

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church Ballymena, NI

19 June, 2010

Dear saints in the
Protestant Reformed Churches,

Missionary-Elect McGeown

Candidate Martyn McGeown arrived back in Northern Ireland on Wednesday, 30 June, to a warm welcome from his parents and a group from the CPRC. Earlier that month, Seminarian McGeown successfully sustained his exam at the Protestant Reformed Synod after four years of fine training at your theological school. (We are also pleased that CPRC elder Brian Crossett was able to be present at our student's examination and participated at his graduation and Mission Awareness Day in Grand Rapids on 12 June.) It is great to have Candidate McGeown back!

That Friday, our brother accompanied Mary and me to S. Wales for a lecture. Since Mr. McGeown is to give speeches there in the future, we wanted to show him around and introduce him to the Welsh saints. Like the previous speech on "Preaching: The Voice of Christ" (13 May), this one on "What About Israel?" (2 July) was not that well attended. But on both occasions we had good fellowship with the saints who did come, and at the latter we met for the first time a brother who has since signed up for the British Reformed Fellowship Conference with his 16-year-old son.

On Sunday, 4 July, Candidate McGeown led the CPRC morning service. After the evening service, the congregation voted to call him as our missionary working with the Limerick Reformed Fellowship. Then we had tea and sandwiches, laid on especially for brothers McGeown (back from the US)

and David Crossett (recently returned from India). The next day, Candidate McGeown accepted the call and met with the CPRC Council that evening to discuss his future labours in Limerick.

Since then Missionary-elect McGeown (as he thus became) has been spending time with his family, sorting out a new car (a diesel, stick-shift) and insurance, and generally making preparations for his work in southwest Ireland. In the meantime, I preached in Limerick on the last two Sundays and brought down some of brother McGeown's books and clothes, etc., while he has been taking the CPRC services (11 & 18 July). The five sermons in all that he has delivered this summer in Ballymena have been very edifying. God has used the Protestant Reformed Seminary to raise up another faithful preacher, as He has graciously done for many decades!



Missionary-elect McGeown is to drive to Limerick tomorrow and take the Limerick Reformed Fellowship (LRF) services next Lord's Day (25 July). He and Sam Watterson (of the LRF) are renting a house together. The house is well positioned, being near the centre of Limerick, near shops and the University of Limerick, and central for the people in the LRF. It has 5 (or 6) bedrooms and 3 bathrooms, so it is ideal for

having people stay over (e.g., PR church visitors and friends) and has enough other rooms for Mr. McGeown to have a study and be able to hold LRF Bible studies and catechism classes, etc. Let us thank God for the provision of an “able minister of the new testament [i.e., covenant]” (II Cor. 3:6) and pray for our brother, the LRF, and their witness in the days ahead!

Limerick Reformed Fellowship

As regards the mission field itself, there have been some very encouraging developments. The Cesars, a lovely Filipino family of five, living 15-minutes drive north of Limerick, have joined the LRF. They were told to leave their local charismatic church unless they stopped having Bible studies with us. The Cesars journeyed north to come to the CPRC services on Sunday, 23 May, to get to meet the saints here and see the progress on our new church building, staying with us at the manse for the weekend. Joanne Cesar’s brother, John Flores, is a pastor in the Philippines in close contact with the PR mission work there. Currently, the Cesar family, except Chris, the husband and father, are visiting family and friends in their homeland, where they have met Rev. Daniel Kleyn.

Jessie Li, a Chinese student from Beijing, has also joined the LRF. Jessie is to come to the British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Conference in S. Wales, though upon the completion of her studies she is planning to return to China in January 2011.

“The Valley of Dry Bones” was the title of the last Limerick lecture (11 June). It arose through a question raised by a visiting couple about this passage in Ezekiel 37 after the previous speech. This occasioned a five-sermon series on Ezekiel 37-39 in the CPRC, which includes a treatment of Gog and Magog. It is strange how things work out sometimes!

The saints in the LRF are eagerly

looking forward to having their own pastor and missionary. Some of them have been worshipping together for years, simply with tapes and then CDs and then DVDs of the CPRC services. Now they are to have a minister of their own! One older saint in the LRF revealed to me that he never thought he would live to see the day that a Reformed missionary would be in Limerick!

The LRF are sending an article about their new pastor to the Limerick press. They have purchased an audio recorder to put the sermons on-line and are planning to obtain a camcorder for a visual recording of the services. Five young adults (including Missionary McGeown, as he will then be) are to fly from Cork to the BRF Conference (7-14 August). A few weeks after that, the church season in the LRF will begin with their own Bible study and catechism classes. The LRF are small and will doubtless face great challenges in the days ahead, but this is an exciting new chapter!

Changes for the CPRC

These developments with Missionary-elect McGeown and the Limerick Reformed Fellowship are significant milestones in the witness of the CPRC too. Our student has returned and accepted a call to be our missionary! Our first mission field! This will mean more (blessed!) work for the CPRC council, which will oversee the labours in the LRF. This will also mean increased possibilities for fellowship between Ballymena and Limerick, as well as pulpit swaps.

