

# THE MESSENGER

MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY

## Alumnus Focus: Proclaiming Christ as the Light of Life

by Glenda Mathes

Pablo Landázuri (2013) is an ordained URCNA minister who serves the Iglesia Reformada Luz de Vida (Light of Life Reformed Church) in Quito, Ecuador. Since Rev. Landázuri's return three years ago, Luz de Vida has started worship services in a second location, expanded outreach and ecclesiastical efforts, and approved a member for seminary education.



Services began on June 18, 2017, in Tumbaco, which is about 15 miles from downtown Quito, but still part of the metropolitan area. Its population of 60,000 includes a college with 5,000 students. Rev. Landázuri preaches in the morning, and Rev. Donoso preaches in the evening.

“Ever since I arrived, we have hosted a Bible study in the area,” Rev. Landázuri explained. “We hosted 22 people in our first service. It is a lot for our context and has a lot of potential due to the lack of sound churches in the area.”

Although rental space at Tumbaco's town center is inexpensive, holding services at another site is a significant undertaking for Luz de Vida, an organized congregation of 42 souls. But since it was established 12 years ago, Luz de Vida has focused on reaching out.

In 2016, the church began a “permanent outreach” initiative that progressively discipled people. Members of the congregation invite acquaintances to a dinner at which Rev. Landázuri shares a gospel meditation, explains the history of the Reformed church, and invites attendees to sign up for a basic course on the Reformed faith. Those who complete the course, attend worship, and evidence fruit of repentance are then offered a membership class. Then the church begins the process again.

Two rounds have nearly been completed. Two out of 15 people completed the first cycle, and four out of 12 still participate in the second. Rev. Landázuri believes these numbers are normal for a culture permeated with various forms of prosperity gospel. “Faithful churches grow very slowly.”

As it reaches out to individuals, Luz de Vida also builds ecclesiastical fellowship and training. It holds monthly meetings with church leaders interested in strengthening the Reformed church. One independent church, in the process of subscribing to the Three Forms of Unity, partners with Luz de Vida on conferences about the Reformed faith.



Rev. Landázuri periodically travels to poor communities along the coast to assist five mission churches, being planted by a Reformed church in the Netherlands. Because they have no ministers, they have asked for his assistance in administering baptisms and the Lord's Supper.

“I am pushing the need of forming a federation of confessionally Reformed churches in Ecuador in these meetings. I am also promoting the idea with the Dutch

*continued on page 4...*

## New Student from Ecuador

by Glenda Mathes

For years, Cristian Garcia's desire to be a pastor wasn't financially feasible. He took online courses from Ligonier and MINTS and researched seminaries. In 2016, he and his family became members at Luz de Vida.

“When I met Rev. Landázuri, I mentioned my search for a seminary education because I wanted to serve the Lord as a minister, but that the prices were high for me,” Cristian said. “He said he studied at Mid-America and my desire was good, but he needed to know me better.”

“Throughout the time we spent with Cristian, we noticed not only a firm commitment to the Word of God and the Reformed tradition, but also a humble attitude that sought to serve the Church of Christ,” Rev. Landázuri said. “Cristian is a teachable man with a heart for the lost. We believe he can be an apt instrument for advancing the mission of reforming the Church in Ecuador, God willing.”

Church leaders recommended Cristian for seminary, his application was accepted, and he was granted financial aid.

“This was such a blessing! We marveled how God was doing things,” Cristian said. “In all the process, I had to face doubts and a little fear, but Rev. Landázuri encouraged me.”

Unlike the Student Aid Fund (SAF) for North American students, the International Student Aid Fund (ISAF) doesn't have a principal balance that generates interest income. Therefore, support for the international students comes directly from gifts the Seminary receives in the international student aid fund.

Individuals or congregations may want to consider fostering the kind of supportive relationships Faith and Covenant had with Cristian's mentor, Pablo.



## President's Message: "Scripture Alone": Re-Affirming the 'Material Principle' of the Reformation"

by Dr. Cornelis Venema



If there is one story that many people associate with the Reformation in the sixteenth century, it is the story of Luther's appearance before the Diet of Worms in 1521. Convened by Charles V, ruler of the Holy Roman Empire, the Diet (official assembly) took place in order to judge Luther and his teachings. Prior to the meeting of the Diet, Pope Leo X had issued a papal bull or decree that termed Luther's teaching a "poisonous virus," demanding that he recant within sixty days or be excommunicated.

