville. In the past, students Dan Nicholson, Darryl Kretschmer, and David Franks have been to Stateville. Current middler, Jeremy Baker, is a "Volunteer Chaplain for the State of Illinois Correctional Facilities." He had the privilege of preaching at Stateville last May 2014 and hopes to do so again in March 2015.

Other students have ministered in the Danville Correctional Institution in Danville, Illinois. Jeff Munive, Brian Blummer, and Joel Worries have led worship services there in connection with the Divine Hope Reformed Bible Seminary at Danville. The role of Mid-America students in the work at Danville has diminished since the Divine Hope students are now leading the worship services there in more recent months. Divine Hope and Mid-America students have had and hope to have conferences together.

It is a wonderful blessing to visit the brothers in prison and bring God's Word to them. Students who have ministered in any prison, sense a great mutual blessing between the believers in the prison and the believers who come to minister in the prison. They both look forward to the visits.

The President's Message: "The Role of the Church in Seminary Training: The Financial Support of Students (2)"

by Dr. Cornelis P. Venema



In an earlier message in this column, I introduced the topic of the role of the church in the training of seminary students. Just as the seminary has clear obligations to the churches in the way it prepares students for the ministry, so the churches have clear obligations to identify prospective students within their congregations, ensure that such students are qualified, and encourage them in the course of their preparation for the work of a pastor in Christ's church.

One responsibility of the church concerns the sensitive matter of financial support. Are the churches under any obligation to support financially the training of students whom they recommend for seminary study?

Certainly, in the history of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches, there is evidence of an awareness of this obligation. Many churches have classical or presbytery committees that oversee a "student aid" fund. Others, like the United Reformed Churches in North America, assign a special responsibility to the student's "council" to ensure that the student's "financial needs are met" (Church Order, Art. 3).

Now it might be objected that seminary students are merely "aspirants" for the ministry, and therefore do not fall under the purview of the Scriptural teaching that the churches should adequately compensate those who labor in the Word and teaching (see 1 Tim. 5:17-18). Some might argue that such students should secure their own needs through personal and family resources, but without reliance upon any form of aid from the church. Why should a seminary student be treated differently than other members of the church, who are pursuing their vocational aims and providing for their education out of their own resources?

In reply to this objection, I would note the following:

First, it is certainly true that a student is not in the same position as an ordained minister, so far as the church's obligation of financial support is concerned. However, if the church's office-bearers recommend a student for study, they also commit themselves to encourage him in the course of his preparation. Such encouragement can hardly be exhausted by wishing the student well in his studies, but not undertaking to help him meet the financial costs of such preparation (cf. James 1:15).

Second, it should be remembered that all students receive indirect support through the gifts of the churches to the seminary. The financial gifts of God's people toward seminary education help to defray the costs of each student's education. At Mid-America Reformed Seminary, the Board of Trustees has long been committed to a policy that keeps tuition and other costs as low as possible. The wisdom of such a policy is fairly obvious in a day when many students graduate from college and seminary with large debts, which can pose great difficulties for students who enter a vocation that does not promise a high salary. But this policy is not simply based upon prudential considerations; it also honors the church's commitment to secure good training for its future ministers.

Third, the obligation of the churches to help students does not diminish the student's prior obligation to meet in a responsible way his own obligations in this area. Like many seminaries, Mid-America has student aid funds. But these are only distributed to students who have demonstrated that they have exhausted their own resources. Students are expected to do what they can, with the support of spouses, families, and other benefactors, to fund their education. But when these resources are inadequate, it is vital that the churches do what they can to assist.

And fourth, the obligation to support students in preparation for the ministry is a corporate one. Since seminary students are preparing to serve within a particular fellowship of churches, the financial aid afforded them should not be the exclusive obligation of their home congregation. In some cases, a local congregation does not have the resources to assist. Since the benefit of the student's education is shared by the churches together, there should be a willingness to partner with other churches to meet the need when it presents itself.

Evening Class: "What Happens After I Die?"

by Dr. Cornelis P. Venema

During the spring term, Dr. Cornelis P. Venema will be teaching an evening class at the seminary on the topic, "What Happens After I Die?" While this topic may strike some as a little uninviting, no topic is of greater importance or more obvious interest. After all, though it may be said that "nothing is more certain than death and taxes," the truth is—taxes are avoidable but death is not (cf. Heb. 9:27). A vital part of the comfort that believers enjoy in union with Christ, is the confidence of victory over sin and death (1 Cor. 15:54-56). The Scripture's teaching regarding the believer's hope for the future is a subject of vital and perennial interest.

Dr. Venema's class will meet on four Thursday evenings in March (5, 12, 19, 26) at 7:30 p.m. For those who wish to attend the class but are not able to come to the campus, the classes will be live-streamed to those who have requested to join the class in this way. The four sessions will address such questions as: What becomes of the believer who "falls asleep" in Christ in the state intermediate between death and the future resurrection of the body? How are we to understand the "resurrection of the body?" Does the Bible teach that those who are unbelieving and impenitent will be eternally punished in hell? What will everlasting life be like in the "new heavens and earth?"

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New Student: Andrew Pinson



Andrew Pinson has been admitted in the M.Div. program to begin his study this Spring. Andrew, and his wife, Zyra hail from Phoenix, Arizona, where he is a member of the URC, pastored by alumnus Phil Grotenhuis. He has taught Sunday school for several years and also served as a youth group leader. Andrew was reared by his devout Roman Catholic grandmother, though he later drifted away from that church.

