

THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

Alumni Sowing Seeds, Planting Churches by Glenda Mathes



Summer outreach of New City Fellowship in Atlantic City

says. "I love being a part of it." Even though getting the word out is challenging, the Lord has brought visitors nearly every week.

A challenge for New City Fellowship in Atlantic City, NJ, is finding committed core group members who focus more on ministering than being ministered to. Yet Santo Garofalo (1996) rejoices to see "lives touched and transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ." About 30-40 people attend Sunday worship. Ordained by the PCA in 1998, Rev. Garofalo began working in Atlantic City in 2009. He says, "People in the inner city need both the milk and meat of the gospel, and I am deeply thankful for the training I received at Mid-America."

Bob Holda (2016) is taking ordination exams and hopes to be ordained and installed this fall as a church-planting evangelist at Sovereign Grace Presbyterian Church, an OPC mission work in Oshkosh, WI. About 17 people are committed to the group, including three elders from the mother church, Apple Valley OPC in Neenah, WI. "It's an exciting adventure already," he says, "and I'm humbled to be called to such a wonderful work!"

Having been ordained in the PCA and served in two previous church planting contexts, Matt Timmons (2004) began working early this year with a group desiring to establish an independent church in Ashland, OH. About 45-50 people attend Hopewell Church's worship in a factory's conference room. "The people are joyous, fun, and continually a fountain of encouragement," he says. "Seeing new people become leaders and step up to help the work prosper is a joy." The church hopes to particularize in October.

Matthew Van Dyken (2011) ministers to about 60 people who attend Iglesia Vida Eterna (Eternal Life Mission), a mission work of the URCNA in Tepic, Mexico. He also teaches several students enrolled in a new MINTS study center. "I often refer to my notes from seminary and find them a great help in this," he explains. "I am also thankful for the wisdom of the different professors. Many things they have said have returned to me over the years."

Brian Zegers (2013) is serving Word of Life Ministry as a URCNA home missionary to Muslims in the Toronto area. The Ministry hosts monthly Christian-Muslim discussion evenings and semi-annual forums. His family hosts Muslims in their home, he writes for Muslim newspapers, and he meets Muslims in the community, their homes, and the mosque. He prizes the rich blessings of covenant community and the privilege of wielding the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, in love to woo Muslims to Christ. The biggest challenge is spiritual warfare. "Satan and his evil hosts are real and seek to attack in particular those on the front lines of the battle (cf. Eph. 6:10-12). The most intense battle is the unseen battle waged behind the scenes." He appreciates the grounding Mid-America gave him in interpreting the Bible and imparting a theological framework. "I still use my seminary notes to this day. Thanks, Profs!"

Many Mid-America alumni have labored in church planting contexts, but space constraints prevent us from sharing all their reflections. While we hope to feature more in future issues or on our website, this article highlights several alumni currently nurturing seedlings in new fields.

Jeremy Baker (2016) underwent a summer internship in Yuma, AZ, where he is now planting a church for the OPC. About 35-40 people attend morning worship at the local food bank and meet for evening Bible study in a member's home. "Everyone here is so excited to see a Reformed church planted in Yuma," he

Missions & Evangelism Course

by Rev. Jeff DeBoer

We seek to provide exceptional ministerial preparation for our students. On occasion that preparation includes instructors from outside of the seminary faculty. This fall three men with skill and experience in missions and evangelism will be on campus to provide training in these areas. We believe this instruction is particularly important as the gap between the church and our culture widens. The following three pastors will be leading the class.

Rev. Benjamin Hopp was ordained to the gospel ministry in 2003 after accepting a call to serve Bethlehem Reformed Church (Orthodox Presbyterian Church) in Freeman, South Dakota. After ministering there for nearly five years, the Lord called the Hopp family to Haiti. Since 2007, he has served as a missionary evangelist in Haiti as called by the Committee on Foreign Missions of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Rev. Paul Murphy pastors Messiah's Reformed Fellowship (United Reformed Churches in North America). A native New Yorker, Paul was raised in an Irish-Catholic neighborhood in the Bronx. At the age of 29 he was confronted with the claims of Jesus Christ. Prior to spearheading the founding of Messiah's Reformed Fellowship in 2003, Rev. Murphy pastored Dutton United Reformed Church in Dutton, Michigan, for 13 years. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife and family.

Dr. Ted Powers is Mission to North America's Church Planting Coordinator (Presbyterian Church in America), a role in which he has served since June of 2002. Ted spends a great deal of time in the areas of vision-building, prayer mobilization, strategic planning with church planters and church planting leaders, recruiting, training, and mentoring. He also oversees staff in the area of coaching, recruiting and church renewal. Ted is the recipient of a Doctor of Ministry degree from Covenant Theological Seminary. He graduated in 2000, presenting a dissertation topic on church planting apprenticeships. The model he devised for that program is currently in use in a variety of settings in the PCA and elsewhere.

President's Message: "Preparing Students to Make Disciples"

by Dr. Cornelis P. Venema



"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'" (Matthew 28:18-20)

In my conversations with supporters of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, I have often remarked that seminary education is a "missionary endeavor." When viewed within the framework of the church's calling to "make disciples of all the nations," the seminary's purpose is to provide students with the kind of theological and ministerial training that will serve to prepare them for a life-time of gospel ministry in fulfillment of the Great Commission. Since the task of the church is go into all the world with the Word of the gospel, summoning all to faith in Jesus Christ and incorporating those who believe into the fellowship of the church, seminaries need to prepare students to fulfill this task effectively and fruitfully.

One obvious way in which seminaries serve the church in the fulfillment of the Great Commission is in the training of international students. As long as I have taught at Mid-America, I have found great joy and satisfaction in teaching students who come to us from a variety of nations throughout the world. These students testify to the world-wide reach of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and are a tangible reminder that the church Christ is building is being gathered by His Spirit and Word from among all the peoples of the earth. To enjoy the privilege of preparing these students for the ministry of the gospel among their own people is a wonderful blessing. When such students come to us from countries where there are limited opportunities for theological education, we are able to provide them a theological education that will prepare them for service among peoples whose language, culture, and history is familiar to them. Though their education is costly (requiring that they be adequately supported through our International Student Aid Fund), it is in many ways less costly than the familiar practice of training and commissioning North American missionaries to work in cross-cultural settings for which they need extensive preparation.

Unfortunately, we often make the mistake of thinking that this is the only way seminaries contribute to the church's fulfillment of the Great Commission. This occurs when we erect a false dichotomy between "world missions" and the task of the local church. However, the assumption of the Great Commission in Matthew 28 is that the church itself is a missionary community which Christ has commissioned to be a disciple-making community *wherever it is found*. The mission field in which Christ calls His church to be engaged in the ministry of the Word and sacrament is not a place "over there" to which missionaries are sent, but the place where Christ's church is found, baptizing believers and their children into fellowship with the Triune God and teaching them all that Christ has commanded them. This means that the ordinary ministry of the Word (through preaching, teaching, catechesis, and the like) and sacraments is the way Christ is pleased to build His church, gathering, defending and preserving the church as an elect community in the unity of the true faith (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21).

When students prepare for the ministry, they need to be taught in such a way that all the subjects in the seminary curriculum are presented from this perspective. The student's instruction in biblical studies, historical studies, doctrinal studies, and ministerial studies, should be intentionally directed to their future calling as missionary pastors. Whether their ministry is in church planting, world missions, or pastoring an established congregation, *the commission given to them is the same*: by God's grace spend yourself and be spent in making disciples of Jesus Christ. The tools for this task, the Word and sacraments, do not differ whether the work be in a church plant or an established congregation. The Great Commission assumes that disciples will be made through the ministry of the church, which means that the church itself is the agent for disciple-making.

While I do not deny that there are unique challenges that belong to the planting of a new churches, all students who aspire to the gospel ministry need to be trained to be fruitful by God's grace in their obedience to the Great Commission.

Retreat

The annual Seminary Retreat kicks off the year following the orientation and registration for students. On August 30, over 40 people from the Seminary community gathered at the Cedar Lake Conference Center. Rev. Andrew Compton led opening devotions from Ezekiel 13:17ff. Then came introductions: we learned names and interesting facts about each other.

Our retreat speaker was Rev. Jacques Roets, Redeemer URC pastor. His first message was based on Nehemiah 1. Jesus promised to build His church, but to do that He uses broken people. Nehemiah shows a deep love for that church and is grieved by its brokenness. Nehemiah cast himself upon the Lord, seen in his frequent prayers, a mark of all who know a need of the Lord. God uses those who embrace a great view of God; to Nehemiah, the Persian king is just a man. In his efforts Nehemiah is an image of Jesus Christ.

Rev. Roets's second address was taken from 2 Timothy 3:10 – 4:8. Paul tells Timothy, "Preach the Word!" In difficult times preacher Timothy may have felt inadequate. Rev. Roets reminded us that ministry can be discouraging. Yet preaching is never about us; preaching is about Christ! God's Word is all that is needed: it "does all the work." So the preacher must be ready to preach, applying the Word with complete patience and careful instruction.

Following an excellent lunch, many participated in a time of recreation. The annual retreat was again an enjoyable event to launch the current school year.

Save the Date!

Mid-America will be in Pompton Plains, New Jersey October 29-30 for the "Inside Outside" conference, promo dinner, and Sem Sunday. Find more information at midamerica.edu.

Welcome, New Students! by Glenda Mathes

This year Mid-America welcomes nine new students to its campus. Unless otherwise stated, they seek a Master of Divinity degree with a view toward pastoral ministry.

Ryan Cook (Christ Covenant OPC, Sheridan, IN) and his wife Stacie have six-year-old quadruplets, a boy and three girls. An attorney for a utility company, Ryan has long desired mission work and is open to various avenues of Christian ministry.

A recent graduate of Dordt College, **Bryce De Zwarte** from Covenant Reformed Church (URCNA) in Pella, IA, appreciates his upbringing in a covenant home. "I love the Reformed faith because it is not only consistent within itself, but also with God's Word."

Cary Gephart is the seminary intern at Cottage Grove CRC in South Holland, IL. He and Karesse have three children. "I hope to increase my understanding of God's Word, strengthen my calling to gospel ministry, and grow in holiness as a man of God."

Jonathan Key (Presbyterian EPC of Portersville, PA), who graduated with a BA in Youth Ministry

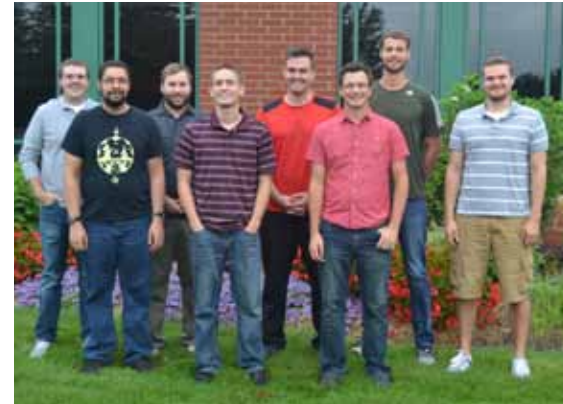
from Geneva College in 2011, seeks to become a teacher. "No matter the trial, I will trust God and follow Him to the best of my ability."

Nathaniel Rademaker (RCNZ of Palmerston North in New Zealand), an emergency room nurse in recent years, felt called to ministry while a teen. "The sense of call to ministry never went away and has gotten stronger." He and Sharon have five children.

A series of providential circumstances, including classes from the only Presbyterian professor at a dispensationalist college, brought **Ryan Swale** (Faith URC in Beecher, IL) to better understand the Reformed faith. He and Caroline are open to service in pastoral ministry or missions.

A 2014 graduate of Redeemer University College, **Kelvin Tiemstra** (Emmanuel URC of Neerlandia, Alberta) has counseled campers with disabilities. "I want to engage with my faith academically, as well as learn better how to put it into practice in my daily life."