When Luther appeared under escort before the Diet, he was confronted with the choice: either recant or suffer the consequence. After asking for 24 hours to consider his response, he appeared before a large crowd and offered the following statement:

"Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me. Amen."

With these words, Luther gave powerful testimony to what is often termed the "material principle" of the Reformation: the Spirit of God speaking in and with the Scriptures is the final, supreme standard for the faith and practice of the church of Jesus Christ. Luther anticipated a similar confession of the Reformed churches in Switzerland during the early period of the Reformation: "The holy Christian Church, whose only Head is Christ, is born of the Word of God, and abides in the same, and listens not to the voice of a stranger" (Article 1, The Ten Conclusions of Berne, 1528).

In commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we need to remember what this affirmation of *sola Scriptura* means, and does not mean, for the church of Jesus Christ today.

First, it means that the church must cultivate a healthy respect for *the authority of the Triune God* who speaks in and through the Scriptures. Notice Luther's words carefully—"it is not safe." Luther's answer was not a testimony in the first place to his courage (though it was that, for sure). Luther's answer was in the first place a testimony to the greatness of the God who speaks in Scripture. He was aware of a greater danger than suffering at the hands of those who called him to recant. And that danger was to suffer God's displeasure at his disobedience to the Word He had spoken!

Second, it means that the supreme authority for, and test of, the church's preaching and teaching is always the Word of God in Scripture. Though the decisions of church councils and assemblies are important and instructive, they do not stand alongside of, or in addition to, what is taught in Scripture. As the Reformed confessions uniformly insist, church councils may err but the Word of God does not err. When the church teaches anything contrary to or goes beyond what is taught in the Word of God, it abuses its authority and assumes a power that it does not possess.

Third, it does not mean that Reformed churches have no respect for, and therefore make little or no use of, "traditional" ways of reading and interpreting the Scriptures. The Reformation view of *sola Scriptura* is not to be confused with a doctrine of what some have called "*solo Scriptura*" (the Scriptures apart from and without any regard for the way the church has historically understood them). The Reformers of the sixteenth century (as well as Reformed churches today) had a high regard for the traditional interpretation of Scripture, particularly as this came to expression in the confessions. Theologians have a fancy way of expressing this, when they distinguish between the Scriptures as the "norm that norms" (*norma normans*) and the confessions as the "norm that is normed" (*norma normata*). The churches' confessions have real authority, though in subordination to the higher authority of Scripture to which they must be conformed.

And fourth, this slogan means little if it is merely a matter of "sloganeering." You can say *sola Scriptura* as often as you wish, but it means little or nothing if it does not shape the way preachers treat the Scriptures in their sermons, or the way hearers receive the Word as the living voice of Christ. As Calvin put it, Jesus Christ "holds out his arms to receive us, as often as the gospel is preached to us. . . . Let us assure ourselves that God offers himself to us in the person of His only Son, when He sends us pastors and teachers."

## Faculty Writing Projects

by Glenda Mathes

Dr. J. Mark Beach's "The Doctrine of the *Pactum Salutis* in the Covenant Theology of Herman Witsius," will appear in *Thine Eye Diffused a Quickening Ray* and "Francis Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*" in the *Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology*. A recent *Mid-America Journal of Theology (MAJT)* contained a different article on Turretin.

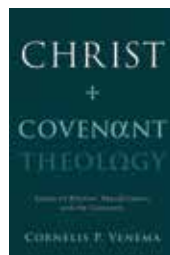
Rev. R. Andrew Compton is writing a series in *The Outlook* entitled "Archaeology: Friend or Foe of Biblical History?" These articles survey historical and archaeological issues from Old Testament history. For the *MAJT*, he is writing an article about how attention to the linguistic feature "deixis" provides assistance for exegeting passages of Scripture. ("Deixis" refers to words and phrases, such as "me" or "here", that cannot be fully understood without additional contextual information – in this case, the identity of the speaker ("me") and the speaker's location ("here").)

