



*Eastern Home  
Missions*

# *Newsletter*

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## **Development in our Fellowship**

I know it has been several months since I have written a newsletter. I wrote a *Standard Bearer* article on some of the progress in our work in the Pittsburgh area at large, but that article did not fill you in on what is happening in the Fellowship. As a result you have heard very little from me as of late.

I know I err when I begin to think that you are interested only in something new and exciting. Yet, that is exactly what has held me back from writing sooner. I want to be able to report each time that something new is going on. I reason to myself that only the new and the exceptional will keep people excited with our domestic mission work. The truth is, labors in the Fellowship here in Pittsburgh have been routine. I teach catechism each week. I lead Bible studies on Wednesday nights and Saturday mornings. I preach two times every Sunday. I do my normal pastoral work with our members. Sounds like the typical labors of a pastor in one of our congregations, right? They are! These, for the most part, have been my labors in the past several months.

What about membership? We have stayed about the same. Some join us for a little while, grow discontent, and for various reasons leave again. Some have trouble with our views on labor unions or on divorce and remarriage. Some have

difficulty with our practice of close communion. Others, after a time, find they disagree with our positions on the regulative principle of worship, the covenant and infant baptism, or Sabbath observance. If we had compromised on these positions over the past years our Fellowship would be more than twice the size and perhaps be organized already. But that is not the case.

At the same time we have a small, but very committed, group of families and individuals who labor together zealously in the cause of the gospel. Our Fellowship has three young families with small children. Two of these families are expecting this coming year. There are several middle-aged families with teenage and older children. There are also a few “empty-nesters” who enjoy being a part of the work of the Fellowship along with the younger. There are a few single young men and women who add a wonderful dimension to the life and work of the mission here. If you had visited our Fellowship two years ago and would now return, you would see some new faces.

I rarely leave the church after worship services before an hour or more goes by. Everyone loves to sit and visit with each other. The ladies of the Fellowship, young and old(er), have found a mutual interest—quilting. They are getting together now on a regular basis to quilt together in the church basement.

Has the Fellowship grown larger numerically? No. Is there growth and development? Yes! Are we happy with the number of people that we have? We are content—and we patiently wait on the will of our heavenly Father for others to be added to our number. Is it discouraging? At times, yes, it is. We (all of us) have our moments of frustration. Do I personally want to quit? Far from it! I still rejoice in the labors God has given me as a domestic missionary. But I am finding out that in these last days fulfilling the calling to be a witness to those who in their generations have departed from the truth is difficult work. We need the fervent prayers of God’s people!

## **Development in the work in Pittsburgh at large**

In the past couple of years, given the circumstances on the field where I labor, I have been struggling as a home missionary with what exactly

my labors are. I realize that sounds puzzling. I mean, is it not obvious what my labors are? Well, yes and no. I know I am called to plant a church here through the preaching and instruction in the Word of God. This requires gathering people from the outside into the mission, while at the same time nurturing those in the mission in order that the group can grow from within too. That work in itself keeps me busy.

But for a time it seemed as if I was doing nothing more than the work of a pastor in a congregation. Think of it. I am performing all the same routine labors of a pastor. I focus most of my attention on shepherding the little flock I have been given. Like other pastors, I also push the need for evangelism on the members here in order to draw others in. What really, then, is the difference between me and another pastor in one of our congregations, other than I must be, perhaps, a bit more innovative and aggressive in finding ways to draw others into the mission? Concentrated labor only in the mission and the neighborhood around it is too narrow, too focused. Forest Hills is but a small borough in a huge metropolitan area. Ought not our work be much broader?

It was that struggle that gave rise to the idea that we should try to create a work in another area of Pittsburgh while still working here in our Fellowship. This prompted our Fellowship (and me personally) to begin a work in Cranberry Township.

A work in a new area is not as easy as one might think. The challenge is how to start a labor where there is nothing in the way of contacts. We sent out a mailer to everyone in Cranberry Township, about 7000 addresses, advertising a community class on Old Testament history. To this mailer twenty-five people originally responded. Five more responded after the class had already started. We have now met seven times and are up to Abraham in our studies. I am using a PowerPoint presentation with the class, including pictures, maps, charts, and illustrations. I must say, this class has been both exciting and challenging. It includes people of various backgrounds.

Just because these people attend the class, however, does not mean they are people with whom we can begin the work of a church plant. Most of

them attend simply because they want to learn the history of the Old Testament. Most of them do not seem to have much of a problem hearing this history from a Reformed viewpoint. But they attend for no other reason. There are also those who for one reason or another have dropped out of the class too. We are down to about 15 people in attendance, some of whom are very interested in what we teach. This is encouraging. I asked those attending from the Cranberry area if they want to recess for the summer months or keep on going. Without exception they wanted to keep the class going. It will be a busy summer!

Right now I have not been pursuing any other avenue of gaining contacts. To be sure, this class has been a real boon in our early work in Cranberry, but the work cannot proceed simply by holding a community Bible class. Other activities must be scheduled too. We are considering a short seminar on a particular subject or a public lecture. There are also other ways and means to “get our name” out into the community. So far the only advertising we have done is by way of the mailers, radio, and a community bulletin board on the Internet. We hope to be trying a few other ideas as time goes on.

That, then, is what has been going on in our mission work in and around Pittsburgh. That is what keeps it new and refreshing for all of us and especially for me. Now our focus is much broader than just our small Fellowship on the east side of Pittsburgh. Who knows where this broader focus may lead us? We know that we live in a day of small things. The Lord does not build a faithful church out of football stadiums of people. We cannot expect a large, ready-made, thriving group of people. God is establishing His church on the domestic mission field in small, almost insignificant numbers. We are content with that. Did not the church in Noah’s day consist of only eight members? When we have 40 to 45 in attendance on Sunday mornings we rejoice.

It is always our prayer that God Himself will give us the increase. Please make that request in your prayers on our behalf.

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma