

the messenger

Mid-America Reformed Seminary

Best Ball, Fun for All

by Mike Deckinga



The front page. The first article on the front page. Top left. Have I arrived? I think so, yes.

When *The Messenger* committee met back in August, they unanimously decided that a recap article on the 14th Annual Golf Outing was in order. Perhaps this demonstrates a lack of creative juices flowing that day, but I am thrilled to get to tell you all about it. After all, it is big news. It is the single largest fundraising event that the Seminary holds each year. So, perhaps, as the golf outing planner, I am a bit biased, but I think this topic is right at home on page 1.

September 8, 2018, Frankfort IL – It was an unseasonably cool morning. The sun was slow to rise as the dew and remnant drops from the previous day's rain glistened on the bent grass fairways of SPG Green Garden Country Club. The golf carts were being wiped down and assembled in order. The registration table had been set up, with gift bags positioned to the right. The wind caused the flaps of the awning overhead to slap against themselves. Cars began to fill the lot, as still yet under-caffeinated golfers approached the table—optimistic about the day, but unsure of the weather. Stray showers from a hurricane were forecasted for later in the day. Prayer was offered,

announcements were made, and one-by-one, the carts pulled out of the lot and onto the links. The 14th Annual Golf Outing was underway.

There was plenty of fun to be had along the way. Several holes offered competitions. There were two “Closest to the Pin” competitions. The first was on hole number 9, and the winner was Greg De Jong. The second was on hole 16, with Pete Krygsheld winning. Hole 2 was where the “Longest Drive” competition was held, and the winner there was Steve Van Kuiken. Dale De Wit was the winner of the “Straightest Drive” on hole 17, and Pete Onnink sank the “Longest Putt” on hole 5. For the second year in a row, Professor Rev. Andrew Compton dressed up in his green knickers, green and white argyle socks, MARS golf polo, and green newsboy cap and challenged each player to out-drive him on the 18th hole. Those that did had their name entered into a raffle drawing to win some fantastic “seminary swag.” Our winner this year was Bob Bult. Legacy Insurance (Cedar Lake, IN) sponsored a \$10,000 hole-in-one challenge. Reports indicate that it was only missed by a few feet. Close!

The scores were tight across our 17 foursome outing. The winning score was 6 under par, and the highest score was only 6 over par. Our first place foursome was Kyle De Young, Micah Leestma, Adam Leestma, and student Cary Gephart. Second place (also 6 under par) was Trent Vander Zee, Keith Vooys, George Eizenga, and John Witvoet.

The seminary is so blessed to have this event participated in by so many generous people. All of the players, and businesses and individuals that sponsor the event, continue to be a great source of encouragement for us in our work. Please know, without the Lord's provision of your partnership, and in particular, your participation in the outing, we couldn't do our work. Lord willing, next year's outing will take place at the same course on September 7, 2019. Save the date!

A Note from Camp

by Bryce De Zwart

As is our custom here at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, we launched into the start of a new academic year with our annual seminary retreat. A change in venue brought us this year to Camp Manitoqua in Frankfort, Illinois.

After a time of devotions and making introductions with the new students and their families, we were both challenged and greatly encouraged by the reflections of Pastor William Shisko on 35 years as the Pastor of the OPC, Franklin Square, NY.

In his reflections, he pressed upon us how a pastor's personal disciplines are absolutely essential to lives of successful Christian ministry. Along these lines, Pastor Shisko invigorated us men pursuing the ministry always to have a lively expectancy that God will use mightily the means of grace. And he encouraged us never to lose sight of the power of the gospel to do that which the United Nations cannot do, namely, to bring about true and lasting peace in a world plagued by the curse of sin.

But Pastor Shisko also challenged us. He reminded us that faithful pastors must not only understand how to relate the Word of God to the lives of their congregants, but also to our culture and its ever-changing trends. And with much conviction, he pleaded with us to make it our aim as future pastors to make Christ more and more precious to the hearts of our hearers.

Afterward, we enjoyed a time of food and fellowship, followed by sand volleyball and various outdoor activities as a seminary community.



The President's Message: "Unconditional Election"

by Dr. Cornelis P. Venema



"... even as He chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved." (Eph. 1:4-6, ESV)

In this and subsequent articles in *The Messenger*, I would like to consider the five main points of doctrine that the Synod of Dort adopted in their response to the Arminian view of election. In the First Main Point of Doctrine, the Synod set forth the Scriptural teaching of "unconditional election."

