

THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

Faculty Appointment Announced

by Glenda Mathes



Rev. Andrew Compton, his wife Pamela, and their three daughters, Hope (1), Hannah (7), and Mia (4)

combination of academic ability and pastoral sensitivity.”

Rev. Compton will teach Old Testament courses alongside Professor Mark Vander Hart, who says: “What I found impressive is how thoroughly Rev. Compton responded to questions on a variety of subjects. He articulates his positions well and knows his area of teaching, but is also deeply versed in Reformed theology more broadly. I very much look forward to working with him.”

Andrew and Pamela Compton plan to move their family, which includes three young daughters and a baby (due in December) to St. John, IN. Andrew will begin his Seminary responsibilities on June 1, 2016.

“I am both humbled and excited at this opportunity,” Rev. Compton says. “Humbled because I wish to honor the trust the Board has placed in me. Excited because I love Christ’s church, I love the gospel ministry, and I love Old Testament studies.”

He adds, “My goals are for students to gain necessary skills for being careful readers of Old Testament texts. I wish to cultivate an awareness of their literary structure, and help students understand their canonical interconnectedness, both in thematic development within the Old Testament itself, as well as the New Testament’s use of Old Testament content.”

He also desires to enable students to “sift” current issues within the secular academy in a manner that best utilizes scholarly insights while effectively challenging the “naturalistic and anti-revelatory assumptions” behind many critical conclusions. He wants students to receive observations useful for exegesis and dismiss “presuppositions and conclusions” not in accordance with God’s Word.

His prayer is that his labors will benefit Christ’s church, primarily in the training of future pastors. He also anticipates collaborating with and learning from existing professors.

“I especially look forward to sharing Old Testament responsibilities with Professor Vander Hart,” he says. “I have enjoyed getting to know him over these past few years, and to work with him in a subject area dear to both of our hearts is a great joy and privilege.”

The Board of Trustees is pleased to announce the appointment of Andrew Compton as Assistant Professor of Old Testament Studies. He will also counsel students in cultivating pastoral attitudes and conduct, and may be assigned various administrative tasks. Rev. Compton has served eight years as Associate Pastor at Christ Reformed Church (URCNA) in Anaheim, CA.

“On balance, Andrew was judged to have the combination of pastoral experience and academic excellence we hoped for in this position,” Dr. Cornel Venema states. “The Faculty Development Committee and the Board (who voted unanimously to offer the position) were impressed with his rare

Board Report by Glenda Mathes

The Board of Trustees for Mid-America Reformed Seminary normally meets on campus twice each academic year, once in the fall and again in the spring. When the Board met on October 8 & 9, 2015, it welcomed new members and interviewed a prospective faculty member.

Rev. Ed Marcusse was elected as the new President, Rev. Jim Sawtelle as Vice-President, and Dr. Steve Werkema as Vice-All. The Board re-elected Rev. Adrian Dieleman to continue serving as Secretary and Mr. Scott De Jong to continue his duties as Treasurer. We also welcomed the newly elected members of the Board: Mr. Harlyn Jacobsma, Mr. Herb Sinke, Dr. Steve Werkema, Rev. James Folkerts, Rev. John Hilbelink, Rev. Paul Murphy, and Rev. Danny Patterson.

After extended discussion, the Board also approved an explanation of the primary purpose of Mid-America Reformed Seminary “to train men for the ministry of the Word and sacraments” in the church of Jesus Christ. This purpose includes three emphases: first, our work “must be pursued and enjoyed within the greater work of Christ’s kingdom”; second, our goal is to train the students “to make disciples”; and third, seminary education includes the task of “forming our students spiritually” for a long-term and effective ministry.

The Board approved the reassignment of Keith Le Mahieu to the position of Vice-President of Administration, effective upon the retirement of Florence Kooiman at the end of May, 2016. In view of this reassignment, the position of Vice-President for Advancement was declared open.

The highlight of the meeting was interviewing Rev. Andrew Compton for a position on the Faculty of Mid-America. The Board unanimously offered Rev. Compton the faculty position as Assistant Professor to teach Old Testament studies.

The President's Message: "Christmas and the Laughter God Brings to His People"

by Dr. Cornelis Venema

"Sarah said, 'God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.' And she added, 'Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.'" Genesis 21:6-7 (NIV)

One of the most beloved of Christmas carols is "Joy to world! The Lord is come. Let earth receive her King." The words of this carol capture well the exuberant joy of the believer at the birth of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. What better way to respond to the news of Christ's birth than to burst forth into whole-hearted praise!

When I think of this carol, I am reminded of the Old Testament story of the birth of Isaac. For this story reminds us of the invincible faithfulness of the Lord in fulfilling His promise that He would give to Abraham and Sarah a son in their old age, and that this son would be the child of God's promise who foreshadows the birth of Jesus Christ, whom Matthew tells us at the beginning of his Gospel is "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). When Isaac was born, how did Abraham and Sarah respond? We are told that they named the child "Isaac," which means "he laughs," because, as Sarah put it, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about it will laugh with me" (v. 6).

To appreciate the significance of the laughter God brought to Sarah, and to believers who share her joy at the birth of Isaac, we need to remember how Abraham and Sarah had earlier responded to God's promise. In Genesis 17:15-17, immediately after God covenanted with Abraham and appointed circumcision as a sign of the covenant, we are told that God repeated His promise that He would give a son to Sarah and that she would be the "mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." How did Abraham respond on this occasion? We are told that he fell flat upon his face and laughed, saying to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" (v. 18). Though this was the laughter of unbelief, we can certainly understand Abraham's skepticism. After all, in the memorable words of the apostle Paul, Abraham was facing the fact that "his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead" (Rom. 4:19).

But that is not all. Not long thereafter the Lord appeared again to Abraham and reiterated the promise to him, saying, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son" (Gen. 18:10). On this occasion, Sarah was listening at the entrance to her tent and her response echoes that of Abraham: "So, Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?'" Interestingly, when Sarah laughs at the Lord's promise, the Lord Himself declares to Abraham, "Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son" (Gen. 18:14).

I rehearse this familiar story in order to call attention to what is most important in the story of the birth of Isaac. Although the story in its early stages bears witness to the unbelief of Abraham and Sarah—to their mocking laughter in the face of what appears to be a promise incapable of fulfillment—it concludes with the birth of Isaac just as the Lord had promised. The Lord of the covenant, whose faithfulness to His promise is steadfast and invincible, does what by any human calculation seems altogether impossible.

Does that remind you of another birth? In the account of the birth of our Savior in Luke's Gospel, the angelic announcement of the birth of Jesus Christ, which would take place by a miraculous working of the Holy Spirit, closes with the words, "For nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

And so the laughter that God brought Sarah is indeed a laughter that all believers share, when they remember the story of Isaac's birth and the even greater story of the birth of Jesus. For nothing is impossible with God, the covenant Lord, who "has helped His servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as He said to our fathers" (Luke 1:55).

Evening Class

by Dr. Alan Strange

Professors take turns offering an evening class every semester. This fall the class was taught by Dr. Alan D. Strange, Professor of Church History. The class met for four successive Tuesdays and had forty to fifty students in attendance and that many, or more, additionally watching via live-streaming. Professor Strange's topic was "Gamechangers," based on the book of the same name by Robert Letham. The class focused on twelve significant characters throughout church history, grouped together in threes, from the Ancient, Medieval, Reformation, and Modern Church. In addition to speaking about these twelve figures (Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine, Charlemagne, Anselm, Aquinas, Luther, Bullinger, Calvin, Wesley, Nevin, and Barth), Dr. Strange developed some of the over-arching themes of the period and sought to tie the whole story together.

In the ancient church, for instance, the focus was particularly on the doctrine of God and the doctrine of the person of Christ. In the middle ages, the doctrine of the sacraments and the church came to receive the lion's share of attention, eclipsing especially the development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. With Luther's emphasis on justification by faith alone and Calvin's on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, this is why the Reformation was a recovery of the gospel. The Reformation itself splintered in the aftermath, yielding a host of denominations and the complications that confront us now.

For those who wish to watch the sessions, videos are posted on the Mid-America website under "resources" and the capture portal.



Probing for Weakness by Keith LeMahieu

We tend to think about Mid-America in present terms, but what Mid-America does now impacts the future of our families and the future of the church. The apostle Peter warns us to be watchful and sober-minded because the enemy of our soul prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Like a lion, Satan preys on the weak and vulnerable, including our children and grandchildren.

There is safety to be found in the church, but the church is safe only as long as she is faithful to her calling. There is very real danger in the church, especially for the weak and vulnerable, when the church becomes something other than the church and she loses her first love, lacks discernment, tolerates false doctrine, or teaches outright heresy. The warning to the watchman in Ezekiel 3 is a chilling reminder for those called to rule His church. This is why careful preparation of men for gospel ministry is so important.

As Satan looks for ways to defeat his enemies, he probes for weaknesses he can exploit. During wartime patrols go out to probe the enemy's defenses for weakness, and then these weak points are attacked. Satan would be jubilant if there were weaknesses he could exploit to defeat the seminary. It would be as if the enemies of the United States were to destroy West Point, Annapolis or the Air Force Academy. The result would be devastating for the country's armed forces. One of the most effective ways Satan can weaken or defeat the seminary is to convince you and your church that the seminary is not all that important and that support of the seminary is unnecessary.

In mid-December, 1944, Adolf Hitler launched a major offensive on Allied troops positioned at the forested Ardennes region of Belgium, France and Luxembourg. This offensive is known as The Battle of the Bulge. His objective was to divide and conquer Allied forces that had retaken those areas defeated by Germany four years earlier. Since landing at Normandy in June, the Allies had reached the German border and were preparing for the final assault on Germany itself. The rapid forward progress of Allied troops created significant logistical problems for the supply of fuel, ammunition and equipment. Hitler clearly understood the importance of disrupting Allied supplies of fuel and by 10:00 am on the first morning of the assault, SS lieutenant colonel Joachim Peiper's 1st Panzer Regiment captured the Bullingen supply depot and fifty thousand gallons of fuel. This was a devastating blow to the Allies.

Mid-America also needs fuel to conduct its operations, but the seminary does not run on fossil fuel: it runs on financial resources. The enemy knows that if he can disrupt the flow of financial resources to the seminary, he can cripple the preparation of men for ministry and thus weaken the church.

Mid-America is presently facing a significant cash flow challenge resulting from the convergence of a variety of factors. As you may know, most organizations who depend upon charitable giving to fund operating revenues receive a significant portion of this revenue during the last six weeks of the calendar year as many folks make year-end financial decisions. Mid-America is no exception. Historically, the seminary receives approximately twenty percent of its annual budgeted income at year-end.

Perhaps more than any year in recent history, Mid-America must finish the calendar-year with a very strong surge in financial support. Would you give generously to help meet this significant need?

Friends Gather to Celebrate by Keith LeMahieu

Mid-America had the distinct pleasure of gathering with friends for dinner and encouragement. First at the Bluff Banquet Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on November 5, and the following week at The Center for the Visual and Performing Arts in Munster, Indiana.

Dr. Cornel Venema, Mid-America President, greeted those in attendance and began the evening with devotions and prayer. After a delicious meal, Maria Luttjeboer provided a special musical treat. Maria is the wife of student Jared Luttjeboer and holds a Master's degree in voice from the University of Iowa.

Two students at each event spoke briefly about their journey to seminary and how God used events in their lives to convict them of their call to gospel ministry. It was also an opportunity for these students to thank those who make it possible for them to attend Mid-America because of their financial support.

Rev. Jeff De Boer, Mid-America's Director of Enrollment and Student Management, served as the evening's keynote speaker. Rev. De Boer spoke of the difficulty many pastors face and the importance of ministry preparation.

Mr. Keith LeMahieu, Vice-President for Advancement, provided an update on seminary financial matters including the financial pressure facing the seminary. After singing a hymn, Rev. Mark Vander Hart concluded the evening by closing with prayer.





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The Continuing Influence of the Westminster Assembly by Glenda Mathes



Dr. Chad van Dixhoorn, Chancellor's Professor of Historical Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Washington, DC, presented this year's fall lectures. A graduate of Huron College and the University of Western Ontario, Dr. van Dixhoorn received his PhD from the University of Cambridge and an MDiv and ThM from Westminster Theological Seminary. He has taught history and theology at seminaries

and universities in the UK and US, and has published works regarding the Westminster Assembly.

Drawing on his expertise in history and ministry, Dr. van Dixhoorn demonstrated how the Assembly influenced and continues to affect the Presbyterian and Reformed world. About 30 people attended each lecture, while 15-20 people followed via online streaming.

On November 10, Dr. van Dixhoorn spoke on "God's Ambassadors: the Westminster Assembly and the reformation of preaching." He spoke twice on November 11: on "God's Shepherds: the Westminster Assembly and the battle for church discipline," and about "God's Physicians: models of pastoral care and neglect at the Westminster Assembly."

Dr. van Dixhoorn noted that the Assembly's labors were intense for the first five years,

but lasted a full ten as it worked during the ecclesiastical and political context of the English civil war. The Assembly contained presbyterians and congregationalists (regarding church polity), as well as men who, although Reformed in theology, held differing convictions on certain points. The English Parliament, particularly the House of Commons, was not always sympathetic to the Assembly's petitions.

From one perspective, the Assembly failed in England as the Commons never approved the Westminster Standards. It succeeded in Scotland and elsewhere, however, producing directories for a well-regulated clergy (their training, their competence in preaching and pastoral care, church polity) with a lasting effect not only in the Presbyterian world, but also far beyond. Dr. van Dixhoorn's revealing and insightful lectures showed how we benefit from the Assembly's work to this day.