

Welcome to the first edition of *Inside GRS*, the semiannual newsletter of Geneva Reformed Seminary.

PRESIDENT'S CHALLENGE

The Imminent & Urgent Need

Welcome to the first edition of *Inside GRS*, the semiannual newsletter of Geneva Reformed Seminary. The purpose of this newsletter, obviously, is to focus on the seminary's work, to keep its readers aware of what is going on at the seminary of the Free Presbyterian Church of North America. The newsletter will provide progress reports, updates on graduates, profiles of the faculty, information about current needs, and a challenge from a member of the faculty. I can think of no more fitting challenge in this inaugural letter than to exhort you to pray earnestly for the Lord to call men to preach the gospel, particularly to serve in the ministry of the Free Presbyterian Church and to prepare for that ministry at GRS.

Geneva Reformed Seminary and the Free Presbyterian Church of North America are integrally related. The seminary would not exist if it weren't for the denomination, and the denomination cannot continue to exist without the seminary. It is imperative that all our churches in the FPCNA recognize this connection and assume the burden of supporting the mission and work of the seminary. An essential component of that support is praying particularly that the Lord will increase both the seminary's enrollment and its influence. The future of the work of the whole denomination depends on the Lord's answering those petitions. If the Lord does not raise up men to be trained to plant new churches and to supply the pulpits of our existing churches (whose present ministers sooner or later will be off the scene), then the first generation of the Free Presbyterian Church of North America will also be its last. That is the sobering reality that must sink in and must become the constant burden of all our churches and supporters.

This last summer I attended a prayer meeting with the presidents of other Christian colleges and seminaries to pray specifically for the Lord's blessing on our various institutions. One of my colleagues from another institution testified that every day he prays the **(Continued on page 3)**



Around Campus—You Can Help:

Here a book, there a book, everywhere—books! Using the library at Geneva Reformed Seminary is more like going on a hunt for hidden treasure than it is a quiet, scholarly exercise. The library, composed of over 6,500 volumes, is presently housed in four different rooms in two different buildings. But things will improve soon. In May, Faith Free Presbyterian Church, where the seminary is housed, is set to begin remodeling and expansion work that will provide the seminary's books a home all in one place and will also make room for the number of volumes to be increased. In addition, the renovation work will provide new space for classrooms and other student activities. Of course more space for books and classrooms creates the need for more bookshelves, desks, and other equipment. If you would like to support the work of the seminary by contributing towards the purchase of these items, you may do so through your local Free Presbyterian church or by sending your gift to Geneva Reformed Seminary, 1207 Haywood Road, Greenville, SC 29615.

FACULTY PROFILE

Inside GRS

2

May 2007



Rev. John Wagner, B.A., M.Div. Professor of Homiletics

Rev. John Wagner has been the minister of Covenant Free Presbyterian Church in Lexington, South Carolina, since 2002. For almost fourteen years he was the pastor of Orlando FPC. In the fall of 2002 he was appointed professor of homiletics at Geneva Reformed Seminary. He has been a member of the FPC for almost 25 years and has served the denomination as moderator of the standing commission of the presbytery for North America.

Mr. Wagner has a Bachelor of Arts degree in speech from Bob Jones University and a Master of Divinity degree from Whitefield College of the Bible. He has also studied at Westminster Theological Seminary.

He and his wife, Kim, have seven children—four girls and three boys.

Those who have been privileged to hear him preach understand immediately why Mr. Wagner was sought to teach homiletics at the seminary. His passion in the pulpit carries over into the classroom. Acknowledging that God must be the One who calls His heralds into service and imparts to them the gifts necessary for ministry, Mr. Wagner says that the mission of GRS is “to train...men to use those gifts to their utmost potential in order that they might go out and preach Christ in all His fullness to men in all their need.”

Effective preachers must use accurate exegesis and theological precision, but according to Mr. Wagner these techniques are not enough. Summing up his own philosophy of homiletics, he points out that it is crucial for the pastor to “preach Christ in all His fullness in the power of

Alumni News: GRS alumni are invited to send in their news (weddings, births, relocations, etc.) for publication. Send news to genevareformed@freepres.org or GRS, 1207 Haywood Rd., Greenville, SC 29615.

the Holy Spirit...bring[ing] Christ home to where people live and struggle.”

