On May 22, 2011, twelve students crossed the stage and received their diplomas from Dr. Stan Reid, Austin Grad President. Three students received the Bachelor of Arts in Ministry and Christian Studies and three students received the Bachelor of Arts in Christian Studies. The Master of Arts in Theological Studies went to six graduates.

Dr. Mark Hamilton, professor of Old Testament and Associate Dean of the Graduate School of Theology at Abilene Christian University, delivered the commencement address. An abridged copy of the address is printed on page two of this newsletter.

Fred Strietelmeier, chairman of the Board of Trustees of Austin Graduate School of Theology, charged the graduates to use what they have learned to glorify God and serve the church. Additionally, he called them to continue to grow through diligent study. The audience promised to continue to support and encourage the graduates.

The 2011 graduates are George Gordon, Rashaanne Lewis, and Dawn Mattson (BAMCS); Erasmo Castro, Alfandre Joseph, and Philip Vick (BACS); and Eliza Bushn, Norman Horn, Kenny McDade, Vinicio Montesdeoca, David Schuler, and Walter Shaw (MATS).

The faculty and staff of Austin Grad wish these graduates all the best as they serve God and the church.
Commencement Address 2011

The following is an abridged account of Dr. Mark Hamilton’s words to the 2011 graduates. You may read the full address at http://www.austingrad.edu/news_update/volume_96/2011_graduation.pdf

It is a great honor to stand here with you at this moment of celebration and to share this time of joyful stock-taking with you. Commencement addresses are funny things. With the rare exception, they consist of two basic thoughts: “congratulations” and “go forth.” Congratulations on your years of steadfast labor, your acquisition of knowledge, your accumulated relationships and friendships, and your survival in the face of the mighty foes that beset you, namely, the faculty. By “you,” we mean not just those graduating, but families, friends, supporters, donors, and teachers who have striven together to make today possible. Congratulations! And then go forth to serve and lead and make a difference.

Perhaps you believe that we say these things to you, as a sort of final booster shot, a last lecture that will complete your inoculations from the threatening diseases of whooping cough or E-D-I-B or “easy descent into boredom.” But in truth, we say it only to express our confidence in what you are doing and will do. You already bring sight to prisoners; empower girls and boys to know that they are God’s beloved children; show us the beauty of the world in art and song and dance; form Christian leaders in Mexico and Haiti, in Ecuador and the United States, in our great cities and small towns; write meditations to feed the souls of God’s people; work for political justice and peace. May you continue, and may these pursuits be a blessing to you as well as to others.

Still, today, there is one more thing to say, the thing that allows us as Christians to go forth and to achieve. That thing is hope. Not wishful thinking or fond desires, but the confidence that despite all appearances to the contrary, good will win in the end, and sooner rather than later. We gather here today as people of hope, firm in the conviction that the last word has not been written about the human race.... The toils ahead of us will not overbear us because we hope in the One who makes all things new.

Hope is that most elusive of virtues... and it is the great experiment that is Christianity. In our time, the Christian thinker whose work is most associated with hope is the German Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann.... [In] his autobiography, A Broad Place, he talks about his experiences as a nineteen- and twenty-year old prisoner of war at the end of World War II. Sometime at the camp, a chaplain came and brought the men Bibles. “Some of us would certainly rather have had a few cigarettes,” he says. But in the course of reading the Bible he encountered the gospel of Mark and near its end the plaintive cry of Jesus, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Moltmann writes about that discovery, “I felt growing within me the conviction: this is someone who understands you completely; who is with you in your cry to God and has felt the same forsakenness you are living in now. I began to understand the assailed, forsaken Christ because I knew that he understood me.”

As Christian ministers, you leave here with many skills.... Yet the most important thing you carry with you is this discovery that Brother Moltmann also made in the prison camp. “I knew that he understood me.” Christian hope depends on the conviction that God understands the human soul and seeks to help it long purely for the things that matter. With us, God longs for justice among human beings and healing in the creation. With us, God longs for the end of wars and the forgiveness of wrongs. With us, God longs for all things to be made new. And, while our longings can often be
Commencement Address 2011 continued

frustrated, the desires of God become realities in due time, so that God’s promises are sure.

From that basic realization that God understands us, we can offer two further ideas. First, hope involves the basic practices of the Church such as baptism, the Lord’s Supper, intercessory and contemplative prayer, fasting, confession, healing, and the sharing of goods. These practices feed hope in the individual soul, or at least they can if we do not surrender them to the very hierarchies and power structures they most naturally wear away.

Second, hope offers us a powerful lens through which to gaze at the world. It allows us to see accurately, to distinguish real from fake, to identify obstacles to human flourishing. Hope provides a way to examine social structures in light of the sin they embody and the new life they might bring. No system that lacks confidence in opportunities for human redemption can long stand, and no such system deserves the support of Christian men and women.

Now, claiming to be for hope might seem like steadfastly supporting motherhood or being adamant for apple pie, a cliché, a throw-away line. But in truth, it requires courage in the face of a secular world that has assumed that humans live alone on earth and bear responsibility for its fate without reference to a God, and thus without any prospect of a transcendent reality.

Our refusal to accept the era’s “whatever” attitude and the thin tolerance that has replaced the Christian commitment to love marks us as different people. People of hope seem out of place in a world obsessed with celebrities and money-grubbing.

So today, go forth in hope. Heal the sick, comfort the afflicted, afflict the comfortable. Be men and women of courage and of good cheer. Resolve to make a difference and surround yourselves with those who wish to do likewise. Those of us who serve a living and active God, do not go forth to battle in futility with insuperable foes. We go forth, rather, to a cruciform life that finds in every tragedy the seeds of hope, in every defeat the resources for victory, and in every sorrow the distant echo of joy. You are going forth to such a life. Congratulations! Amen.

30th Sermon Seminar a Success

More than one hundred participants attended Austin Grad’s thirtyeth Sermon Seminar May 23-25, 2011. Dr. Randy Ashlock, Associate Professor at Abilene Christian University and pulpit minister for Westgate Church of Christ, spoke on the Five Scrolls (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther).

Dr. Eddie Sharp, adjunct faculty member at Austin Grad and pulpit minister at University Avenue Church of Christ, presented The Lord’s Prayer: A Paradigm for Christian Spiritual Formation and Dr. Mark Hamilton, Abilene Christian University, offered insights from Jonah.

Bob Chisholm, Small Group and Spiritual Formation minister at Prestoncrest Church of Christ in Dallas, lead a class on Spiritual Formation: A One-Year Guide for Micro-Groups and Luke 9:28-36 was the focus of Dr. Allan McNicol’s class. If you missed this outstanding seminar, you may order audio recordings of the presentations at http://www.silvertreeaustin.com/sermon-seminar-2011/

Mark your calendar for the next Sermon Seminar, May 21-23, 2012.
Michael Weed: Teacher and Scholar

During the 2011 Sermon Seminar, Dr. Allan McNicol reflected on Dr. Michael Weed’s upcoming retirement. The following is an abridged account of Dr. McNicol’s comments. To read his full presentation go to http://www.austin-grad.edu/images/Resources/McNicol/weed_tribute.pdf

I have known Michael since 1962 when we were both students at Abilene. Since that time, with the exception of the period 1967-1974, when we both were pursuing higher degrees at other places, our careers have overlapped. For well over thirty years we have worked together as colleagues at this school.

Weed as Teacher

When he came here in 1974, UT would only give credit for freshman and sophomore classes in Bible. Our students wanted and needed more training in the theological disciplines in preparation for teaching and leadership in the churches. Michael was tasked to set up a program to do this. This program was successful and it became known as the Institute for Christian Studies. Later, of course, it became Austin Graduate School of Theology.

[From the beginning, we set up the Institute to train leaders in Churches of Christ. What we didn’t count on was that considerable numbers outside our fellowship were hungry for credible, biblically based teaching in Bible, theology, and church leadership. [Our] willingness to share what we have with others outside our fellowship has been a mark of the school since the earliest days of the Institute. To this day this ecumenical focus is a feature of our school.

Given the pluralism of our student body, we have become strongly aware of our need to reaffirm, and in some areas, recover a sense of the importance of our heritage as a restorationist community. There is much to be done in reflecting on where we are going and whether we articulate a credible theological tradition. In all of this Michael has had and continues to play a central role.

Weed as Scholar

We believe that properly construed, the Stone-Campbell movement has something to say to the theological world. Through his editorship of Christian Studies, Michael has fostered a kind of ecclesiastical scholarship that seeks to show that our theological tradition has integrity.

