

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church Ballymena, NI

5 January, 2023

Dear saints in the
Protestant Reformed Churches,

At the start of this new year, we thought it would be good to update you on the Lord's work in our midst, and to thank you for your prayers and support. We appreciate the cards and e-mails that some of you have sent us, though we are not able to respond to all of them. We trust that this letter to all will also serve as a satisfactory reply to those who have contacted us.

Members

Since our last letter, two covenant children have been baptized in the CPRC: Elsie (9 October), a daughter of David and Kristin Crossett, and Jude (11 December), a son of Joe and Lisa McCaughern. Elsie's grandparents, Bob and Carolyn Prins, and her uncle Andrew from Trinity PRC in W. Michigan were present, as were many of Jude's relatives, on these respective blessed occasions.

Billy and Val McCaughern, Jude's grandparents, were received as members on 25 December, when they were able to join the rest of the confessing congregation at the Lord's table. Billy had been an elder in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. It is lovely to have them with us.

Some of the saints pointed out that there had been times when the volume of the audio of the Sunday services pumped into the cry room was too low. A technician fitted an amplifier control button in the room in time for the worship services on 16 October, so now those with small children in the cry room can hear well.

On 19 October, Timothy Spence left for Australia, stopping off for a few days in Singapore to enjoy fellowship and worship with the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, our sister church. Tim is working as a doctor in Australia for a year or so and has settled in well with the saints in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Launceston, Tasmania, pastored by Rev. Mark Shand.

This year, there are 26 children in five catechism or pre-confession classes. The mid-year tests took place last week (18 December) and the kids did well. Last Friday, we held a games night at church, which was well attended by both adults and children (30 December).

Teaching

In the late summer, we completed an 11-sermon series on Psalm 69, entitled, "The Most Avoided Messianic Psalm." Psalm 69 is appealed to thrice in the Gospel According to John (2:17; 15:25; 19:28-30), twice in Paul's Epistle to the Romans (11:9-10; 15:3) and once in Luke's Acts of the Apostles (1:20) regarding Christ's ministry and cross, and those who betrayed and reproached Him. Why then does most of the church world avoid this inspired messianic song? Because it includes imprecations, teaches particular atonement, and opposes both a desire of God to save the reprobate and a universal or common grace. Moreover, Psalm 69 clearly records the sovereign will and prevailing prayers of our Lord Jesus Himself, especially from the cross (www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2Y5Eq5r6y2EbmQYH8fHr1kU0khongBB6)!

“Faith or Works” is the title of the series of 10 sermons on Galatians 3. Over against all Judaizing, Galatians 3 contains powerful teaching on justification in Christ (13), the Seed of Abraham (16), and by faith alone without works (1-14). It explains more clearly than any where else in Scripture the relationships between the Abrahamic covenant promise, the Mosaic law and the New Testament faith (15-29).

Our Tuesday morning classes on “Saving Faith: A Biblical and Theological Analysis” have been progressing well. In the last few months, we considered faith in connection with, first, authority and, second, reason. Many err by placing the authority for their faith in the wrong place: the Roman magisterium, science, a charismatic minister, political correctness, fallible tradition, one’s own intellect, etc. (cf. I Cor. 2:5). We looked at Scripture’s teaching on natural revelation, natural theology, natural religion and natural law, and contrasted this with Thomas Aquinas and Roman Catholicism, before turning to John Calvin’s biblical theology regarding the *sensus divinitatis* and the *semen religionis*, namely, the ineradicable sense of divinity and seed of religion in every human being, as well as man’s conscience as an essential part of his humanity under God—things that the spirit of our age is trying desperately to stamp out!

The *Ballymena Times* on-line version carried a short article I sent in regarding our Wednesday night “Classes on the End Times” (16 September). In our seven classes on “The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9,” we presented and critiqued Dispensationalism’s literalist view of Daniel 9:24-27, considering the first 7 weeks, the middle 62 weeks, and the 70th week. Then we explained the correct and historic teaching of this powerful passage in terms of seven key words, all of which begin with the third letter of the alphabet: Christ, cross, covenant, chronology,

coming, counsel and comfort in Daniel 9:24-27.

Then we had six classes on “The Signs of Christ’s Return,” considering them collectively or as a group. We introduced, identified, and classified the eschatological signs spoken of in Scripture, before turning to their idea and characteristics, as well as people’s responses to them. We also looked at the Old Testament and the signs of Christ’s second coming, and we compared and contrasted them with the signs of the end of the world in Judaism and Islam (www.cprc.co.uk/belgic-confession-class).

Prof. Engelsma’s two volumes on *The Church’s Hope* were published at a good time for these classes on the last things and many attendees have bought them. Stephen Murray, our audio-visual man, has produced box sets of the two sermon series (on Psalm 69 and Galatians 3) and the two topics in eschatology (“The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9” and “The Signs of Christ’s Return”). All the Lord’s day sermons and the Wednesday night doctrine classes are recorded and placed on our website (www.cprc.co.uk), but not our more informal Tuesday morning meetings.

Others

In the 153 days since our last letter (5 August), we have added 125 translations in 11 languages (www.cprc.co.uk/languages). All of *The Reformed Worldview* book by Profs. Hanko and Engelsma is now on-line in both Polish and Russian. Through the fine work of Lilian from Kenya, our new translator into Swahili, the major African language in eastern parts of that vast continent, we now have 37 articles in her native tongue. Of the 207 languages on our website, Spanish is the one that receives most hits. In the last year or so, the *Covenant Reformed News* has gotten a lot of translations. Now for every English article in the *News*, we average more than two translations.



Lilian and her daughter

Here are the translations that Mary has put on our website in the last 5 months or so: 35 Polish, 23 Russian, 22 Hungarian, 21 Swahili, 12 Spanish, 5 Afrikaans, 2 Chinese (by a new translator in Malaysia), 2 Telugu (*Apostles' Creed* and *Heidelberg Catechism*), 1 Tagalog, 1 Italian, and 1 Arabic (*Canons of Dordt*).

Late in the summer, Mary and I visited places in and around the historic border between England and Wales (22-26 August). We had two major purposes: first, to meet friends and give a lecture in South Wales on “The Two Ages in Eschatology” (25 August), and, second, to check out possible venues for BRF conferences and places suitable for the day trips that would occur during such conferences. We visited three possible conference sites, and spoke with managers and staff. We toured abbeys, aqueducts, battlefields, bridges, canals, museums, Roman remains, interesting towns, etc., so as to make recommendations for the BRF Council.

In our last letter, we mentioned the subject and speakers that were chosen for the next BRF conference by the attendees at July’s BRF conference in Northern Ireland. Now we can also announce the BRF Council’s decision regarding the venue and dates. The BRF has booked Cloverley Hall in Shropshire, England, near the border with Wales (www.cloverleyhall.org) for a week (3-10 August) in the summer of 2024. We are looking forward to Prof. Brian Huizinga and Rev. Ronald Hanko unfolding to us wonderful truths in the area of eschatology concerning the glorious return of our Saviour! The conference is now less than 19 months away.



Cloverley Hall

May the Lord preserve and bless you in this coming year, as we look “unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

In Him,

Rev. & Mary Stewart