

# THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

## Commencement Report by Dr. Alan Strange



Mid-America Reformed Seminary's Thirty-Second Commencement was held on May 11, 2017, coinciding with the Spring meeting of the Board of Trustees. Board member Daniel F. Patterson, a 2002 alumnus of Mid-America and an Adjunct Professor of Ministerial Studies, delivered the commencement address to a large crowd of graduates' families and friends gathered for the occasion. Rev. Patterson, who had taught the five graduates "Introduction to Pastoral Counseling," gave a warm, challenging and encouraging talk to the assembled. His text was from Mark 9:35-52

and is elsewhere detailed in this edition of the Messenger.

This address followed an academic procession in which the faculty, speaker, graduates, and board marched in. Highlights of the procession included our newest faculty member, the Rev. Andrew Compton, Assistant Professor of Old Testament, and the bright regalia of Rev. Marcus Mininger, Associate Professor of New Testament and a newly-minted Ph.D. from Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia, PA).

President Cornelis Venema welcomed all and introduced our speaker. He also gave special recognition to the wives of the graduates for their support during the arduous training of their husbands. After Rev. Patterson's stirring speech, President Venema was joined by the Board President, Rev. James Sawtelle, for the conferring of the degrees. Four of the students received M.Div. degrees and the fifth an MTS degree. Of those receiving the M.Div., David Jouf (OPC), Tad Groenendyk (URCNA), and Ryan Noha (OPC) will continue to work towards licensure/candidacy in preparation for calls. The fourth, Ruben Zartman (RCUS), has received a call to an RCUS congregation in California where he will be stated supply for a season in preparation for ordination. The fifth, Moody Wasif (who received the MTS), will continue in advanced theological studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, IL).

After receiving their degrees, and the hearty applause of the audience, the graduates received a charge from Dr. Alan D. Strange, Professor of Church History. The faculty takes turns in giving this annual charge. Dr. Strange charged the graduates in the words of the Apostle Paul from I Corinthians 9:19-27. He noted that while the Apostle claims great gospel freedom in the discharge of his duties, such freedom is always shaped by self-discipline, both in his becoming all things to all people and in keeping himself under control. Some misuse the "all things to all people" dynamic to mean "anything goes." In fact, to become such requires self-denial and the adoption of a servant mentality. In these days of looseness such self-giving, instead of self-seeking, is crucial for effective gospel ministry.

Drs. J. Mark Beach and Mininger also assisted in the ceremony, placing academic hoods on the new graduates. Additionally, Professor Compton led in a responsive litany and Professor Mark Vander Hart offered a prayer for the blessing of the new graduates. Adding to the festivity and beauty of the ceremony, Nancy Venema (organ) and Lauren LeMahieu (trumpet) accompanied the singing of the hymns as well as played processions and recessions (in addition to prelude and postlude).

Following the conclusion of the service, the newest alumni of Mid-America gathered in the fellowship hall to receive the congratulations of and enjoy refreshments with all who had come to witness this joyful occasion.

## Mark 10:35-52: Two Philosophies of Discipleship

by Rev. Danny Patterson

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? James and John thought they knew when they came to Jesus asking him to do for them whatever they ask, but sadly they were mistaken. You see, they believed their relationship to Christ entitled them to ask for positions of power and honor in God's kingdom. Discipleship for them meant access to influence, reputation, and honor. Yes, James and John wanted to be followers of Jesus, but they also wanted to be first with him. They wanted to sit on thrones with him in the kingdom of heaven.

Contrast this philosophy of discipleship with that of Blind Bartimaeus. He didn't come to Jesus boasting, like James and John, but broken. He cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me" (v. 47). He wasn't interested in being first; he was simply ecstatic to be a follower of the Messiah. He wasn't interested in sitting in power, but simply seeing.

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus. It means coming to Jesus broken, not boasting. It means finding joy in simply being a follower, not being first in rank. It means seeing Christ in all his saving glory, and not craving to sit in power. It means being content to fill a little space if Christ is glorified in us.



## For Our Good (Hebrews 12:5-11)

by Dr. J. Mark Beach



Parents see the value of discipline more easily than their children. When I was a child I never quite bought the idea that I was being punished for my own good. Only when I was older did I view discipline through a clearer lens. Of course, now I'm glad for my parents' loving discipline.

But what about God's discipline? Are we grateful for it? Do we see his love in it?

As believers, we struggle to apply this childhood lesson to our walk of faith. We often view God's discipline from a childish perspective. We suffer—prompting us to ask, why? When bad things happen to us, we puzzle in wonder or frustration or doubt. Why should I go through this pain?

This certainly fits the situation being addressed in the book of Hebrews. The writer urges the Hebrew Christians to consider their current trials and suffering with spiritual maturity. He encourages them to remember God's ways with his children. They needed a reminder.

Don't we all? "And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons?" (Heb. 12:5). These words are part of the prior exhortation to remember Jesus Christ in his suffering, who "endured the cross" and "the opposition of sinful men" (12:2, 3).