[Speaking of Christian Studies, let me highlight two of the many themes that may be worth a fresh look at what Michael has to say. In 1982 Michael wrote an essay titled, “The Twilight of the Gods: Pluralism, Morality, and the Church.” He started off by saying that every society has a set of basic beliefs, “self-evident” truths which shape its common life and with respect to Western society, pluralism has eroded many of these traditional beliefs.

The old amalgam of a stable society: having a set of common beliefs (whether you are Catholic, Protestant or Jew), and a common stake in the culture, is rapidly eroding as well. In light of this, what is the church to do? Weed’s answer: through the proclamation

continued on page 10
Graduate Writes Book

It began simply enough as a ministry to family and friends. While a student at Austin Grad, Eliza Bushn (MATS 2011) began to write a weekly devotional which she distributed via e-mail. Over the months, as requests to receive the devotionals grew, friends suggested she publish them in book form to reach a wider audience. Other friends, who knew Eliza to be an accomplished photographer, insisted she include her photographs with the devotionals. The result is Finding God's Majesty in the Mundane: Devotionals for the Common Man.

As she notes in the preface, the credit for the book belongs to God. Eliza says, "I often find myself sitting down to write my weekly devotional and finding nothing in my thoughts. And, so, I turn pen in hand to the God who created me to create in me again. The result is this book. His creation is through me; his heart on the pages in ink and parchment, his eyes through the lens of the camera. I am just the vessel through which His living water flows. I find it interesting that when I am the most empty, He shines the brightest."

In more than sixty devotionals, Eliza shares her personal life, her meditation on God's word, and insights from her classes at Austin Grad. Taken from Central Texas to Colorado, from Wyoming to Florida, from Pennsylvania to Ireland, the photographs that accompany each devotional remind the reader of God's creation. Together, the pictures and the words call the reader to consider God's work through the ages and in his or her life.

In the pages of her book, one can see Eliza's theological journey—a journey influenced by the professors at Austin Grad. She credits them with "providing the tools to read and grasp the content of scripture. They helped me see God's creation as he does."

Eliza came to Texas for a job with Dell; years later her interaction with a panhandler* made a profound impact on her, leading her to learn more about faith and discipleship at Austin Grad. Today, she works at First Evangelical Free Church and serves in various community ministries providing a drink of cool water for those in need.

*(This story can be found on page 48 of Finding God's Majesty in the Mundane.)*

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Expand Your Horizons with a Class at Austin Grad

Many of you regularly take New Testament or Old Testament courses at Austin Grad, but Bible classes are only a part of the curriculum available to auditors. Classes in Church History and Theology offer an opportunity to explore Christian thought through the centuries. Introduction to Ministry provides a new perspective for service in the church and the community. Graduate and undergraduate courses in preaching enable you to be a more effective Bible class teacher. Classes in Greek and Hebrew will take your Bible study to a new level. And don't forget the new general education classes.

The Fall Semester begins August 24th. For a course schedule go to www.austingrad.edu and click on the admissions tab or call 512/476-2772.
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**From the president**

**What’s Next?**

On May 22, a sunny and warm Sunday afternoon in Austin, several hundred people gathered in the auditorium of the University Avenue Church of Christ. Light filtered through stained glass windows creating a pleasing aura. Christian symbols—a small and simple cross set on a ledge above the baptismary, a table, and a pulpit—were clearly visible. It was an appropriate setting for the occasion.

The congregation had never assembled before and will never assemble again. They were drawn together by one common interest—to hear the name of someone special to them announced as having earned a degree from Austin Grad.

The names of twelve men and women were called out that afternoon. One by one they stepped forward to receive their diploma. During the graduation ceremony, they had been appropriately congratulated for their academic accomplishment.

In his commencement speech, Dr. Mark Hamilton spoke a word of Christian hope and exhorted the graduates to go forward with that hope into their various callings and vocations. “Christian hope depends on the conviction that God, the creative sovereign of everything,” Dr. Hamilton said, “understands the human soul and seeks to help it long for the things that matter.”

Juxtapose that setting and its message of hope with a news magazine cover that had been on the stands two months earlier. In bright and bold red letters the headline read: *Apocalypse Now*. The subtitle gave the context: *Tsunamis. Earthquakes. Nuclear Meltdowns. Revolutions. Economies on the Brink. What is Next?*

Since then we could add to the list *Tornado Outbreaks, Massive Flooding*, and *Severe Drought* as well as other catastrophic events. All serve as reminders that we do not have as much control over our world as we often assume. Such catastrophic events cause some to ponder and think more carefully about the things that matter. What is the church to do with such big questions?