Mohr Siebeck (Tübingen, Germany) will publish Dr. Marcus Mininger's dissertation, *Uncovering the Theme of Revelation in Romans 1:16-3:26: A New Approach to Paul's Argument*, in their series for high-level dissertations in this field. His article, "A God-Centered Ministry and Responses to Conflict between Peers: Perspectives from the Apostle Paul," appeared in *MAJT* 27 (2016).

P&R will publish Dr. Alan D. Strange's dissertation, *The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church in the Ecclesiology of Charles Hodge*, and an article on Hodge appeared in the *MAJT* 27 (2016). *New Horizons* recently contained two of his articles: "The Reformation of Marriage" (May) and "Why We Also Sing Hymns" (June/July).

Rev. Mark D. Vander Hart led a Bible study on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) that met at Oak Glen URC from September through May. He prepared discussion notes and questions for the monthly meetings. His article, "Being Christlike in Conflict: Perspective from the Old Testament," appeared in the *MAJT* 27 (2016).

P&R has published Dr. Cornelis P. Venema's *Christ and Covenant Theology: Essays on Election, Republication, and the Covenants*. For Mentor/Christian Focus, he is writing, *He Has Mercy on Whomever He Will: Revisiting the Biblical, Historical, and Theological Contours of the Doctrine of Election*, as part of the New Studies in Systematic Theology series.



## Assemblies & Synod by Mike Deckinga



Board members, Rev. Todd Joling, & Rev. John R. Hilbelink, joined by professors, Rev. Andrew Compton, and Rev. Alan Strange, PhD, Mr. Mike Deckinga, Vice-President of Advancement, and Dr. Cornelis P. Venema, President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary at the Trinity Christian College for the 84th General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The late spring/early summer season is marked by a number of things in the great Midwest. Rain showers dwindle, the grass greens up, farmers get into the fields, and the temperature begins to get very pleasant under the warming sun. Here at the Seminary, it's a time to take inventory of pads and pens, brochures and books, table cloths and banners, and of course, MARS candy bars. It's a time for the Mid-America road crew to

fuel up, hit the highway, and head out to the various synod and assembly meetings of the denominations we historically serve. We enjoy these times because as an institution that seeks to serve the church, it's important to stay plugged in, and in touch.

I had the pleasure of kicking off synod season by heading down to Northland Reformed Church in Kansas City, MO for the 271st Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (RUCS) (May 15-18, 2017). Among the pastoral ranks in the RCUS are many alumni of Mid-America, so it was great to spend time in fellowship hearing seminary stories of the past. It was also great to see our alumni active in the synodical proceedings. Dr. Robert Grossman (former professor), and Rev. Paul Henderson (alumnus) led the body in worship on Monday night. Rev. Kyle Sorensen (alumnus) was elected as Vice President of Synod, and Rev. David Fagrey (alumnus) was elected as the Stated Clerk. Of course, one would be remiss to neglect to mention that Kansas City is known for its good BBQ, and the RCUS did not disappoint!

Next up was the 84th General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) held on the beautiful campus of Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, IL (May 31-June 5, 2017). Being a local event, the Seminary

was well represented throughout the week. I attended each of the days' events, as did Rev. Andrew Compton, Rev. Todd Joling, (alumnus and Board member), and Rev. John Hilbelink (Board member). Andrew and Todd served as fraternal delegates from the URCNA. Rev. Alan Strange was there also, serving on a variety of committees for the OPC. On Friday, the Seminary treated the commissioners and guests to an ice cream break. We were pleased to be joined by Dr. Cornel Venema for a time of fellowship with the commissioners.

Rev. Jeff De Boer represented the seminary at the 45th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) held in Greensboro, North Carolina (June 12-16). He spent his time in the exhibit hall meeting and greeting as many of the over 1,300 commissioners and guests as he could. Jeff tries to communicate with those in the PCA exactly what makes Mid-America unique, since we are well recognized, but not always well known. The PCA Administrative Committee works hard to accommodate such a large group of commissioners and exhibitors. Additionally, they conduct approximately 40 training sessions that cover topics from gospel-centered preaching, to pastoring a multi-cultural congregation.

