

# PRCA FOREIGN MISSIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES

## JULY 2021 NEWSLETTER

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Dear Congregations and Members of the PRCA.

We send warm greetings to you all as we give this update of our work and life among our fellow believers here in the Philippines.

Many changes have taken place in recent months, as will be explained below. However, one thing which has basically remained the same is that we continue to live under significant restrictions due to covid. A few months ago our restrictions even increased for a while, and at this point we are not yet back to the quarantine level we had prior to that increase. Current restrictions require that we wear both face masks and face shields when out in public. In addition, leisure travel is forbidden, and anyone under 18 or above 65 years is required to stay at home (except for things that are "essential").

However, in spite of the restrictions we are able once again to go to Faith Academy (the school the missionaries use for their children) for recreational activities. We do need to sign up ahead of time, and we are limited to a maximum of five activities per week. But the swimming, basketball, tennis, and playground activities provide a nice break for us all, especially now that the Smit children are out of school for the year (their last day was May 28).

Another positive is that the restrictions for religious gatherings have slowly loosened (from 10 persons, to 30% of the building's capacity, to 50% of the building's capacity). As a result, we are once again able to worship in church every Sunday with a good number of our fellow saints. In fact, a few weeks ago my wife Sharon, in a letter to our families, mentioned how significant this was when she wrote: *"We both got choked up in church this morning. I sat down, looked around and there were all kinds of children there! There must have been 18-20 of them. This was the first time there were so many since the lockdowns began more than a year ago*

*(in March 2020). It was beautiful to see them all. And the attendance was the highest we have seen it yet, at 65 or so. Almost all the chairs were full. That, along with a couple good sermons and good fellowship, made it a lovely Lord's Day."*

Due to covid, one aspect of our work which we've been unable to carry out in the past year and a half is our monthly visit to the pastors and churches in Negros Occidental. Even now the restrictions for domestic travel in the Philippines make it very difficult for us to get to Negros Island yet (among other things, two weeks of quarantine is required on either end). We did consider providing online instruction to the pastors there, but due to their poor internet connections, this wasn't feasible. We have, however, kept in touch with them, and they and their congregations are doing well. We also regularly send them a supply of magazines: *Standard Bearer*, *Beacon Lights*, etc. The pastors and their members very much appreciate receiving this literature.

What has kept us missionaries especially busy in the past months has been the work of providing seminary instruction for the three seminary students of the PRCP. Unfortunately, because of covid the classes needed to be conducted online again (using Zoom). Rev. Smit taught NT Exegesis, Greek Reading, and Dogmatics (Soteriology), Rev. Holstege taught Hermeneutics (from the USA, where he is currently on furlough), and I taught Hebrew Grammar, Homiletics, and Church History. The semester (including the final exams) ended on May 21. The break is welcome. It also enables us to prepare for the next school year, which is scheduled to begin on August 10, the Lord willing. Sad to say, the PRCP now has only one student left in the seminary program (more about that on the next page). And speaking of Rev. Holstege and his family being on furlough, although their furlough has now ended, due to covid restrictions they are

as yet unable to return to the Philippines as they had hoped and planned (they were scheduled to arrive back here on July 1). It is all rather complicated, but to put it in simple terms, in order for the Holstege family to return to the Philippines they will need and are trying to obtain a tourist visa, but as of now the Philippine government is not yet issuing one to them. Things are therefore rather uncertain for the Holsteges at this time, specifically as to when they will be able to return here. As a result, the furloughs of the other missionary families were canceled for this year, since our churches consider it necessary and important to have at least two missionaries and their families on the field at any given time, if at all possible.

One more significant item remains for this newsletter, and it grieves me to report it. I refer to the fact that a split has taken place in the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines. This happened when the PRC in Bulacan suddenly announced (on May 16) that they were withdrawing their membership from the denomination. It is evident from one of the reasons the PRC in Bulacan gave for their withdrawal that this separation is related to the schism that has taken place in the PRCA. For reasons which remain in many ways a mystery to us, especially because there was no doctrinal controversy taking place in the PRCP itself, the church in Bulacan has now departed, has associated itself with those who have separated from the PRCA (namely, the RPC), and has even taken as its new name the First Reformed Protestant Church in Bulacan.

This split has hit the PRCP and all of us here hard. It troubles us greatly that they have separated from a faithful denomination here (the PRCP), and that thereby they have also broken ties with two faithful sister churches (the PRCA and the CERC in Singapore). What is baffling is that they have done all this without having or presenting valid reasons for doing so. What adds to the sorrow is that they have also taken with them the mission field of the PRCP (the Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Albuera, Leyte), as well as two of the PRCP's seminary students (which explains why we will only have one student this coming school year). In light of the fact that Maranatha PRC disbanded this past March (due to a lack of men to serve as office bearers, along with the retirement of Rev. Leovy

Trinidad who is now 77), the denomination has gone from four churches to two in the span of a few months. God's ways are often mysterious and difficult. His thoughts and ways are certainly higher than ours. And while we may at times be somewhat discouraged and disappointed, yet we know and believe that Jehovah's work is always perfect. By His grace, we strive to submit ourselves humbly to His will and to His fatherly chastisement, confident that His cause and His Name will always triumph.

In relation to the above, the PRCP Classis (at its regular meeting on June 12) received a "Withdrawal of Membership" letter from the church in Bulacan. Classis approved a letter of response in which they called Bulacan to reconsider what they have done and to return to the fellowship of the PRCP. It seems unlikely that this will happen, but we know the Lord is able to accomplish it, if that is His will.

As a result of the split, the June 12 Classis also made some necessary changes to the makeup of its standing committees. Classis decided to reduce the number of committees from four to two, and to divide all the work between these two. By the way, each of the two missionaries currently on the field serves as an advisor on one of these standing committees. The Classis also decided to have the missionaries take turns, along with Rev. Ibe (the only remaining active pastor in the PRCP), to chair the Classis meetings. The missionaries will also be carrying out Church Visitation for the PRCP.

In light of all these events, we ask you to remember us and also the two remaining churches here (the Berean PRC and Provident PRC) in your prayers. We are thankful for these two congregations and for their continued love of the Reformed faith as confessed in our churches. Please pray that they may remain united in that truth and committed to stand together for the cause of Christ's gospel and kingdom here in the Philippines. Be assured, too, of our continued prayers for the PRCA.

*"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" (Lamentations 3:22-23).*

In Christian love,  
**Rev. Daniel Kleyn**