Nathan Voss (Faith CRC in Elmhurst, IL) felt his faith deepen while he obtained a BA in Biblical and Theological Studies from Reformation Bible



Left to right: Bryce De Zwarte, Jonathan Key, Cary Gephart, Ryan Swale, Nathaniel Rademaker, Kelvin Tiemstra, John Ysinga, Nathan Voss, Not pictured: Ryan Cook

College. "Being brought up in the Reformed faith, I always appreciated its rationality and foundation upon biblical authority."

A 2014 Redeemer University College graduate with a BA in Religion and Theology, **John Ysinga** (Zion URC in Sheffield, ON) enjoys teaching Cadets. "I have been blessed by the Holy Spirit's work through my church and its members my whole life."

Please join us in praying for these students as they begin their seminary careers in preparation for bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to our world.

Your Next Pastor by Mike Deckinga

October is here! My favorite season is autumn. I love the crispness in the air. It's not too hot, and not too cold. The leaves are changing colors and beginning to gently fall to the ground. Football season is here, and so are bonfires, hay rides, and corn mazes. One of the most exciting things about autumn is that our students have returned to campus! It was pretty quiet here during the summer. It's good to see some life around here again. Our incoming class is a group of men that are a true joy to get to know, and it's been a pleasure catching up with our upperclassmen after their internships.

Our students come from a variety of backgrounds. Some have been members of Reformed churches their whole lives, while others discovered the Reformed faith recently. Some come to Mid-America with wife and children, while others come as single men. Some are fresh out of college, while some are preparing for a second or third career. Whatever their story or situation, the Lord has led them here, and we are glad He did.

Mid-America cares deeply about each aspect of our students' lives. We want them to study hard and to mature spiritually. If they have families, we want them to be devoted and involved husbands and fathers. In order for this to happen, Mid-America needs to continue to be an affordable place to learn. Financial pressures on our students will inhibit all of the areas of student development listed above.

Our student aid fund needs your help. To those who support our student aid fund already, we thank you, and pray you'll continue. To those who support our general fund, we thank you, but we ask you to think about a special gift to the student aid fund. Maybe there are some of you who have wanted to give to Mid-America, but you just haven't yet been moved to do so. A gift to the student aid fund is a great way to start. Will you join us in the development of faithful men who are called to be God's servants to the next generation? Please pray enthusiastically for, and invest generously in, your next pastor.





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Fore! by Mike Deckinga



A great time was had by all at the 12th annual Mid-America Reformed Seminary golf outing. Although the rain delayed us initially, the sun eventually broke through over beautiful SPG Green Garden Country Club in Frankfort, IL.

60 golfers hit the links at 8:30 am and over the next several hours drove, chipped, and putted their way through over 6700 yards of challenging

golf. The round concluded hours later with a delicious lunch buffet and an awards ceremony in Green Garden's beautiful banquet hall.

The conditions of the day were pretty poor—wet, windy, and chilly—but three teams managed to rise nicely to the occasion, each scoring two under par in a three-way tie for first place. After following official tie-breaking protocol, two teams emerged. Winning first place was Dave Beezhold, Adam Beezhold, Lou Karr and Daryl Van Schouwen. Each player won a \$100.00 Visa gift card for their efforts. Second place belonged to Rob Buitter, Rich Buitter, Karl Bultema, and Kurt Bultema. Each player won a \$75.00 Visa gift card for their efforts.

There were competitions held throughout the day. Winner of the longest drive this year was

Adam Beezhold. The winner of the straightest drive was Dave Beezhold. Keith Le Mahieu and Dan Bruinsma took home the closest to the pin awards, and Brad Van Soest sunk the longest putt. Jordan Hoekstra was proudly named this year's "Woodie Mammoth" after he crushed the longest drive with a 40 year-old wooden driver. Everyone received a door prize for participating, and other prizes were awarded through a drawing.

We wish to enthusiastically thank all of our sponsors and those who came out in the rain to enjoy a day of fun and fellowship at our outing. To see the outing in action, check out our video on Facebook or YouTube! I hope you will make plans to join us at next year's event. Lord willing, it will be held on Saturday, September 9, 2017.