

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church Ballymena, NI

31 December 2024

Dear saints in the
Protestant Reformed Churches,

Each year seems to be busier than the last and it gets harder to make time to update you on things in your sister congregation, the CPRC in Northern Ireland. With the holidays, however, I have been able to catch up on several things and so, on this last day of 2024, I will provide a summary of some of the highlights in the last year.

BRF Conference

The 2024 British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Family Conference was held at Cloverley Hall, Shropshire in England (3-10 August). Prof. Brian Huizinga and Rev. Ron Hanko ably developed our theme, “Then Comes the End: The Reformed Doctrine of Eschatology,” in their six main addresses and two Lord’s day sermons, as well as in a group discussion of the mark of the beast (Rev. 13:16-18). The speeches will be published in upcoming issues of the *British Reformed Journal*, DV.



Including the eight visitors who joined us for two or three or four days, there were 130 in attendance, with saints from the US, Northern Ireland, Canada, Wales, England, Singapore,

the Republic of Ireland, Malaysia, Norway, Australia, and Brazil. Besides the Word of God brought by our two American speakers, the conferees learned some history involving the Venerable Bede (and his commentary on Revelation), a medieval walking tour in Chester (and a broken bow!), the Industrial Revolution (which started in Shropshire), and a Victorian village (with its wares). Swimming, falconry, tennis, etc., and (above all) good fellowship were enjoyed at our charming home for the week.

Prof. Brian Huizinga and Rev. Ron Hanko also preached for the CPRC on three Sundays around the time of the BRF conference (28 July and 11 and 18 August). A number of saints who were in the British Isles for the conference also joined us for these Lord’s day services—a great blessing for our congregation.

Stephen Murray set up a new BRF YouTube channel and Sven Kuhs uploaded to it the videos from the 2024 conference (recorded by Ger Smith) plus all the videos that we had from the previous BRF conferences (www.youtube.com/@BritishReformedFellowship). The audios from these conferences are on the main BRF website, thanks to Manuel Kuhs (www.britishreformed.org).

Several kind souls brought with them to the BRF conference copies of our new book *Union with Christ* by Profs. Engelsma and Huizinga (184 pp., softback), consisting of the nine addresses at the 2022 BRF conference. The 3,100 books that were printed have been distributed to churches and evangelism committees in America, Canada, Northern Ireland, the Philippines, and Singapore. The CPRC has sold a good number of our copies, and the whole book

is available on-line in Polish translation and part of it in Portuguese (www.cprc.co.uk/product/union-with-christ).

Greece and Turkey Tour

Mary and I joined 30 saints from various Protestant Reformed congregations in Michigan, Iowa, Colorado, and California on a tour of biblical sites in Greece and western Turkey (11-25 October). Mary's parents wanted us to go there with them on a tour some years ago but then it was not possible for us. This time, three of Dad and Mom's daughters—Carrie Dykstra (who organized it), Jan Westra, and Mary—were able to make it, with their spouses.



In Greece, we saw places especially connected with Paul's second missionary journey: Neapolis, Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica, Athens, and Corinth (Acts 16-18). Other attractions were King Philip of Macedon's impressive tomb in Vergina, the beautiful rock formations around Meteora, Delphi (where was the famous pagan oracle), and the Corinthian Canal (opened in 1893). In Turkey, we travelled to the ancient cities of the famous seven churches to which the apostle John wrote in Revelation 1-3, as well as Hierapolis (Col. 4:13). The largely unexcavated ruins of Colossae were also nearby.

Given the available flights from the British Isles, Mary and I arrived in Greece earlier than

the rest of our group. We toured some of the Greek coastline and had a delightful hike among the foothills of Mount Olympus, seeing nary a trace of Zeus or Hera or even a nymph, before meeting our party at Thessaloniki airport, after their long flight from Chicago via Istanbul.

It was a great trip with wonderful people. Using her smart phone, Mary recorded the audio of the informal scriptural presentations that I gave at appropriate points during our tour. So far, she has uploaded to YouTube several videos containing these audios, along with photos, maps, Bible texts, etc., on this playlist: "Tour of Biblical Sites in Greece and Turkey" (www.youtube.com/user/CPRCNI). There are more to come!

While we were away, Rev. Bill and Mary Bruinsma stayed at the CPRC manse. Our brother preached at our Lord's day services on 13, 20, and 27 October, led two Bible studies on biblical anthropology, and visited with a fair number of people in the congregation. Given his role with the Reformed Witness Hour, the *Ballymena Guardian* carried an article "American Radio Pastor Preaching in Ballymena" (10 October). Mary and I had a very enjoyable couple of days with the Bruinsmas after we returned from Turkey.

