

### **Greetings**

Greetings in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of the harvest, to all of our PRCA congregations!

Here is an update regarding our labors and lives here in service to the Lord, our sister churches of the PRCP in the metro Manila area, and in our mission work in Southern Negros Occidental (SNO).

### **"Mold on Our Shoes!"**

In a tropical climate of constantly high humidity here, things that are made of leather, which has a porous surface, are susceptible to developing mold when left unused for any substantial length of time. Especially during the rainy season (June to November), shoes, wrist-watch bands, handbags, belts, wallets, and any other such items can quickly develop a layer of mold if left alone.

Because of the quarantine restrictions of last year, our Sunday shoes have been stored in their usual spots, but, of course, left unused for many weeks. In fact, they sat unused for weeks because the quarantine restrictions prevented us from attending the PRCP congregations for Lord's Day worship from mid-March to September 2020. As a result, and sadly so, a layer of mold began quietly to flourish on some of our Sunday shoes. Then, deep into the quarantine, someone shouted, "There is mold on our shoes!" I never expected to see a day when we would need to wipe mold off of our Sunday shoes because we were hindered from using them in God's providence for public worship.

Pondering our discovery, it struck me that it was an accurate metaphor of the poor condition of sabbath observance in this country, even before the quarantine. I would imagine that the same would generally apply to the spiritual condition of many professing Christians in North America, too. The analogy certainly warns us personally about our spiritual proneness with regard to Lord's Day worship, sabbath observance, and spiritual faithfulness to the Lord. Left unattended and neglected, our sinful and straying hearts and minds will surely and quickly develop a thick layer of unbelieving mold: complacency, slothfulness, a disinterest in Christ's doctrine, selfishness, resistance to daily conversion, neglect of proper worship, neglect of Scripture reading and study, and neglect of prayer, and even the temptation to redefine public, face-to-face, corporate worship of the Church to include online services. May such unbelieving mold never grow on our Sunday shoes!

If it has, then may the Spirit wipe away the layer of unbelieving mold by leading us to confess and to repent of our spiritual neglect. By His grace through faith, may we maintain the marks of a true Christian, and delight in the weekly privilege to go up to the house of God and worship there with our fellow saints and faithfully bow face-to-face at God's throne of grace by faith alone through our Lord Jesus Christ, our only righteousness and our everlasting life. May we be willing to sacrifice health for faithful obedience to the Lord, rather than in disobedience have our health serve as a witness unto our unbelief.

### **Challenges of Sabbath Observance in Quarantine**

I think that you would agree that sabbath observance during our respective quarantine periods has been a major challenge and trial for individuals and families without the regular routine of public worship. I included in my August 2020 report to the Doon Council and FMC an observation about the challenges of sabbath observance during quarantine. I share with you what I mentioned to them.

*"As a general observation of PRCP members by watching and listening over the past five months, I have noticed through the quarantine both negative and positive spiritual developments. For some, sabbath observance has declined with a slide into involvement in Sunday business and other spiritually, unedifying activities. Of course, at our house, we are not above reproach. We similarly know and work to resist the temptations in mind and heart against proper sabbath observance to the Lord during the quarantine. For example, since the family has not been going to church worship in Valenzuela or Antipolo for about five months, we have been tempted to wonder why we should even bother with formal dresses, pants, barongs, or shirt and tie for the livestream church services since nobody will see us listening and singing in our faded shorts, comfortable t-shirts, or more casual clothing.*

*However, there is the matter of the willingness, the attitude, the effort, and the understanding of faith to do our utmost to devote ourselves to the Lord on His day, unlike our activity of the other days of the week. Although the type of clothing we wear on Sunday at home is not in itself the issue and I'm not about to stumble into any legalism regarding Sunday clothing, yet our clothing and the accompanying and underlying effort for Sunday clothes does have its way of reflecting how seriously we and our little ones devote ourselves in will and thought to the fear of the Lord and show our love for Him on His Day, even during the quarantine that He has placed upon us.*

*In that regard, I overheard recently that some members have recognized and are laboring to resist various Sunday temptations. A family mentioned that it has learned to take the livestream broadcasts very seriously as the only opportunity left for them and their children for worship and spiritual food on Sunday. So, without anyone looking over their shoulders and by their own initiative, they have become carefully punctual for the start of the Sunday morning broadcasts, even putting forth the effort to have their little ones properly [dressed and prepared] for worship through the livestream at home.*

*In the midst of the disappointments and the weariness of the quarantine, I found this positive observation of the renewing grace of God in the life of a young covenant family both humbling and encouraging. I trust that you will, too."*

### **PRCP Theological School**

With thanksgiving to God, we can report that our first semester of classes was completed on December 4, and final exams were finished on December 11. An interim course was given to the students from January 5 to 14 by recorded lectures from Prof. Cammenga's interim course at the PRCA Seminary on "The Theology of John Calvin.". The second semester began on January 19 and mid-term exams will be given in the week of March 7.