We easily slip into a forgetfulness of God's Word, though. The author of Hebrews therefore reminds us of that Word, referring to God's fatherly discipline as an "exhortation" or an "encouragement." The specific word used here bears a kinship to the word used for the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John, where he is called our "Advocate" (NIV) or "Comforter" (KJV) or "Helper" (NRSV). In John's Gospel the word is "paracletos"; here the word is "paracletis." The biblical writer informs us of two things, followed by an explanation: first, we must not make light of the Lord's discipline; secondly, we must not lose heart when rebuked; and the explanation: "For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives" (vv. 5b-6). Discipline is grounded in God's fatherly care for us. The point is clear; and we must not miss it. In the face of suffering and struggle, in the face of disappointments and persecution, God has not abandoned us. He has not forgotten us; nor is he treating us as rejects or unwanted. On the contrary, he is treating us as his sons and daughters.

The author of Hebrews notes how parents discipline their children "as seems best" to them. Sometimes parents fail miserably. By contrast, God's discipline is never "as seems best" but always "for our good," in order that "we may share his holiness." No question here whether God knows what he is doing. There's never anything misinformed or misguided or unfair in his child-rearing efforts. Is it pleasant? The writer to the Hebrews says it isn't. "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful" (12:11a). There is no getting around that—discipline is distasteful. It is corrective. It steers us in a new direction. It forces us out of ruts of sinful attitudes, actions, thoughts, and words. It makes us look at our habits from a better, more biblical perspective. Though the path is painful, its rewards are blessed: "Later on . . . it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (12:11b).

"For those who have been trained by it"—Ah! We mustn't miss this pivotal point. The Hebrews Christians are urged to be "trained" by their sufferings. In other words, if the discipline is to have its desired effect, we are not merely to endure suffering, we are to be "trained" by our suffering. We must learn from it, for "training" doesn't take place automatically, just as going to school doesn't guarantee that we learn anything. Some Christians who have suffered a great deal have learned very little. Others, however, were "trained" by God's discipline, and the "fruits of righteousness" are there for God and us to see. God uses our trials as discipline "for our good."

If we are to believe this, we need ears to hear.

Are you being corrected and "trained" by the hardship you endure? Are you becoming a fit disciple of Christ from God's fatherly discipline? God's fatherly discipline is for believers only; it is for disciples. No doubt, unbelievers can also learn a lot through the hard knocks of life, and as a result they might become better people because of trials. But life's hard knocks don't sanctify them. They aren't being made into Jesus' disciples through suffering. God's discipline toward his children, however, is sanctifying. His discipline is love in action, for he loves us not by spoiling us but by correcting us. He is making us disciples—for our good!

## Board Report

by Rev. James Sawtelle

On May 11, Mid America Reformed Seminary board members gathered for our spring meeting. Reports from the President on the overall work of the seminary, as well as the faculty, and all board committees were carefully considered. The Board approved a six month sabbatical for Dr. Venema; Dr. Beach will serve as President pro tem.

With gratitude to God we heard the report that the transition of the seminary's office administration from Mrs. Florence Kooiman to Mr. Keith LeMahieu has gone smoothly. While Florence is truly missed, Keith and the other office staff have continued to work well together and serve the seminary's needs with dedication and skill. Professor Andrew Compton completed his first year of teaching duties. Faculty and students alike expressed much appreciation for his work.

I highlight two reports for your information. First, we praise God that the seminary's financial position continues to remain strong, thanks to the faithful and generous giving of our supporters. Second, the seminary continues to make progress on developing a Long Range Plan. This plan requires a comprehensive evaluation of how the seminary can best continue to prepare men for ministry in the 21st century church and the cultural situation in which they will serve.

Professors Strange, Vander Hart and Venema were examined and reappointed for another four years each. We note with thanksgiving the faithfulness of each of these men, their many years of service to the seminary, and their willingness to use their gifts in this service.

On Thursday evening the Board members attended the commencement exercises in which four students received the Master of Divinity degree, and one student received the Master of Theological Studies degree.



### Did you know?

You can fill out the board ballot **online!**  
Visit our website at  
[www.midamerica.edu/boardballot2017](http://www.midamerica.edu/boardballot2017).  
Ballots must be completed by July 31.

## Summer Assignments

Mid-America's Ministerial Apprenticeship Program requires students in the Master of Divinity program to do two summer internships in order to graduate. This program gives students a guided opportunity to practice theories and ideas learned in the classroom. A student must learn much more than academic material to be an effective minister of the Word, and this program capitalizes on the personal and educational benefits of a tutorial relationship between an experienced minister and a student.

