

THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

NAPARC at Mid-America by Glenda Mathes



The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) held its 38th annual meeting, November 12-15, 2012, on the campus of Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

“The Seminary did a fantastic job of hosting the event,” says Rev. John Bouwers, who at this meeting concluded his one-year term as NAPARC’s chairman and also chairs the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU). It was

the URCNA’s turn to host the annual meeting, and after choosing Mid-America as the venue, delegates turned to the Seminary for assistance.

“It was a real blessing to have Florence Kooiman step in and take care of the organization the way she did,” says Rev. Bouwers. “Advance arrangements were made in a very thorough and timely way. Everything went very smoothly.”

He adds, “It was a privilege for us as the URC delegation hosting the meeting of NAPARC to be able to have the rest of the bodies see what’s going on at Mid-America.”

NAPARC churches aim to advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters while holding before each other the desire for organic unity. Twelve confessional Presbyterian and Reformed denominations are currently members of the council, which has no ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

According to Rev. Bouwers, the meeting’s most significant item was the Committee of Review’s report, which chronicles NAPARC’s history and focuses on the desirability for organic union. “Following up on a speech given at NAPARC last year by Dr. Robert Godfrey, “A Reformed Dream,” the committee report also seeks to provide encouragements and advice concerning how such a dream of a broader, more visible unity might become a reality among us, while at the same time emphasizing that any and all moves toward unity would be the responsibility of each body of churches.”

At this year’s banquet, Rev. Danny Hyde, URCNA church planter from Oceanside, CA, expanded on Dr. Godfrey’s vision in his address entitled “From Reformed Dream to Reformed Reality: The Problem and Possibility of Reformed Church Unity.” Rev. Bouwers described the speech as “very helpful,” noting that it “challenged us to be humble in our recognition of our immaturity and called us to a focus on revival, reformation and reunion, in that order.”

In addition to the NAPARC meetings, delegates took advantage of being at the same location to meet ecclesiastically with representatives from other churches.

“We were very grateful for the opportunity to host NAPARC at Mid-America’s beautiful and functional facilities, and it was especially gratifying for the many of us there who are graduates of the Seminary ourselves,” says Rev. Bouwers. “We trust that the exposure of the Seminary to pastors from all of the bodies represented at NAPARC will also continue to be of lasting benefit to Mid-America.”

Conferences on Campus

by Glenda Mathes

Mid-America’s campus will be the site for overlapping URCNA conferences in June. The Ministers Conference will run from June 24-26 with its final presentation being the initial presentation of the June 26-27 Missions Conference.

Under the theme, “Ministering in Changing Seasons,” the first conference speakers will include Dr. J. Mark Beach on “Pastoral Humility in Years of Popularity,” Rev. Alan Strange on “Loving the Flock When It Seems They Don’t Love You,” Dr. Joel Beeke on “Maintaining pastoral vitality in a long pastorate,” Dr. Gerhard Visscher on “Beginning well: What to do and what to avoid in your first charge,” Dr. Joey Pipa on “Concluding well: How to know it may be time to emeritate and how to finish well,” and Dr. David Murray on “Blogs, Facebook, and the flock: What is the relationship of social media to the local pastorate?” Rev. Paul Murphy’s discussion of “The Pastor as an Evangelist and the Evangelist as a Pastor” will be the common hinge connecting the two conferences.

Additional missions presentations include “How to Plant a Reformed Church” by Rev. Michael Brown, “Developing a Plan for Outreach” by Rev. Bill Boekestein, “Maintaining a Vibrant Ministry in a Small Church” by Dr. Brian Lee, “The Cultural Factor in Church Planting” by Rev. Mitch Persaud, “The OPC’s Approach to Foreign Missions” by Mr. Mark Bube, “Lessons Learned in Latin America” by Rev. Richard Bout, and “The Long-term Commitment in Foreign Missions” by Rev. Andrea Ferrari.

“We are very grateful to Mid-America for their generosity and support of this conference,” says Rev. Brown.

OPC young men also may spend some time on campus, visiting classes during the Timothy Conference from April 18-19.

Spiritual Encouragement in New Zealand by Glenda Mathes



Dr. Venema with Marta De Graaf

During a whirlwind tour of New Zealand from Oct. 23-Nov. 10, 2012, Seminary president Dr. Cornel Venema spoke 12 times within nine days. He preached on Sundays, spoke on a variety of topics at Reformation conferences and events hosted by Reformed Church in New Zealand (RCNZ) congregations in Auckland, Christchurch, and Wellington, as well as at informal meetings on both the North and South Islands.