During his youth Mr. Wagner sat under men who “preached with fire in their hearts and tears in their eyes as they pled with both sinners and backsliders to seek Christ.” He knew, even as a teenager, that effective preaching must be passionate, simple, and direct.

Yet a good sermon requires more than an enthusiastic delivery. In his classes, Mr. Wagner stresses two basic elements for every sermon: solid content and clear structure. He elaborates that every sermon should also be expository, carefully explaining the great truths of the Word.

If you were to ask him why he is well suited to teach homiletics, Mr. Wagner would state modestly that he does not know. As he puts it, “I keep wondering when they’re going to replace me.” But others who have been blessed by his ministry and have learned from him are quick to say so.

One of his former students mentioned four characteristics that permeate Mr. Wagner’s teaching: his “evident burden for the uncompromised preaching of the person and work of Jesus Christ..., [his] uncanny ability to communicate..., [his] keen insight into human nature..., [and his] passion for the men in the seminary to be Spirit filled and well equipped.”

Another student, who requested Mr. Wagner as his internship mentor, made the observation that Pastor Wagner is “graced with the ability to both understand and apply the Scriptures. [He] has the ability to take what most would consider an ‘obscure’ passage of Scripture and make it live with illustrations and apply it with pinpoint accuracy.”

As a preacher and a teacher of preachers, Mr. Wagner can fully appreciate the struggles his students face and is quick to recognize a situation that presents a practical teaching opportunity. One student who confessed to forgetting his sermon notes was required to preach (before his classmates) from recall. The student acknowledged that that lesson left an impression on him. But the greater impression came when, with humility and empathy, the professor later admitted to his pupils that he too had learned that lesson the hard way.

To the task of preparing men for the ministry, Mr. Wagner brings his 25 years of preaching experience, his background as a pastor, his knowledge of sermon preparation and delivery, but most of all his passion for the ministry and his love for the Saviour and the gospel. The seminary is much blessed by his labors here.

—Paul Peters is a member of Covenant Free Presbyterian Church in Lexington, South Carolina.

(Continued from page 1, “President’s Challenge”) petition of Matthew 9:38, that the Lord of the harvest would send forth laborers into His harvest. I confess that I was greatly rebuked at my own laxity in praying this prayer given the urgent need in the Free Church. Since then I have reflected often on this text and have been more consistent in praying according to Christ’s instructions. Significantly, Christ’s command to pray for laborers was the expression of His compassion for the multitudes scattered as sheep without a shepherd—a compassion that we ought to share if we have the mind of Christ.

Three simple thoughts emerge from Christ’s prayer request. He observes a tragic contrast and then points to the logical resolution. First, on the one hand there is a great prospect: “The harvest truly is plenteous” (Matthew 9:37). The harvest analogy suggests that we are to view the mass of population around us as fruit for the picking. And there is a lot to pick. There are plenty of people out there for the FPCNA to reach with the gospel. If our churches are few and our congregations small, it is not for lack of available people. Surely, there is a part of that huge harvest field in which the FPC can labor. The prospect is great.

Second, on the other hand there is a serious problem: “the labourers are few” (9:37). I well believe that God’s elect from all the earth will be gathered in, and that is a glorious truth. But the corollary truth is that God has determined the means whereby that will occur. He uses the preaching of the gospel, and the preaching of the gospel requires preachers. The need for laborers is not limited to the FPC, but the (Continued on page 4)

GRADUATE INTERVIEW

From the Inside Out: An interview with GRS graduate Derrick Bowman

Inside: When did you graduate from GRS?

DB: I graduated May 29, 2004, with an M.Div.

Inside: What is the most important thing you learned in the seminary?

DB: I learned how to study and interpret the Bible, specifically with a view to finding the person and work of Christ. Also, in Homiletics I began to learn how to preach.

Inside: What was your favorite class?

DB: Wow, how can I decide? I have three that are right up there at the top: Biblical Theology with Dr. Michael Barrett, Paul’s Shorter Epistles with Dr. Rhett Dodson, or Homiletics with Rev. John Wagner (Homiletics was by far the most difficult, but also one of the best).

Inside: What was your least favorite class?

DB: This one is easy: Romans in Greek with Dr. Barrett. The class was great, and I think I learned some Greek, but I had the class with Dr. Barrett all by myself. So, every question was directed at me. If I did not know the answer, I could not hide behind one of my classmates.