In the last few years, the CPRC has become self-governing, and now with its own missionary it is more obviously self-propagating. It has also, thereby, become self-financing (though not absolutely), as I will explain. With the CPRC consisting of only 14 families, and putting up (and later maintaining) its own church building, we are not able to fund Missionary McGeown in Limerick. For this, we turned to our sister

churches, the PRC, and Synod 2010 graciously agreed to support financially the labours in the LRF. In requesting aid for Limerick, it was appropriate that we not ask for subsidy for Ballymena. Thank you for your help of us over many years, as well as your contributions to the N. Ireland Building Fund (which is to continue till the end of the calendar year, 2010)!

CPRC Activities

With the conclusion of the church season in May, family visitation began, using Philippians 4 (in which connection we had four sermons on “Peace, Contentment and Joy,” which followed the series on “The Parables of Christ’s Last Week”). We also held a congregational barbecue at the manse (21 May). Some fifty people were able to make it, including four young adults from Limerick. The weather was gorgeous, and we had a great evening.

Brothers McGeown, Francesco De Lucia, and Douglas Stewart ran a stall at the 12 July parade in Ballymena. People took a number of pamphlets and invitations to our services. One man, who was opposed to the Federal Vision, bought a copy of Prof. Engelsma’s *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers*.

Recently, Mr. Callender, a faithful saint and a former elder in our church, has been unwell, spending a lot of time in hospital.

Members and friends of the congregation have helped us add several more translations to our website (www.cprf.co.uk/languages.htm): 8 German, 7 Chinese (links to PR catechism books), 3 Italian, 1 Spanish, and 1 Ukrainian, as well as a modern Hebrew version of the *Heidelberg Catechism* (the only one on-line) and a Dutch translation of a book by Michael Kimmitt (a BRF member in N. Wales): *Baptism: Meaning, Mode and Subject*.



Italy Trip

The Italian Reformed Fellowship (IRF), consisting of Francesco De Lucia’s mother, Marco Barone (who was at the 2008 BRF Conference), and Gaetano, meets each Lord’s Day in Avellino near Naples to read a sermon by a PR minister or John Calvin translated into Italian by Francesco. So Mary, Francesco, and I flew to Italy to visit (31 May – 4 June), with Francesco acting as translator, chauffeur, and guide! I gave two lectures on “Predestination” and “Assurance,” followed by lively question-and-answer times. The video recording of the speeches and one of the question times are now on YouTube (the other question time was unsuitable for general consumption, as the truth of “Predestination” did not meet with universal acceptance!).

It was great to encourage the IRF, visit other Italian believers, and see Francesco’s homeland (*patria*, as he calls it!). We also enjoyed ancient Pompeii (preserved by the volcanic eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in AD 79), the Vatican Museums (fascinating art exhibits with a lot of idolatry thrown in), the Amalfi coast (beautiful), and pizza in its city of origin, Naples (“real” pizza, as Francesco says).

This was the first time Francesco’s parents (our superb hosts) had met anyone from the CPRC, and we were able to assure them that Francesco was doing well in N. Ireland and that he would be well looked after in the United States and at seminary by the Protestant Reformed saints.

Francesco's report of the trip can be read on-line (<http://www.cprf.co.uk/audio/bulletin/june1310.htm>).



Church Building

The church building is coming on well. The overflow car park has been stoned, the Ibex fence and all the perimeter walls have been erected, the gates into the two car parks (main and overflow) have been hung, the marble-effect slabs before the main entrance have been positioned, and the first layer of tarmac on the road leading to our property has been laid. Almost all that is still needed outside the building is the second layer of tarmac on the road and the two layers in the main car park.



Inside, too, most things are finished: the lift is installed (though the emergency phone needs to be connected), the kitchen is fitted, the "porcelain" and the cubicles are in the bathrooms, etc. In the main auditorium, the wooden ceiling has been varnished, the lights from Spain have been hung, the platform for the pulpit is fitted, and the walls painted.

Tommy Hamill, our project manager, is also our painter. He has put a huge amount of time into the building and is working long hours on the painting. Next the carpet is to be laid and then the pews, pulpit, etc., fitted.

Upcoming Events

A number of important events are coming up for us. This Sunday will see Missionary-elect McGeown's first sermons in Limerick and the last CPRC services in the Protestant Hall. The Friday after that is the ordination of Rev. McGeown, as he will become (30 July). Then we will have our first Lord's Day services in our new building (1 August). After that, a number of saints from the PRC will arrive in N. Ireland, and Prof. Hanko will preach at the official dedication of our church building (5 August). Then, early in the morning of 7 August, saints from Northern Ireland, America, Italy, and Germany will fly from Belfast to the BRF Conference in S. Wales (7-14 August). The Sunday after the conference (15 August), we hold a farewell after the evening service for our student, Francesco De Lucia, who flies to the US the next day to attend the PR Seminary. All Lord willing.

We have been through many trials for many years from many quarters. The Lord has been working by His Word and Spirit, and the devil has been busy attacking, for "he knoweth that he hath but a short time" (Rev. 12:12). But Jehovah has been gracious to us, so that we have overcome by the power of faith. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jer. 29:11).

May His grace be with you all,
Rev. & Mary Stewart