Dr. Venema and his wife, Nancy, traveled with Florence Kooiman, Mid-America's Office Manager; Babs Zandstra, widow of an original Board member; Gerald Rozema, current Board member; and his wife, Karen Rozema.

"I was first of all impressed that the two Reformed churches in New Zealand during the 1960s have grown to 20 Reformed churches today," says Gerald Rozema. "Of those 20 churches, five are presently pastored by Mid-America alumni. After meeting them, I couldn't be more impressed with the work they are doing in New Zealand."

The five alumni serving in New Zealand

L-R: Gerald and Karen Rozema, Flo Kooiman, Babs Zandstra, Rev. Erik and Georgina Stolte, Rev. Andre and Anita Holtslag, Dr. Cornel and Nancy Venema



are Revs. Leo deVos, Andre Holtslag, Peter Kloosterman, Peter Moelker, and Erik Stolte. Visiting with them and witnessing their effective ministries also impressed Florence.

"As office staff, we are very involved with assisting students and their families in acclimating to life in America, and generally do not get the opportunity see these students again," says Florence Kooiman. "The scenery was beautiful (so often I thought, 'How Great Thou Art!'), but to visit with the students and people whose lives have been blessed by their ministries was the highlight of my trip."

Seeing the work of his former students also made an impression on Dr. Venema. "It was spiritually encouraging to see these men and their families, and to hear so many good reports of their work," he says. "But the ultimate story is one of the Lord's steadfast love in Christ toward His people."

The entire group enjoyed dinners with all of the alumni families, including a rack of lamb grilled New Zealand style by Rev. Leo deVos. Rev. Holtslag drove the group to view earthquake destruction in downtown Auckland as well as a scenic tour of the area. Rev. Stolte took the visitors to the Dunedin Botanic Gardens during the peak of rhododendron season. Rev. Moelker graciously allowed the group to use his GPS, which often saved the day.

At different times, Dr. Venema or Florence had opportunities to chat with synodical deputies for theological education of the RCNZ, Rev. Michael Willemse and Rev. John Haverland, as well as former deputy, Rev. John Rogers.

"They were interested in more information about

our curriculum and approach to theological education," explains Dr. Venema. "The RCNZ has approved Mid-America as a seminary for training their pastors, but the deputies are seeking synodical permission to visit the Seminary."

At the three main venues where Dr. Venema spoke, he met a number of people. Many of the older people remembered his father and mother from the time Dr. Richard Venema served congregations during the fledgling years of the RCNZ (1958-1963).

"Among the older couples we met, several were married by my father when he served first in Dunedin," says Dr. Venema. "New Zealand's immigrant policy favored single persons with



Rev. John Haverland and Dr. Venema

particular skills, and so Dutch immigrants often would come and immediately marry upon arrival—some on the first or second day!"

The most delightful meeting for Dr. Venema was with Marta De Graaf, a widow who recalled his family's 1958 arrival in Dunedin. The congregation gathered on the highway outside the city beside an old van that had been painted to proclaim, "Welcome to the Venemas!"

"Marta reminded me (and was amazed to find that I remembered well, though only a lad of four years) how the parsonage was not quite ready for occupancy upon our arrival, and that my older brother Rick and I were farmed out to stay with her family for a few days," relates Dr. Venema. "I told her that I still remember the event so well because I was terrified to find myself in a stranger's home in a strange land, separated from my mother and father. I signed Marta's guestbook, the first entry being by my father and mother in 1958."

Mid-America is on the Move

Mid-America president, Dr. Cornel Venema, and Director of Development, Keith LeMahieu, were in Phoenix, AZ on Friday, November 30, for a promotional event at the Phoenix United Reformed Church. The evening was planned by Mid-America Board member Darrel Kuiper and his wife Diane, and former Board member Jonathan Gross and his wife Lisa. After a delicious meal Dr. Venema spoke about how God builds His church through the Word and sacraments and the important role the seminary plays in preparing men to effectively minister the Word and sacraments. Board members Darrel Kuiper and Jonathan Gross spoke about their experience serving on the Board, and Keith LeMahieu gave a presentation on the cost of training pastors. Phil Grotenhuis, graduate and pastor at Phoenix United Reformed Church, closed the evening by reflecting on his time as a student at Mid-America. The following Sunday Dr. Venema was privileged to preach both services at Phoenix URC.

Dr. Venema and Mr. LeMahieu are scheduled to travel to California for similar events in early February. A dessert social is being planned by Jake Sonke at Zion United Reformed Church in Ripon on February 7, and the following evening another dessert social is scheduled at First United Reformed Church in Chino. The Chino event is being overseen by Board member Ron Scheuers, who also is pastor of First URC. At both events Dr. Venema will speak on the nature and importance of seminary training using themes from his upcoming new book. Mr. LeMahieu will conduct a “virtual tour” of Mid-America’s campus through the seasons and bring an operational report on the seminary. Dr. Venema is scheduled to preach at First United Reformed Church in Chino on February 10. We look forward to renewing bonds with our friends in California.



Backing Away from the Cliff by Keith Le Mahieu

In the run-up to the end of 2012 the news was dominated by tense negotiations over the so-called “fiscal cliff.” The fiscal cliff was a financial predicament created by Congress in the Budget Control Act of 2011 that included provisions scheduled to be implemented on January 1, 2013. Inaction by Congress and the president would have resulted in significant tax increases and deep cuts to over 1,000 government programs including Medicare and defense. Many economists warned that failure to act would plunge the American economy into another recession.

Shortly after the deadline Congress passed the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 and president Obama signed the legislation on January 2. The agreement addressed tax increases but postponed any discussion of spending cuts. The good news is that the legislation did not include provisions that could have significantly limited taxpayer benefits for charitable giving. The legislation extended the IRA charitable rollover, it increased the capital gains rate to 39.6% for higher income earners, and it fixed the estate and gift tax exclusion at \$5,000,000 (indexed for inflation).

Inclusion of the IRA charitable gift rollover extends the opportunity for you to make a tax-free gift of up to \$100,000 from your IRA through 2013 if you are 70 ½ or older. This gift will qualify for all or part of your required minimum distribution provided the gift is made directly to Mid-America and is made from a traditional or Roth IRA.

This provision could benefit you significantly, especially if you do not itemize and do not need the income generated by your IRA. Let’s assume you are 70 ½ or older and have an IRA from which you are required to withdraw \$10,000 even though you don’t need the income. You are required to pay tax on that withdrawal. If you instruct your IRA fund manager to draw a check for \$10,000 and send that money directly to Mid-America, you may exclude that amount from your taxable income.

Perhaps you need your minimum distribution but you also plan to give to charitable causes. You can take the minimum distribution but draw additional tax free funds from your IRA, provided they are sent directly to those charitable causes you wish to support. If you are a non-itemizer, this will eliminate all taxes on the amount of your gift and the need to claim a charitable income tax deduction.

There are some restrictions you should keep in mind when considering whether an IRA charitable rollover is right for you. The most important thing to remember is that your transfer must be made from your IRA account directly to Mid-America. The transfer cannot be made to a charitable gift annuity or to a donor advised fund such as Barnabas Foundation’s Steward’s Fund. Like any gift to a charitable organization, you must obtain appropriate documentation to substantiate the transfer, so make sure you file any related paperwork you receive for the transfer.

If you wish to make a charitable donation from your IRA, contact your IRA administrator or custodian and let them know that you want to make a gift directly from your IRA to Mid-America Reformed Seminary. The plan administrator will advise you on the requirements for transferring funds for a qualified distribution. Ask the administrator to indicate on the transfer of funds that you are the donor.



New Student

by Rev. Alan Strange



Hollister is pastor, Professor Strange is associate pastor, and Keith LeMahieu serves as an elder. Bob and Grace came to New Covenant and the

We welcome Bob Holda to the student body this spring. Bob and his wife, Grace, are members of New Covenant OPC (New L e n o x , IL), where former board member Bruce

area when they began serving as house parents at Glenwood Academy (Glenwood, IL) about two and a half years ago. The Academy was started in 1887 by, among others, Robert Lincoln, oldest son of Abraham Lincoln, to help disadvantaged youths. Bob had earlier received a B.A. in Elementary Education and a Masters in Educational Administration and had taught in a public middle school before entering into the private boarding school. Though Bob was serving youths and loved to do so, he has, in his own words, “awakened to a call to full-time gospel ministry.” Particularly the leadership in Bob’s church, seeing his gifts and graces, urged him to consider seminary preparation for gospel ministry. We welcome Bob and Grace to Mid-America.

Interim

by Rev. Alan Strange

Shortly after the new year begins, and running for approximately three weeks, the period called Interim occurs. The January Interim always involves for the juniors, or any others taking Hebrew, a continued and intensive study of Hebrew. This is often affectionately tagged “Winter Hebrew” and takes the students through the rest of the grammar begun earlier. For the middlers and seniors, an elective is offered. This year Dr. Craig Troxell, a local Orthodox Presbyterian pastor and adjunct in Ministerial Studies, taught a course in Reformed Spirituality in which students read classic authors like John Calvin, Richard Sibbes, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, and others and more contemporary authors like Francis Chan, Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, and others.



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