## Happy New Year! by Mike Deckinga



No, you won't see a six hour television special celebrating the ringing in of the new fiscal year at Mid-America, but I've got to say, we are pretty excited about it. It's an exciting time of looking back at the year past, and, with much enthusiasm, looking forward to the year ahead. As I'm sure many of you are aware, we operate on a fiscal year beginning on July 1 and ending on June 30.

As I look back on this year, I see God's faithful hand at work for our institution. I have seen Him sustain our students in their studies, I have seen Him encourage our professors in their work, I have seen Him open doors for our graduates who are now pursuing their calls for gospel ministry, and I have seen Him move your hearts to be generous towards us through your prayers and financial gifts. Over the last year, I've asked you to consider giving generously to the International Student Aid and the Student Aid funds, and you answered that call! I am pleased to report that contributions to the student aid accounts saw an increase of 80% this year vs. last year. These gifts allow us to keep our education affordable for our students.

Our General Fund saw a slight decrease in contributions. The account was down in donations by 5%. It is easy to see though, that some money got shifted around as your priorities changed a bit this year – and that's okay – the Lord still used those contributions to the general fund to pay our bills and meet our financial obligations.

Estate gifts are another important area of revenue for the Seminary. Estate gifts were up over 300% this year. We are so thankful that our friends made it a priority to remember us in their final will and testament. We are particularly humbled and encouraged by these gifts.

As you read earlier, there is a very high demand on our International Student Aid Fund, and I've already asked you to consider how you might help. The fact of the matter is, our general fund obligations never go away either. In fact, operational costs increase all the time. As you consider our special request for the international fund, please remember our day-to-day operating costs as well. A great way to help us in this way is to set up a monthly recurring gift.

Thank you for your support this past fiscal year. To God be the glory!



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## ◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

### “Alumnus Focus” continued...

by Glenda Mathes

brothers on the coast,” Rev. Landázuri said. “Additionally, I am working with the MINTS representative here in forming a M.Div. program that is comparable to my experience at Mid-America, and helps to secure the provision of faithful ministers for the future.”

In the meantime, a member of the Luz de Vida congregation is studying at Mid-America. Cristian Garcia and his family arrived in June, and he began Summer Greek in July. Luz de Vida hopes to call him to church planting in Ecuador.

During Pablo’s seminary years, he was a member of Faith URC in Beecher, IL, and worked with its Spanish ministry in Chicago Heights. Faith provided both spiritual oversight and financial support. But Pablo also enjoyed a special bond with Covenant URC in Pella, IA.

“We had a wonderful arrangement between Covenant and Pablo,” Keith LeMahieu, Vice President of Operations says. “They really adopted him in so many ways and developed a

good relationship with him.”

About the same time Pablo’s search for a Reformed seminary led him to contact Mid-America, the Missions Committee of Covenant Reformed Church expressed an interest in financially supporting an international student at the Seminary.

Covenant’s consistory invited Pablo to exhort in the church on multiple occasions. Members of the congregation opened their hearts and homes to the Landázuri family. Following Pablo’s graduation, he spent a year’s internship at Covenant.

“During my year-long internship in Pella, we got to know most of Covenant’s members,” said Rev. Landázuri. “Our visits with some of the older folks are still part of our most special memories, because they would usually share their life experiences and testimony of faith. At consistory and council meetings, I came to feel

the church’s struggles and blessings as my own.”

On April 25, 2014, Pablo Landázuri was ordained and installed as Covenant’s Associate Pastor to serve as Minister of the Word and Sacraments and church planter in Ecuador. The Landázuri family departed in June of that year, but their relationship with Covenant remains close.

When the opportunity arose for the Luz de Vida congregation to purchase a suitable building, Covenant borrowed about half of the expense from its own building fund. That money has since been paid back by Covenant and donations from other individuals and churches. Covenant’s consistory (with assistance of its Missions Committee) oversees Pablo’s work jointly with the Luz de Vida consistory. Covenant also provides his salary through funding from its congregation and other churches. The Missions Committee keeps supporting churches informed about how God is using the ministry in Quito to proclaim the light of life that is Jesus Christ.