

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church Ballymena, NI

14 July, 2023

Dear saints in the
Protestant Reformed Churches,

Singapore and Malaysia

In January, Mary and I were invited to the June Camp of our mutual sister church, the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church (CERC) of Singapore. I was asked to unfold the CERC's 2023 and 2024 theme text, Nehemiah 2:17-18, in four lectures.

Ministers, like everyone else, have parts of Scripture with which they are less familiar. The book of Nehemiah was one of mine. So I ordered several works or commentaries on Nehemiah, and I have grown more and more impressed with this inspired book. On 23 April, I began preaching on Nehemiah for the edification of the saints in the CPRC in Northern Ireland and in preparation for the CERC's Camp in peninsular Malaysia to the north of Singapore.

Working especially with Nehemiah 1-6, I developed the Camp's theme "Come, Let Us Build the Walls!" in four speeches: 1) "The Idea of the Church's Walls," 2) "Building the Walls Together," 3) "Opposition From Without" and 4) "Opposition From Within." With the lectures prepared, and group discussion questions and diagrams/maps of Jerusalem's landmarks and the work teams on its walls emailed to Singapore for inclusion in the Camp booklet, Mary and I flew east via Doha in Qatar, arriving in Changi Airport on the morning of Friday, 16 June.

Our approximately 10 days in SE Asia were divided fairly equally between Singapore and Malaysia. Meng Hsien and Serene were our main guides, with Yoon Chuan and Jee Fung ably deputising. It was wonderful to renew fellowship with saints in the CERC after our fairly brief visit in 2014 and to get to know other believers in our sister church—over meals, during tours, in homes, dropping in at the youth camp, at the Lord's day meetings, and at Pulau Springs, the resort in Malaysia where the Camp

was held (19-22 June). Singaporean sights, Chinese culture, and even Portuguese, Dutch, and British history in Malacca, are best enjoyed in the company of the Lord's people!



Two members of the PRC were present: Ed Bos from Lacombe in Canada and Rachel Buitter from Redlands in California. Tim Spence of the CPRC in Northern Ireland joined us from Australia, where he is currently working as a doctor and worshipping with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC). A friend with whom I have corresponded for several years and our Chinese translator, Hwee Tiong Tan of Kuala Lumpur, attended the four speeches at the Camp, with his wife, Constance. I also met Jeffrey Setiawan, with whom I have had contact through Facebook, when he attended the services on our second Sunday with the CERC accompanied by brother Marcus.

Along with four speeches during the Camp and four Sunday sermons (18 and 25 June), I gave a presentation, with a couple of slides, on our church in Northern Ireland during the afternoon of our first Lord's day with the CERC. All too soon, however, our time in Singapore came to an end and we flew west very early on Monday, 26 June.

Cheryl Lim of the CERC is to move to the Ballymena area in September and stay in Northern Ireland for a year while she attends some university lectures in England. It will be great to have her with us. Others from our sis-

ter church in Singapore hope to visit us in the future, including at the next British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) conference at Cloverley Hall in England, where Prof. Brian Huizinga and Rev. Ronald Hanko will treat the grand subject of biblical eschatology (3-10 August, 2024).

Rev. Jim Laning and Activities

Rev. James and Margaret Laning kindly agreed to come to Northern Ireland (13-26 June), while Mary and I were in SE Asia. Since this was their first time in our country, it was especially good that we had a couple of days with the Lanings at our house to help them settle in before we left.



We visited some of the sights together, like the Giant's Causeway, ate out at restaurants, and talked about mission work—something especially relevant since Rev. Laning is the new Protestant Reformed home missionary. It was lovely to spend time with the Lanings.

The *Ballymena Guardian* carried an article I sent them, “Former US Flight Officer to Preach in Covenant Church” (15 June), along with a photo of Rev. Laning standing behind a pulpit. The four fine sermons on Acts and I Thessalonians that he preached in the CPRC are on-line in audio and video (www.cprc.co.uk/visiting-preachers). After the evening service on their last Lord's day in our congregation, the ladies laid on tea and sandwiches, etc., as a farewell to the Lanings (25 June).