One of the greatest gifts our students receive is the opportunity to hear and see their professors demonstrate how to think about, reason over, and reflect on questions of life that perplex us and inspire us. The intellectual ability of these professors is matched by their spiritual maturity, pastoral care, and love for the church.

At Austin Grad, we do not claim to have the answer to every question. However, we do believe that Christian faith requires honest inquiry about things that matter. Unlike many of our contemporaries, we believe that the source of truth does not reside internally in each human soul. Rather, the source of truth comes to us externally through the biblical revelation of God and his intended purpose for his creation.

We believe that the Bible is the fountainhead of theological inquiry. Our professors guide our students to responsibly use the best biblical and theological tools available. The goal is that they are able to better raise and address critical questions about things that ultimately matter.

It was appropriate to hold the graduation ceremony in the University Avenue Church of Christ auditorium. It is often noted that the church building stands between the University of Texas and the Texas Capitol Building. “What starts here changes the world” is a slo-
General Education Courses Offered This Fall

In an effort to better serve present and future students, Austin Grad will offer two general education courses as part of the Fall 2011 curriculum. Zachary Alexander will teach Introduction to Philosophy on Tuesdays, from 5 PM to 8 PM. American History I will meet on Thursdays from 5 PM to 8 PM. The instructor is Robert Williams.

These general education classes, being offered under the designation ‘Alpha Classes at AGST,’ provide an alternative resource for students who are enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts program at Austin Grad. Alpha Classes offer the student a different perspective than the one presented in a state or community institution. At Austin Grad, general education courses are taught by well-qualified part-time faculty active in a community of faith and are presented from a Christian perspective.

Because Austin Grad tuition is highly affordable, these classes also provide an opportunity for qualified high school juniors and seniors to fast track their college education at a reasonable cost. High school students who plan to attend another institution may enroll in general education courses eventually including American History, Philosophy, English Composition, English Literature, and Western Civilization. The credit hours earned at Austin Grad are generally transferable to another institution. If the secondary school or home school association allows dual credit, Alpha Classes may be used to complete the requirements for high school graduation.

Jeff Peterson, faculty chairman, has this to say about the Alpha Classes, “We are excited to begin offering our BA students general-education courses taught from a Christian perspective by academically qualified and gifted teachers. We hope these courses will prove useful also to students in Austin-area high schools and others seeking to fast track their college career. For all our students, we seek to maintain the School’s longstanding practice of offering solid instruction at a tuition rate that’s a real bargain when compared with other private institutions.”

For more information about Alpha Classes and the qualifications for enrollment please contact Celeste Scarborough at 512/476-2772.

Zachary Alexander has a Masters of Divinity with an emphasis in Philosophy from Abilene Christian University. From January to June 2010 he served as guest lecturer at African Christian College in Swaziland.

Robert Williams received his undergraduate degree from Abilene Christian University with a major in History and a minor in Bible. He earned a PhD in History at Texas Tech University. Dr. Williams currently teaches American History and Texas History at Central Texas College in Killeen.

From the president continued

gan used by the University. We know how legislation at the Capitol has far reaching effects.

Do we dare hope that graduates from such a small school as Austin Grad can ever have the same impact as the other two institutions? Will they have anything to say to those who are observing the unsettling events in our world and asking, “What’s next?” We are not so bold as to claim that what happens at Austin Grad will change the world.

However, we do remember that God opened a tomb and delivered his Son from the corrupting clutches of death. We know that God delivered his Kingdom to Jesus. We remember that Jesus took a group of twelve and taught them about the things that matter.

We remember that he has given the church the task of continuing all that he began to do and teach. We believe that our graduates walked from the church building back into the world better prepared to demonstrate Christian hope in their lives and respond with critical reflection about the events that cause unease and prompted the cynical question on the magazine cover asking, “What’s next?”