As with the last semester, so the second semester of instruction will be given by means of ZOOM. Although this method is certainly not the official norm of face-to-face training of future preachers, it is what the Theological School Committee (PRCP) has determined is the best available for the current quarantine situation.

We are currently training three men: Bro. Jeremiah ("Jhem") Pascual (2<sup>nd</sup> year), Bro. Emmanuel ("Emman") Jasojaso (1<sup>st</sup> year), and Bro. Jethro ("Ace") Flores (1<sup>st</sup> year).

Classes are held in the mornings on Tuesdays through Fridays. We are currently teaching the men Homiletics, Hermeneutics, Hebrew Grammar, Church History, NT Greek, NT Exegesis, and Dogmatics (Soteriology).

A seminary library continues to grow in its temporary location in one of the rooms of the guest house on the Kleyns' property. The library, thus far, has been helpful already to the students for their research papers.

### **PRCP News**

The Berean PRC announced that it was renovating their church building. Their parsonage was sold and the money from that sale was used to finance the addition of a third floor to the church building. As a result and because of the quarantine rules, Pastor Ibe and family moved in July to a house in San Fernando, Pampanga, which is about a 2-hour drive north of Antipolo.

The Classis of the PRCP met on October 31 and November 30. Classis approved the emeritation of Rev. Leovino Trinidad, which will be effective on February 28, 2021. He was ordained as a minister of the Word on March 28, 1976, in his former denomination in Cebu City, the Philippines. After several years of instruction under the PRCA missionaries, he and the Maranatha congregation joined the PRCP in 2015.

Classis PRCP will meet again on February 25.

Maranatha PRCP has announced recently that it will be disbanding on March 1 due to the lack of men to serve as elders and deacons. Members are being advised by the Maranatha consistory to transfer their church membership to the Provident PRC (Marikina).

### **PRCA Missions**

Rev. Kleyn and I, who have been assigned for now by the Doon Council and FMC to do mission work in the Inayauan-Sipalay area in SNO, were not able to get to do our work there during the lengthy quarantine. Also, in my August 2020 monthly missionary report to the Doon Council and FMC I reported my reflection on the disappointing situation. I share the same with you.

*"[The] principle of the Lord's sovereign guidance in missions is an important principle to remember. The good foreign mission desires that we may have, regarding the spread of the Reformed faith into new and hard to reach places, may not come to pass when and for how long we have desired or envisioned. We are reminded that the Lord of the harvest directs and fulfils His work of missions through His servants according to God's good pleasure and eternal counsel by various means. Even in missions, not our will, but the Lord's will must be done. All of our planning, praying, preaching, and pouring out of our souls in the work remain always subject to His sovereign direction and good pleasure.*

*...I am well reminded through the quarantine that missionaries are only limited, dependent servants in the Lord's work of the gathering and preservation of His church over the earth. I am sure that the Apostle Paul faced the same truth as he sat in prison in Caesarea for a few years or under house arrest in Rome, wishing and waiting for the time, subject to the Lord's will, that he could freely go about his labors throughout the Roman Empire among the established churches and in areas not visited yet."*

Pray that the Lord will grant us in His time both the opportunity and the ability to resume faithful, face-to-face preaching and clear instruction in the service of a Reformed church (Inayauan), its mission outreach (Sipalay), a reforming church (Canturay), and other contacts in SNO.

### **Foreign Tourist Ban**

In order to limit the spread of the coronavirus, the Philippine government has continued to ban the entry of foreign national visitors. This ban does not prevent permanent residents, such as the Kleyns and Smits, from re-entry. However, the ban prevents visits from delegations (the Contact Committee, FMC, and Doon Council), family, and friends. There is no concrete information yet regarding when this ban may be lifted.

### **Holsteiges' 2021 Furlough**

The Holsteige family departed on December 16, and they will be living in Grandville, Michigan. Rev. Holsteige has done some field presentations during furlough about the work done here in the last two years.

The return of the Holsteige family is scheduled for July 1 as approved by the Council and FMC. However, since immigration restrictions on the entry of foreigners, including the Holsteige family, still remain unclear, we will need to be patient regarding their actual return date.

*Finally, farewell, brethren. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you. (2 Corinthians 13:11)*

In His service,  
Rev. Richard J. Smit