Like all of the five points adopted by the Synod, the First Point was affirmed in order to refute the position of Arminius and his followers, the Remonstrants. According to the teaching of Arminius, God elects before the foundation of the world to save those whom He foresees will respond in faith to the gospel call to believe in Christ. What ultimately distinguishes those who are saved from those who are not saved is that some freely choose to believe and persevere to the end. Divine election is based upon, or in consequence of, the human work of evangelical faith. In the final analysis, God elects those who merit or deserve their election by virtue of their evangelical faith. Because some fallen sinners distinguish themselves from others by freely choosing to believe, God elects to save them. In the Arminian view, salvation is not granted to believers in Christ as a free gift of God, but as a reward for what He foresees they will do. Election is based upon the decision of some sinners to meet the "condition" of faith. Election is neither sovereign, gracious, nor unmerited in the proper sense of these terms.

In the opening articles of the First Main Point, the Canons summarize the most important aspects of the biblical gospel. These include the fact that "all people have sinned in Adam and have come under the sentence of the curse and eternal death" (Art. 1), that God has manifested his love in the sending of His only-begotten Son (Art. 2), and that God's anger continues to rest upon those who do not believe the gospel of Jesus Christ (Art. 3). These truths raise the inescapable question to which the biblical doctrine of election is addressed: why do some believe and repent at the preaching of the gospel, but others remain in their sins and under the just condemnation of God?

The answer to this question at its deepest level is God's unconditional election in Christ of some persons to salvation: "The fact that some receive from God the gift of faith within time, and that others do not, stems from [God's] eternal decision. For *all His works are known to God from eternity*

"Only God saves, and He does so out of His undeserved love and free decision to grant His people salvation in Christ."

(Acts 15:18; Eph. 1:11). In accordance with this decision He graciously softens the hearts, however hard, of His chosen ones and inclines them to believe, but by His just judgment He leaves in their wickedness and hardness of heart those who have not been chosen" (Art. 6). God's election in Christ is unconditional, an entirely gracious and undeserved decision to save His people. God does not elect "on the basis of foreseen faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, or any other good quality and disposition as though it were based on a prerequisite cause or condition in the person to be chosen, but rather *for the purpose of* faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, and so on" (Art. 8).

The importance of the teaching of unconditional election cannot be overstated. As J. I. Packer once put it, the doctrine of election preserves the simple gospel truth that "God saves sinners." Sinners do not save themselves. Only God saves, and He does so out of His undeserved love and free decision to grant His people salvation in Christ—and that "before the foundation of the world"! By affirming this, the Synod of Dort preserved the biblical teaching that salvation is by grace alone. And at the same time, the Synod of Dort provided a sure footing for confidence in God's invincible grace in Christ.

The doctrine of unconditional election provides great encouragement to us in our work in preparing our students for the gospel ministry. We may do so with confidence that God will use the foolishness of preaching to save those whom He has chosen (1 Cor. 1:18-31).

¡Predica la Palabra! Preach the Word!

by Cristian Garcia

I recently saw a Facebook ad promoting Quito, the capital of Ecuador, as a place of opportunities for financial investors. Rapidly, Rev. Landázuri, former MARS student and current URCNA missionary, wrote a commentary on his feed: "Quito is also a city with a great need of the Gospel."

Those words came to my mind as I was thinking on this article. If you ask me, "Luz de Vida" (Light of Life) may be defined as one that seeks to be a faithful church, founded on the Scriptures, shaped by a commitment to the Three Forms of Unity, and one that sees herself as an instrument for the advancement of the gospel in Ecuador.

This summer, I was able to intern alongside Rev. Landázuri. Apart from exhorting every Sunday, teaching Bible studies, and visiting families, we arranged a "Genesis v. Evolution" conference, where we presented the case for believing in a universe that has the biblical God as creator. In spite of some opposition from outside, believers left encouraged, with a renewed Spirit-given confidence in the Scriptures.

I was also encouraged by seeing how the Lord, through the faithful preaching of the Word, brings His people to church. Every Sunday we had visitors who shared with me their surprise to hear the Word of God clearly preached from the pulpit. This should not be a surprise, but sadly most churches take the preaching of the Word as something of secondary importance.