—Stan Reid, President
Dr. and Mrs. Malherbe
Visit Austin Grad

In May, Dr. Abraham Malherbe and his wife, Phyllis, were luncheon guests at Austin Grad. Dr. Malherbe is Professor Emeritus of New Testament Criticism and Interpretation at Yale University. The Malherbes stopped by Austin on their way to Abilene where Dr. Malherbe spoke to the Friends of the Library at Abilene Christian University. With the aid of O.J. Weber and others, Dr. Malherbe founded the Friends of the Library while he was an associate professor at ACU.

Over the years, Dr. Malherbe taught several Austin Grad faculty members. In addition, he is the author of several books and was instrumental in starting the Living Word Commentary series and Restoration Quarterly. Today, Dr. and Mrs. Malherbe reside in Hamden, Connecticut.

Michael Weed: Teacher and Scholar continued

of the gospel the church must be the place where the divine vision is presented and lived in such a way that it is able to furnish a total cohesive view of reality for the people of God.

I would also draw your attention to Weed’s latest essay, in Christian Studies 24, titled “American Fundamentalists: The Left Behind.” This is part of a wider project where he is wrestling with our failure in Churches of Christ to take seriously the importance of sanctification for the Christian life. In such projects as these Weed invests considerable energy in thinking about the church. This is why he has shown himself to be such a valuable colleague.

For close to four decades Michael Weed has worked in this small school in Austin alerting people to worrisome trends in the wider culture that are having a deep impact on the church. From time to time, as faculty chair, I would see the assessments of students of Dr. Weed’s work in the classroom. I remember well the comment of one student. “Dr. Weed is so extremely careful to make sure that you understand a particular author or doctrine and not represent it falsely.” [This] sums up much of what Michael is about. For better or worse Michael has chosen the role of carefully speaking truth to power. We salute him for a job well done.

--Allan McNicol
Visionary Philanthropy
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It has often been said that giving cash is the most common way that people support their favorite charities. This is true because of the simplicity of the transaction. You simply write a check and the full amount qualifies for a charitable deduction if you itemize your taxes.

The second most common method, closely behind the giving of cash, is the donation of appreciated securities. It’s almost as simple and offers the same level of charitable deduction plus a bit more.

For example, let’s say that Mr. A. gives Austin Grad a gift of 100 shares of stock. Mr. A paid $50 per share for the stock more than one year ago. When he donated it to Austin Grad, the stock had doubled in value and was worth $100 per share. Mr. A’s gift to Austin Grad was worth $10,000.

Like a gift of cash, Mr. A’s gift of stock may be deducted at its full fair market value of $10,000. In addition, Mr. A avoids the 15% capital gains tax ($750) he would have paid on the $5,000 gain had he sold the stock and given the proceeds to Austin Grad.

Assuming that Mr. A is in the 35% tax bracket, his $10,000 gift to Austin Grad only costs him $6,500 after his $3,500 federal tax savings. By choosing to donate the stock directly to Austin Grad rather than selling it and donating the proceeds, Mr. A also avoids a $750 capital gains tax. Austin Grad receives the full value of the stock ($10,000).

In making a gift of appreciated stock make sure to:

- Instruct your broker to transfer the stock into the name of Austin Grad prior to selling it. Any stock sold by the donor will become taxable.
- Notify Austin Grad of your intent to donate stock so we might assist your broker in properly transferring it.
- Tell us if you wish to use the stock to fund a Life Income gift such as a Charitable Gift Annuity or a Charitable Remainder Trust.
- Tell us if your gift is unrestricted or is intended to fund a special program at Austin Grad such as a scholarship fund.

For more information about donating appreciated stock, contact Neil Haney in the Austin Grad Development Office at 512-476-2771, extension 117. We will gladly send you our complimentary booklet, Ways to Give.

This information is not intended to be legal, tax or financial advice. It is always wise to consult your attorney, CPA or other financial advisors prior to making any financial decisions.
Sign Up for Austin Grad’s Electronic Newsletter

President Reid has this to say about our electronic newsletter, "Although our school will continue to publish a semi-annual newsletter via traditional print, the move into electronic communication provides new opportunities for us to expand our mission.... The main focus of our work will continue to be the personal interaction between our professors and students in the classroom. However, the advent of this electronic newsletter enables us to keep our friends and partners apprised of the exciting things happening at Austin Grad. It will also provide more opportunities for the work of our professors to equip Christians and students for service in the Kingdom of God."

If you are not currently receiving our electronic newsletter, you may subscribe by sending your e-mail address to rkennell@austingrad.edu