Through the Months

Our annual church visitors in 2024 were Prof. Barry Gritters (with Lori, his wife) and Elder Sid Meidema (5-15 January). As well as preaching for the CPRC on two Lord's days, Prof. Gritters led a fine Bible study on forgiveness and gave a great lecture on "The Ongoing Battle for the Sabbath" (10 January). It was lovely to spend time with them, especially on the bright clear day we spent in and around the Mourne Mountains.

One of our longest-serving and oldest members, Mrs. Mabel Callender (91), went to

be with the Lord in glory on 29 February (Ps. 116:15). Her husband Desmond, who predeceased her, was one of our precentors and first elders, when our church was first organized in 1996.

On 5 April, I gave an interview with Chris Arnzen on Iron Sharpens Iron Radio dealing with “The Abomination of Desolation” in Daniel 8, 9, and 11, and Matthew 24:15. It touched upon the various millennial views, apostasy, etc., as well as other Scriptures, such as II Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 13. The audio is on-line (www.cprc.co.uk/sermons/the-abomination-of-desolation).

With the help of Richard Robinson, an expert in this area, and after many monthly Council meetings, we produced several safeguarding policies. These were e-mailed to the congregation in August.

This year saw two sisters in the Lord who were a great blessing in our midst return to their native lands. Charlotte Higgs of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, who stayed in Northern Ireland for over two years, headed “down under” in August. Cheryl Lim of the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, who was here for less than a year for postgraduate studies, departed for Singapore in September.

September also saw the election and installation of a third CPRC elder, David Crossett (who serves with Ivan Reid and Brian Crossett), and a new deacon, Joe McCaughern (who serves with Julian Kennedy). This is the first time that we have had three elders since the 1990s.



On 6 December, a pallet containing 33 boxes of RFPA books and other Protestant Reformed literature, etc., arrived at our doorstep from Jenison, Michigan. We extend our hearty thanks to Dwight Quenga for arranging the transportation, Vicki Zolen for packing the materials, and various evangelism committees for supplying us with free pamphlets. The CPRC Bookstore is well-stocked for the days ahead!

Besides the saints who have already been mentioned, other visitors in 2024 included Hui Yi Koh from Singapore (May and October), Bob and Carolyn Prins (June) and Alicia Prins (September) from Michigan, Jordan and Chandra Kamps from Colorado (September), Daniel Carlton from England (October), Megan Higgs from Australia (October), and Hannah Mathilda from the Netherlands (December).

Others

The CPRC sermon series this past year were “Jesus Heals a Paralytic (the Son’s Works and Witnesses)” (John 5), “Phinehas, Israel’s Third High Priest,” “God’s Son—So Much Better Than the Angels” (Heb. 1-2), and “Church Divisions and Christian Ministers” (I Cor. 3). In 2024, our Tuesday morning classes dealt with the idea of faith in Pentecostalism, Charismaticism, and the Word of Faith, before turning to the sources of Paul’s gospel and doctrine. Over this same period, our Wednesday night classes on *Belgic Confession 37* have

covered “The Sign of Apostasy,” “The Great Tribulation,” and “The Antichrist” (www.cprc.co.uk/belgic-confession-class). There are great riches and variety in God’s Word!

Using only the intelligence of human beings, over several years we have added to the CPRC YouTube channel 39 videos in several languages. With the help of Ger Smith from Dublin, our adviser in such matters, in the last nine months we have started using artificial intelligence (AI) to translate scores of our videos into various languages. Now we have 134 videos in French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish in a handy playlist (“Translated Debates, Speeches, Sermons, Books, Articles, etc.”) on the CPRC YouTube channel. This helps us to reach new people around the world.

Besides videos, our written translations are going well with the help of dear friends from around the world. These are the six languages (in order) in which we have seen most growth in the last year: Spanish, Polish, Hungarian, Portuguese, Russian, and French (www.cprc.co.uk/languages). The three saints who have most recently started translating for us are Ian from the Philippines (in Cebuano), Vlada from Belarus (in Russian), and Jimmy from India (in Hindi, the fourth most-spoken first language in the world).

For the first time since the 1990s, there will be (five) teenagers from the CPRC going to the Protestant Reformed Young People’s Convention. They are eagerly looking forward to it. Lord willing, Mary and I will be travelling with most of them on our trans-Atlantic flights in August 2025.

We hereby express our thanks to all who sent us cards and messages. I hope that this letter will also serve in lieu of a personal response.

In Jesus Christ, we confess corporately and individually, “It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him” (Lam. 3:22-25). May the God of the covenant be with you all in 2025!

Rev & Mary Stewart