



"The great trumpet will be blown,
they will come,
who are about to perish"

The Trumpet

Isaiah 27:13 (NKJ).

Apologetics Emphasis



MINTS focuses on teaching course on defending the faith on

trip to Nicaragua and Costa Rica September 8-22, 2011

A Ministry of Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto in Partnership with Faith United Reformed Church of West Olive, Michigan

Once again I have returned from another ministry trip to Central America, this time to Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Often I teach several courses on one trip which requires considerable preparation before and during the trip. During this trip I was able to coordinate things in such a way that I was able to teach one course throughout the trip. That course was Apologetics, which I taught on seven different occasions, three times in Costa Rica and four times in Nicaragua. It was a busy trip with many stops and considerable travel between each of the stops, but because I was able to arrange to teach just one course throughout the trip. I found it was far less demanding on my time and energy. It doesn't always work to be able to teach the same course, but I was thankful that on this trip it worked out. In addition to teaching activities, I had the opportunity to present the MINTS program of study to three different groups in Costa Rica and one in Nicaragua.

“...in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect...” 1 Peter 3:15

Nehemiah Course Syllabus Completed



MINTS

During the trip, I had several blocks of “free time”. I used that time to finish up the course of Nehemiah for which I was professor during August and September for the online program of studies that MINTS offers. The last two weeks of the Nehemiah course coincided with the two weeks of this trip. I’m thankful that I was able to find internet access in order to keep up with the review of the student assignments for the course and to participate in the student forums, even while travelling.

In Costa Rica I had the privilege of teaching the Apologetics course to the teachers of a Christian School whose director is the wife of missionary colleague Rev. Bill Green. It was good to have an opportunity to provide some training to these 15 teachers. In addition to two other conferences on Apologetics, it was good to

follow up on work being done by the Costa Rica MINTS Coordinator, Jaime Morales, with some contacts he had made for me to visit.

Pray for an “Open Door” for Prison Ministry

In Nicaragua I had the opportunity to teach on four different occasions. That’s always the focus of my trips. The conferences went well. The



disappointment in Nicaragua was that once again I was unable to enter the prison there for which I had been invited by the pastor who coordinates a prison ministry there. This is the fourth time in a row that I have been denied access, after having entered there on three occasions several years ago. But one of my students is involved in a prison ministry in another smaller prison and he has invited me to teach some courses and preach in that prison. Please pray for open doors in this area.

One of the highlights of my ministry is to participate in the graduation of students. During my visit to Nicaragua I had the privilege of participating in the graduation of Jonathan Radis with a Bachelor in Theology degree. Jonathan is in his 60's and is a humble but respected indigenous pastor in a marginalized area of the indigenous Mosquito region on the east coast of Nicaragua. During this past year he developed serious eye problems and couldn't read anymore. He had four courses to finish up for his degree. Arrangements were made for him to be able to fulfill the academic requirements to finish his course work so he could receive his degree. Earlier this year he told me, "I am praying that I will see my diploma before the 'lights' go out". He received financial help to see a specialist and had some cataracts removed about four months ago. He can see better, but is scheduled for further medical intervention. He had tears in his eyes as I presented his diploma to him this week. These moving experiences help to motivate me as I see students encouraged to prepare themselves for service in God's Kingdom.

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DIVINE HOPE
REFORMED BIBLE SEMINARY

The following article by Glenda Mathes appeared on pages 13 & 14 of the October 5, 2011 issues of Christian Renewal as well as in her blog [Ascribelog](#)

Doors have opened for a unique Reformed seminary within the walls of a prison in the Chicago area. A Board of Directors for Divine Hope Reformed Bible Seminary initially met on July 25, 2011, to determine direction for the Seminary, which will exist inside Danville Correctional Center in Danville, IL.

"Nobody is doing this," says Jon Hoek, President of the newly formed Board of Directors. "There is not a Reformed Seminary that we know of in the prison system. This is an opportunity not only for social justice, but also for reformation."

The Board of Directors is seeking an ordained man to serve as program coordinator for Divine Hope Reformed Bible Seminary and hopes to begin classes in late January with a curriculum provided by Miami International Theological Seminary (MINTS).