He describes himself as “wanting to love Jesus and be loved by Him,” but was never sure how to do this, fearful that he was not good enough. This led to years of seeking to make his own way, part of which led him to enter the world of ballroom dancing, in which he has served for some years as an instructor. Things were falling apart when he met the children of Pastor Grotenhuis in dance class, subsequently coming to Christ and the Reformed faith.

Interim Classes

From January 19-23, Rev. Danny Hyde led an interim class entitled “Preaching from the Old Testament: Tabernacle Narrative.” This course discussed why Christian preachers should preach the Old Testament in general and the tabernacle of Israel in particular. The class explored the problems and possibilities of preaching these texts, building a theology of the tabernacle, analyzing samples from the history of exegesis and preaching, and setting for a positive example of such preaching.

During the January interim junior students finish their study of basic Hebrew. Since each day of class represents two normal class sessions per week in a regular semester, it is fairly intense: learning more verb forms, memorizing vocabulary words, etc. It is a lot of work, but it is satisfying to be able to read through a book like Ruth.

Rev. M. Vander Hart occasionally teaches an elective course on Old Testament apocalyptic literature. This particular January that course was taught. In this two-hour course, examination is made of the nature of apocalypticism, coupled with study of Isaiah 24-27 and portions of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. Obviously, understanding the OT background is essential to opening up the Gospels and Revelation.

Thinking About Tomorrow by Keith LeMahieu



Estate planning is a topic we rarely think about, especially in our younger adult years. The birth of a child is the first catalyst that causes most married couples to consider estate planning. It is natural to be concerned about who will take guardianship of our children in the event something should happen to us. On the other hand, many young parents don't realize the future of their children will be decided by the court, not other family members, and thus postpone estate planning “until we have some assets to plan for.”

If you already have an estate plan, another common trap we fall into is the “set it and forget it” trap. Laws concerning estate planning are constantly changing and the size and complexity of your estate often changes over time. These changes could impact how your estate is settled and thus a periodic review is important. Also, the probate process (the process of proving the genuineness of the will in court after your death) can be very costly. A regular review of your estate plan can often identify and resolve many potential probate problems.

People and circumstances also change. Are the heirs you have listed in your estate plan financially responsible? Is the trust established for minor children still necessary? Are there circumstances with children or grandchildren that require special care? Will the amount your heirs are due to receive, do them more harm than good? Are the charitable organizations you identified in your will, still faithful to the causes you wish to support? Are there different Christian ministries you wish to support?

How about matters of medical and legal care? Do you have a living will that clearly identifies your healthcare intentions and who will make decisions about your healthcare should you be unable to make these decisions on your own? Do you want extraordinary medical intervention in the event of a serious medical emergency? What if you are no longer able to make decisions due to incapacitation? Who has power of attorney to make decisions about the management of your affairs?

Through its membership with the Barnabas Foundation, Mid-America can provide expert estate planning advice from a Christian perspective at no cost to you. If you are interested in speaking with a representative of the Barnabas Foundation, contact me or Barnabas directly to arrange a confidential consultation from one of their professionally trained staff.



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Spring Evening Class

at Mid-America Reformed Seminary

on March 5, 12, 19 & 26

at 7:30 pm

“What Happens After I Die?”

Led by Dr. Cornelis P. Venema

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◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

How I spent my winter vacation (or at least six days of it) by Dr. Alan D. Strange



This January, I had the opportunity to go down on behalf of the OPC to San Juan, Puerto Rico, and to teach the first Spanish edition of a Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC (MTIOPC) course that I also regularly teach stateside: the OPC Form of Government. I hasten to add that I taught the course in English and Miguel Flower, one of the elders in one of the San Juan OP churches (there are two vibrant and wonderful OP churches in San Juan), served as my translator.

I also preached on Sunday in the church in which Miguel serves and of which the Rev. Carlos Cruz is the pastor. Sunday evening we went to Ponce, on the central southern coast of the Island, for a service in the church plant there. The churches there are quite vibrant, with many young couples involved, as they seek to spread the Reformed faith throughout Puerto Rico. They have another church plant in the south to the east of Ponce; one that they had in the northwestern part of the island earlier didn't make it. But anyone serious about church planting realizes that some particular plants will flourish and others won't: we must get out and spread the faith and this is what the church there is doing, through regular radio broadcasts, YouTube and other internet outreaches (through other social media), publishing Reformed literature in Spanish, and much personal evangelism. They also have a seminary there to which Mid-America hopes to

provide counsel and help with courses.

One may wonder why anyone would want to leave Chicago at this time of year, but I have managed to force myself! Of course, the weather has been beautiful in San Juan, with overnight lows in the 70s and daytime highs in the 80s. In addition to the time spent teaching, preaching, and thoroughly enjoying getting to know the brethren there, two of my daughters and I toured around on our own, with a hired tour, and also with the brethren there. Jaime Zapata, a Puerto Rican Dept. of Agriculture official, and elder in one of the churches gave us a remarkable all-day tour of Old San Juan. We toured a rainforest and enjoyed the hospitality of all the saints on numerous occasions. What a blessing to go there!