

July 30, 2019

## Dr. Craig Sheppard Appointed as Executive Director of Center for Reformed Theology



The Board of Trustees of Reformed Theological Seminary is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Craig Sheppard as the Executive Director of the Center for Reformed Theology (CRT) in Indonesia.

RTS' connections to Indonesia started in the 1970s and '80s, when Indonesian students started attending RTS. After graduation, these alumni established churches and seminaries in their home country. Over the years, many RTS professors have traveled to Indonesia as guest lecturers and preachers.

In 2009, Chancellor Emeritus Ric Cannada taught for a week at a seminary co-founded by Dr. Jacob Susabda, an RTS alumnus, and Dr. Stephen Tong. Dr. Susabda serves as the president, while other RTS alumni hold roles such as academic dean and professors.

Dr. Cannada asked his hosts if he could meet James Riady, a prominent Indonesian business leader and Christian. "Yes," the seminary leaders told him. "He's one of our students." Dr. Cannada had first heard of Riady in Little Rock, Arkansas in the 1970s, when the Riady family had partnered with Stephens Inc. to increase their banking presence in America, starting with a bank in Arkansas.

After their first meeting, Riady reached out to Dr. Cannada for help. Riady is the founder of Pelitan Harapan Educational Foundation (YPPH), a foundation that develops and supports Christian schools, universities, and hospitals throughout Indonesia. Riady wanted to move YPPH's theology in a Reformed direction.

After Dr. Cannada stepped down as Chancellor of RTS, his involvement increased, eventually helping to start a new Reformed denomination in Indonesia, (Presbyterian Reformed Evangelical Church of Indonesia). "It's not just a story about RTS," Dr. Cannada reflects as he shares about RTS' many connections to Indonesia. "It's a story about how God is at work even when we don't recognize it at the time."

Riady also asked Dr. Cannada how he could protect YPPH from "mission drift." Since all students in YPPH's many schools must take bible and theology courses, Riady wanted to ensure that their courses continued to be in line with Reformed theology. In 2018, after Dr. J. Ligon Duncan, III, and other members of the Board of Trustees, visited Indonesia, they entered into a memorandum of understanding with YPPH, establishing the Center for Reformed Theology (CRT).

The CRT exists to steward the spiritual and theological content and culture of the YPPH's many education centers throughout the country. Although this is a new direction for RTS, since the CRT is not a traditional campus, RTS's mission to serve the church through the education of its leaders will still be fulfilled in Indonesia.

When the CRT was established, there was no official director, even with Dr. Cannada continuing in his role as advisor. RTS started looking for the right fit and found Craig Sheppard, a pastor and missionary with decades of experience.

"Craig is the best guy for the job," said Dr. Cannada. "His experience as a missionary, both on the field and in administration, as well as his education and pastoral work, give him a background that will enable him to lead the CRT well."

In the '90s, Dr. Sheppard and his wife, Lisa, were the first missionaries for Mission to the World (MTW) in Bulgaria, where he eventually served as the director for all of MTW's operations in Eastern Europe. In Bulgaria, he spearheaded works in theological education, church planting, translation and publishing, mercy ministry, and education for missionaries' children. Since returning to the states, he has pastored churches in Texas and North Carolina. He has also regularly taught classes at various RTS campuses and has continued teaching in Bulgaria.

"The current spread of the gospel and growth of the church in Southeast Asia (and in Indonesia in particular) is unprecedented," commented Dr. Sheppard. "RTS has been

given the opportunity and responsibility to help provide a biblical and theological anchor at this strategic time in history. My wife and I feel blessed to be a part of this great movement of the Lord."

In his role as Executive Director for the CRT, he will teach, consult, hire additional employees, interview potential teachers to ensure their theological soundness, as well as serve as the interim pastor at the campus church and preach at chapel services. Dr. Sheppard and Lisa have five grown children.