Besides the visit of the Lanings, we have had the benefit of communion with members from various Protestant Reformed churches in the last three months: Keith and Cheryl van Drunen (Crete), Bonnie Meelker (Hope, Redlands), Pete and Marilyn Adams (First, Grand Rapids), and Bob, Carolyn, and Briana Prins (Trinity). Other visitors from the U.S. include Brian and Kathy Gesch from Wisconsin, and Creighton and Carol Baldwin from North Carolina.

Six Reformed Hungarians stayed with us at the manse for a week (17-24 April). Pastor János and his wife, Alexandra, and Bálint and Kati with their young children Illangó and Daniel were excellent Christian company. They joined us for our Sunday services, church Bible studies, family devotions, etc. One windy day, we accompanied them on a trip to County Down for some beautiful mountain, lake, and coastal hikes.



On Easter Monday (10 April), some in the church, especially among the younger families, enjoyed a picnic at Glenariff Forest Park followed by a beautiful waterfall walk. Gerard and Claire Smith from Dublin, along with their baby Jacob, joined us. We have gotten to know Ger in the last several months and this was the first time his family has been able to stay in the Ballymena area for a long weekend in order to be with us.

On Friday 26 May, we held a congregational barbecue at the manse. The weather and fel-

lowship were warm, and we had a good game of football too.

In April, our five Monday night catechism classes ended with tests and our Wednesday night *Belgic Confession* class on the end times finished for the season after our fifth meeting on global preaching as a sign of our Saviour's return (www.cprc.co.uk/belgic-confession-class). This freed up time for family visitation, which started on 1 May, with Ephesians 4 as our Scripture passage.

Our Tuesday morning Bible studies continue through the summer. We critiqued the Roman Catholic view of the relationship between faith and love, including unformed and formed faith, preparation for justification, etc., and interacting with key sections in the deceitful counter-Reformation *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent (1545-1563)*. Currently, we are looking at the view of faith in Pentecostalism, Charismaticism, and the Third Wave, especially in connection with the Renewalist view of the "baptism with the Holy Spirit."

Websites and Translations

Stephen Murray uploaded both the four meetings and the four speeches of the Malaysian Camp on "Come, Let Us Build the Walls!" to the CPRC YouTube page (www.youtube.com/user/CPRCNI). Our thanks also go to Jotham Chin and others in the CERC for making and passing on to us their video and audio recordings.

Now over 6,000 people have signed up for push notifications on the main CPRC website (www.cprc.co.uk). This means that a short message appears as a pop-up on their computers, smart phones, or devices whenever Mary creates a new webpage, which results in more people accessing our articles, audios, and videos, and being edified thereby.

With the addition of "Angels and Demons," "Particular Atonement," and "Union with Christ," we have 40 on-line "Topical Resources" pages ([www.cprc.co.uk/topical-](http://www.cprc.co.uk/topical-resources)

[resources](#)). These helpful webpages draw together articles, audios, books, *Covenant Reformed News* pieces, pamphlets, quotes, videos, etc., from our website, as well as off-site materials, that deal with a particular subject.

After many years and numerous requests, we have finally created a webpage on the history of the CPRC (www.cprc.co.uk/history-of-the-cprc). It contains articles, audios, charts, conferences, lectures, letters, photos, programmes, reports, sermons, speeches, videos, etc., on various aspects of the history of our congregation. Now any PR student doing a school project on our church knows where to start!

Mary has added 61 translations to our website in the 3½ months since our last letter on 31 March (www.cprc.co.uk/languages). Most of these are in European languages: 24 Polish, 11 Spanish, 9 Hungarian, 5 Russian, and 2 Italian. A new translator, Reynardt from South Africa, sent us 5 pieces in Afrikaans. Lilian in Kenya translated 2 more articles into Swahili. Fiaz in Pakistan emailed us his first Urdu translation. A pastor from Nebraska forwarded us attachments containing the *Heidelberg Catechism* in Japanese. Rev. Vernon Ibe in the Philippines graciously sent us his Tagalog translation of Herman Hoeksema's "Essentials of Reformed Doctrine." Our thousands of translated pages probably receive more hits than our English materials!

May the Lord bless and keep you,

Yours in Christ Jesus,
Rev. and Mary Stewart