These experiences are a confirmation of how important it is to receive sound training for the work of missions, and a reason for gratitude to the Lord, MARS, and its donors. I pray the Lord would keep blessing the work He has called the church to do, in partnership with MARS, for the advancement of the Kingdom gospel to the nations.



New Faces by Jared Luttjeboer

This year, Mid-America welcomes seven new students. Each of them is pursuing a M.Div. degree towards either pastoral ministry or church planting.

Luke Walkup (Morgantown, WV) and his wife Laura have two children, Mary (3) and Ephraim (1), and are expecting another near the beginning of March. Luke was drawn to Mid-America because of its focus “on specifically training men to be pastors with a faculty having a wealth of experience as pastors.” After seminary, Luke hopes to seek a call in the service of the OPC.

David Dick (McBain, MI) became aware of God’s calling on his life to attend seminary while serving as an elder at his home church, Prosper CRC in Michigan. He was “drawn to Mid-America because of their commitment to practical Reformed preaching,” and looks forward to growing in the Word with his classmates, anticipating becoming a minister of a church after seminary. David and his wife, Rachel, have a 1-year old daughter, Hazel.

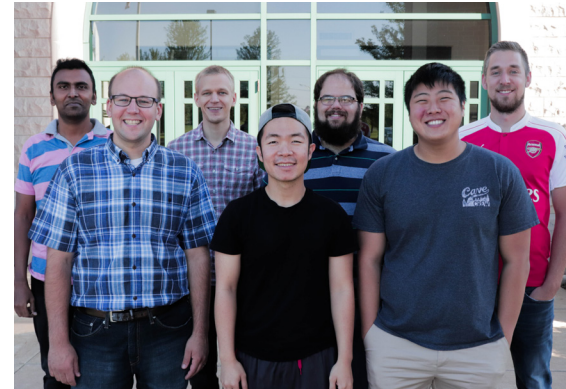
Aaron van der Heiden and his wife Karissa, along with their two boys, Andrew (20 months) and Grayson (5 months), moved to Dyer from Ponoka, Alberta. In the past few years, Aaron has “received strong encouragement from pastors and

mentors to pursue seminary studies.” The small class sizes and large support from the URCNA ultimately drew him to Mid-America. After seminary, he hopes to preach in the URCNA.

Hailing from Columbus, Ohio, **James Stafford** says that what appealed to him most about Mid-America was its “emphasis on pastoral ministry,” particularly the Ministerial Apprenticeship Program. He appreciates that Mid-America does not divorce academic learning from its practical application in the life of the church. After seminary, he hopes to be licensed and ordained in the Presbytery of Ohio (OPC).

Praveen Phineas, from the city of Chennai in the State of Tamil Nadu, India, was drawn to Mid-America because of its “unwavering commitment to the authority of Scripture and its ability to produce sound reformed men who faithfully exegete Scripture.” He is looking forward to learning “the right tools for a lifetime of labor in the Lord’s vineyard.” Praveen hopes to return to India and plant more reformed churches in his city and state.

Randy Hyun, from Chicago, Illinois, was recommended by the reformed Korean community in the suburbs of Chicago to study at Mid-America. After seminary, he is looking to



Back row (left to right): Praveen Phineas, James Stafford, Luke Walkup, Aaron van der Heiden; Front row (left to right): David Dick, Joseph Kim, Randy Hyun

complete candidacy exams in the PCA in order to be ordained in the denomination.

Joseph Kim was also born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. He moved to his current church to have “more of a foundation in reformed teachings” and believes that Mid-America is the place where those foundations may be sharpened and stretched. His aim is to lead the youth in the church and help plant churches in the Chicagoland area.