Inside: Where did you do your internship?

DB: The Free Presbyterian Church in Cloverdale, British Columbia, under Pastor Ian Goligher.

Inside: What was the most valuable lesson you learned during your internship?

DB: I had the opportunity to preach and/or teach Sunday school, youth, etc., three or four times a week. I think the experience of actually preaching on a regular basis was the most valuable lesson I learned. Another value of my internship was getting to know the people and families in the Western Canadian churches. Now we can pray for those churches better because we know the people in them personally.

Inside: What are you doing now?

DB: My family moved to Hiram, Georgia, (a northwest suburb of Atlanta) in May of 2006, and now I am seek-



Graduation invitation

You are invited to the 2007 graduation service of Geneva Reformed Seminary, the theological seminary of the Free Presbyterian Church of North America

June 1, 2007

7:00 P.M.

Faith Free Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC

Dr. Larry Saunders will deliver the commencement address.

The President’s Itinerary

- May 3–6 Bible Conference in Minneapolis
- July 24–26 Bible Faculty Leadership Summit in Minneapolis
- August 2–4 President’s Prayer Advance, Lexington, Kentucky
- August 6 Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, Canton, Michigan
- October 28–29 Toronto Free Presbyterian Church

ing to plant Calvary Free Presbyterian Church (www.calvaryfpc.org). We began services in September of 2006.

Inside: Briefly, how did the Lord lead you to this place?

DB: It was while I was a junior at BJU (in 1999) that the Lord first gave me a burden for the Atlanta area. When my internship time was coming to a close, the Lord kept burdening me more and more to go and start a work there. After I spoke to presbytery, I learned of a family in the Atlanta area that had been praying since 1999 that the Lord would raise up a Free Presbyterian church some place in Atlanta. The Lord answered their prayer long before it was realized.

Inside: What do you find most challenging about church planting?

DB: When there are small numbers in the congregation, I find it difficult to make specific application in preaching. I try my best to stay away from vague or general application, but sometimes it is difficult.

Inside: Tell us about your family.

DB: I am married to Lydia Munger Bowman from

our Winston-Salem congregation. We have two energetic little boys. Nolan is 2½ and Hudson is 1.

Inside: How, specifically, do you want people to pray for you and for the work?

DB: Please pray that the Lord would continue to work in my own heart to make me a “good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine” (1 Timothy 4:6). Also, I am only 28 years old. I need the Lord to give me wisdom in the ministry to deal with people and the problems that people have.

Inside: Are there other ways (besides praying for you) that people can help you?

DB: If you have friends in Atlanta, tell them to come and visit. Also, if you have about 3,500 square feet of light gray or blue carpet lying around, you could send it my way. We are praying for the Lord to provide us with carpet and new chairs for our meeting place.

Calvary Free Presbyterian Church is located at 4645 Hiram Sudie Road in Hiram, Georgia. Phone: 770-439-8858.

(Continued from page 3, “President’s Challenge”)

poverty of prospective preachers in the FPC magnifies the predicament. GRS is happy and desirous to train men called by God to labor in some other part of the harvest field, but the chief reason for the seminary’s existence is to prepare preachers for our denomination. Where are the men, called and gifted by God and committed to the cause? The problem is serious.

Third, there is a spiritual solution: “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest” (9:38). The natural solution to an enrollment crisis is to devise and implement some marketing strategy to gain exposure and to induce prospective students to come. There is certainly a place for planning, advertising, and recruiting, and I’m wide open to suggestions and

fresh ideas as to how to do all those things. But after all is said and done—better before all is said and done—we must pray that He will raise up laborers and send them out to His harvest. Only He can do it, and He has the most interest in doing it because the harvest belongs to Him. By praying, we enter into His purpose and acknowledge our dependence on Him. It is always the case that the intensity of our praying is in proportion to our recognition of that dependence on Him. Christ underscores that sense of necessary dependency by using a word for “pray” that could well be translated “beg.” Although we readily acknowledge the serious problem, how many of us have taken it seriously enough to beg the Lord for resolution?

This is the burden that I exhort each of you to share. Can we join together in consistently begging the Lord that He would raise up men and assign us our place to work in His harvest field? This is the urgent need.

—Michael P. V. Barrett, President



SEPARATED UNTO THE GOSPEL

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