Reformed churches in the Chicagoland area have been actively involved in prison ministry to the correctional facility for more than a decade. During that time a healthy group of Reformed Christians has formed within the prison. The idea for a seminary developed as these inmates began expressing their desire for deeper instruction in the Reformed faith.

Jon Hoek and others with prison ministry experience began discussing the idea with professors at Mid-America Reformed Seminary. In 2009 some of these representatives began visiting Louisiana's Angola State Penitentiary to learn more



about how a program of New Orleans Baptist Seminary functions there.

The men were impressed with the Louisiana program and had high hopes for instituting a similar program at Danville. Their hopes soared when Illinois correctional officials enthusiastically supported and promoted the plan at meetings held during the spring and summer of 2010.

But by fall of that same year, it had become apparent that Mid-America's high academic standards and accreditation requirements were not feasible within a prison setting. The steering committee was discouraged. The men sought God's guidance as they reassessed the concept of instituting a theological study program at Danville Correctional Center.

“They have been actively encouraging us to deliver a program to equip men for sound doctrine in a place that has so much confusion about good theology.”

“I felt like Moses standing on the banks of the Red Sea when the waters parted,” he says. “We all came away from the meeting convinced that the MINTS curriculum was exactly what we needed.”

A comprehensive proposal, detailing the program's implementation and outlining the academic curriculum, was subsequently presented to the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC).

“On May 23 of this year we met with high level officials of the IDOC in Springfield, IL, to request permission to launch the Seminary,” Mr. Hoek says. “We received the Director of

Corrections' signature on our application by Thursday of that week.”



Don Hoekstra, Jon Hoek, and Dr. Nelson Kloosterman in front of Danville Correctional Center

Mr. Hoek relates that a conference held with Neal Hegeman from MINTS on February 3, 2011, was a turning point.

The Board of Directors that began meeting this summer consists of men with prison ministry experience from Faith URC in Beecher, IL, Oak Glen URC in Lansing, IL, Redeemer URC in Dyer, IL, and Immanuel URC in DeMotte, IN. Immanuel URC will serve as an interim facilitator of funds for Divine Hope Reformed Bible Seminary.

The Program Director being sought by the Board must have a BA degree and be a member in good standing of a NAPARC member church. He should have pastoral, chaplaincy, and biblical counseling experience. A M.Div degree or its equivalent from an accredited school of theology is preferred.

“This development in no small part has been encouraged by the Illinois Department of Corrections and the Wardens at Danville Prison,” says Mr. Hoek.

The curriculum will include programs that award a certificate, Associate of Arts degree, or Bachelor of Arts degree in theological studies. Courses are organized into five categories: Bible studies,



theological studies, ministerial studies, church history and mission studies, and humanities.

“We’re pretty excited,” says Mr. Hoek. “We have developed a relationship of trust with a vibrant community hungry for the Word. This is all about teaching systematic theology; the believers there are eating it up.”

He envisions the Reformed instruction reaching far beyond Danville’s walls.

“The IDOC hopes for virtual classrooms in every prison in the state of Illinois, linked to Danville,” he says. “This is an opportunity to spread Reformed theology and the doctrines of grace we hold so dear, to train leaders and pastors throughout the prison system of Illinois. You have to look at it from a long-term, evangelistic, strategic way of thinking. This is an opportunity to reach across cultural and ethnic barriers in a way that isn’t happening today. This is the application and fruit of our theology as Reformed Christians.”

The formation of Divine Hope Reformed Bible Seminary in Danville Correctional Center brings new meaning to Psalm 146:7, “The Lord sets the prisoners free.” May many prisoners bound by the chains of sin experience the true freedom found only in Christ!

MissionsURC.org is a project of Classis Michigan of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). MissionsURC.org has been formed for the purposes of:

- Informing church members of potential venues for short-term missions and work project opportunities
- Updating church members of the progress of missionaries and their works
- Encouraging Christ-centered and practical dialogue to encourage discipleship both within and beyond the church

The primary purpose of MissionsURC.org is to communicate information regarding missionaries, short-term missions, and work project opportunities related to the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA).

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