Off to a Good Start by Mike Deckinga



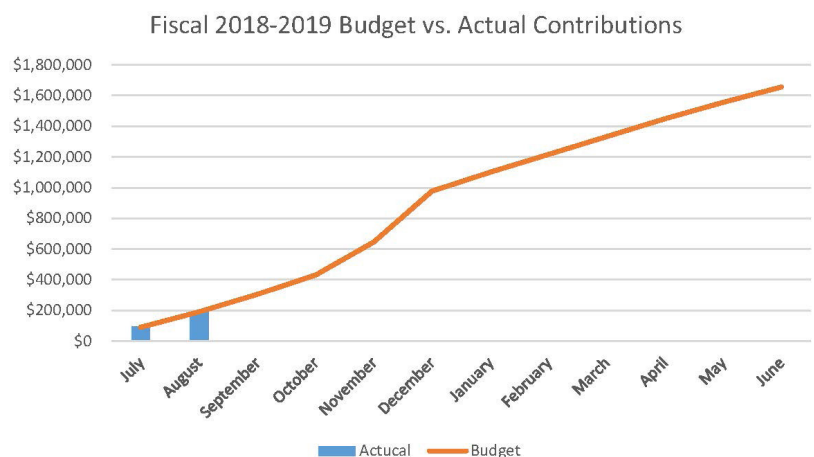
Despite how many desserts I might consume at a church fellowship dinner (Oreo Salad doesn’t count, by the way), I do care about physical fitness. I have a gym membership, and provided I wake to my alarm, I try to get in a bit of exercise each morning before heading in to the office. There are a variety of machines I use; however, I tend to steer clear of the treadmill. In fact, running in general interests me very little. I’ll never fully understand those that run – especially those who run a marathon. It’s tough work. There’s a lot of pain involved. What I do admire is the training long the way. It takes dedication and discipline. It means tying on those running shoes and heading out in the wind, rain, or snow at times. The race is the end, and all the incremental training regiments are the means to that end. A real runner knows that if he or she is going to make it to the marathon – to the end goal – they’ve got to keep an eye on the means each and every day, week, and month leading up to the big finish.

One of my responsibilities at the seminary is keeping an eye on our financial situation, and communicating with all of you – be it individually

or corporately through appeals and articles like this one – the various needs we have. I am happy to report that, after two months of our new fiscal year, the Seminary is on pace to meet our budgeted expenses. This is good news, but much like the runner we talked about, we at the Seminary need to play “small ball” throughout the year to make sure we remain on track. A full year of financial viability is composed of 12 financially viable months. Often, if contributions fall below the monthly budget, they rarely catch up by year’s end.

Observe the graph here, and join us in thanksgiving to God for providing for our needs through you, but please consider a generous, recurring monthly contribution to the Seminary to help us finish well after this good start.

(To make or plan a gift, contact Mike Deckinga, Vice-President of Advancement at mdeckinga@midamerica.edu.)





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◆ CAMPUS UPDATES

Fall Evening Class

by Rev. Mark Vander Hart



The book of Joshua is not appreciated at all in certain circles today. "Can't we all just get along?" many may wonder. In the book of Joshua it appears that God calls for the extermination of whole groups of people. In other words, some accuse the God of the covenant of authorizing, even commanding, genocide, the wholesale slaughter of people.

In the Fall Evening Class, we will explore the revelation of God in the book of Joshua. While we cannot ignore the modern-day questions that arise because of the story told in Joshua, at the same time we must listen to what the concerns are in the book of Joshua itself. This story has its own context in the whole flow of the history of redemption. Is the book of Joshua a scandal because of genocide, or does it tell a message of good news, in that God's covenant people are receiving the land that God Himself

had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

The Fall Evening Classes will meet on four successive Thursday evenings: October 11, 18, 25, and November 1. The classes begin at 7:30 pm and end at 9:00 pm. In these four evening sessions we will look at the following:

October 11: Preparing to enter the inheritance. Joshua receives instructions on how he must lead Israel when the people cross over the Jordan River. The interesting story of Rahab harboring two Israelite spies rounds off the section on preparation.

October 18: Entering the inheritance. Except for the families of 2½ tribes, the entire nation of Israel crosses over into Canaan on dry ground. The miraculous power of the LORD held back the flooding water of the Jordan River. Memories of crossing the Red Sea!

October 25: Conquering the inheritance. Once in the Promised Land, Israel must now conduct a 'holy war,' that is, a kind of warfare that has specific restrictions and unique pre-

scriptions. What is this 'holy war,' and why is it the way that Israel must follow to conquer the land?

November 1: Administering the inheritance. Having received the Promised Land, how shall God's covenant people now live? They have entered the land of rest, but can they keep it? Or, will Israel become restless? Israel must choose for the covenant God!

Throughout this whole story, we will see that the story of Joshua is a microcosm of something that the LORD is doing in our day on a larger scale. The name 'Joshua' means, "the LORD saves" or "the LORD wins." Simply, Joshua is the Hebrew version of the New Testament name "Jesus." What God does through Joshua, He does on a macrocosmic scale now in the Person and power of His own Son, Jesus Christ.

You are warmly invited to come out for this Fall's Evening Class and read with us a familiar story of great news, revealed in the book of Joshua.