The following is a list of where students are serving this summer:

| Student             | Assignment   | Ministerial supervisor  |
|---------------------|--|-------------------------|
| Daniel Beezhold     | Wellandport United Reformed Church in Wellandport, Ontario         | Rev. Joel Dykstra       |
| Bryce de Zwart      | Sioux Center United Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa          | Rev. Todd de Rooy       |
| Paul Freswick       | Reformed Bible Church (URC) in Pompton Plains, New Jersey          | Rev. Richard Kuiken     |
| Ehren Gaebler       | Grace Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Hudson, Ohio                    | Rev. Dr. Rhett Dodson   |
| Cary Gephart        | Cottage Grove Christian Reformed Church in South Holland, Illinois | Rev. Dr. Joseph Brinks  |
| Joel Irvin          | Michiana Covenant Church (PCA) in Granger, Indiana                 | Rev. Dr. Peter Wallace  |
| Jonathan Key        | New Life Fellowship (PCA) in Atlantic City, New Jersey             | Rev. Santo Garofalo     |
| Glem Melo           | Faith Church (RCA) in Dyer, Indiana                                | Rev. Bob Bouwers        |
| Nathaniel Rademaker | Immanuel United Reformed Church in DeMotte, Indiana                | Rev. Tom Wetselaar      |
| Ryan Swale          | Faith United Reformed Church in Beecher, Illinois                  | Rev. Todd Joling        |
| Kelvin Tiemstra     | Redeeming Grace URC (Living Water) in Brantford, Ontario           | Rev. Greg Bylsma        |
|                     |  | Rev. Daniel Ventura     |
| Nathan Vos          | Borculo Christian Reformed Church in Zeeland, Michigan             | Rev. Stephen Terpstra   |
| John Ysinga         | Bethel United Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan                 | Rev. Wm. Jason Tuinstra |
|                     |  | Rev. Steven Postma      |

In all cases of work, the supervising pastor, consistory/session, and student will provide periodic, detailed evaluation. In short this field education component of the M.Div. program, is concerned with spiritual, personal, theological, and ministerial development of students in the areas of worship leadership, church education, pastoral care, and church government and administration.

## Help Wanted by Mike Deckinga

People hire professionals all the time. Some people hire a travel agent to help them get the best deal on that all-inclusive getaway. Some people hire a plumber to get that clogged drain working again. Some people hire an interior decorator to bring their living space into the 21st Century. Some people even hire YouTube. No really, it's true. I've seen it. Confession time: I've done it. The point is, people need help with things they're not experts at. There's no shame in it – we've all got things that we are experts at, and things we are not. It's just that simple.

One area that help may be needed is in charitable giving. That's why we are going to wrap up our mini-series on generosity with a look at who can help us be the most generous givers we can be. Did you know that Mid-America Reformed Seminary partners with two different organizations whose sole mission is to be of service to you – the donor interested in giving to kingdom causes? Well, we do. Let's look at the Barnabas Foundation, then Christian Stewardship Services.

The Barnabas foundation is able to assist you in planned giving. They have been in operation, by God's grace, for over 40 years and offer a variety of services to help you glorify God with what He's given you. From estate planning, to planned gifts that can generate income for you, to donor-advised funds, the folks at Barnabas know what they're doing. You can check them out at [www.barnabasfoundation.com](http://www.barnabasfoundation.com).

Christian Stewardship Services is an organization which serves citizens of Canada the way Barnabas does in the United States. We are pleased to announce our new partnership with them. They too can celebrate God's faithfulness for over 40 years, and they offer the same types of services as Barnabas. Visit their site at [www.csservices.ca](http://www.csservices.ca). I should mention that both organizations are able to offer all of their services at no cost to you, because of Mid-America's partnership with them.

What I like about both of these wonderful organizations is that they can help you lead a generous life – both now, and after you die, leaving a legacy to the kingdom causes that are most important to you. Mid-America has benefited tremendously from these organizations, and I encourage you to check them out.





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## ◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

### Senior Awards

by Glenda Mathes



awards, which were presented at the final chapel on May 3.

Mid-America's Registrar, Dr. Alan D. Strange, noted that the winners "are particularly good students, and the choice was difficult in each case." He added, "Two of the students had perfect GPAs in three of the categories, with one of these also having the highest preaching evaluation scores; additionally the faculty

Each year Mid-America awards select seniors with academic prizes, based on their Grade Point Average (GPA) in the four divisions of the Seminary's Master of Divinity curriculum. This year, three students received the four

believed that this student most deserved the award. Bottom line, these excellent students made the choices challenging ones."

The Seminary awarded the Biblical Studies prize to Ryan Noha. He received the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (part of the IVP Bible Dictionary Series) as well as a CD-ROM containing works of Calvin and Spurgeon. Ryan also received the Ministerial Studies award, based on his preaching evaluations in addition to his academic work. That gift consisted of the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker Reference Library) and the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Ryan is scheduled to undergo an examination for licensure with the OPC's Presbytery of the Midwest this fall, and he is considering an advanced theological degree.

The Doctrinal Studies award was presented to Ruben Zartman, who received *Dogmatic Theology and Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*. Ruben is

licensed within the RCUS and is serving an internship for Ebenezer RCUS in Shaftner, CA, working primarily with the church's Spanish-speaking congregation, "Valle de Gracia."

As a prize for his high GPA in Ecclesiastical Studies, David Jouf was awarded the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. David and his family are members of the OPC and at one time hoped to become missionaries in France. He still would like to plant or pastor a church in France someday.

Dr. Strange relates, "The graduating class, though small, is a very fine class. In addition to those receiving awards in the M.Div. program, one MTS graduate is going on for graduate studies in Old Testament."

Please pray for God to bless these students and their fellow graduates in bringing the gospel message to a hurting world.