

Greetings

Greetings in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the Church, from the Pearl of the Orient.

Here are some updates and interesting experiences since July 2021 regarding our labors among our sister churches of the PRCP (Metro Manila) and in our mission work in Southern Negros Occidental (SNO).

From Furlough to Farewell

Rev. and Mrs. D. Holstege arrived in the Philippines on Thursday morning, November 18, but not to continue their labors here as originally planned. The Holstege family had received at the end of August 2021 a special document from the Philippine immigration authorities that allowed them to return from furlough to the Philippines under tourist visas before November 23.

However, after making plans for the family to return to the field on November 17 and after Rev. Holstege had been assisting our vacant Wingham PRC with pulpit supply, catechism instruction, pastoral counsel, and reorganization, the Lord led the Wingham congregation to extend a call to Rev. Holstege. Then, the Lord led him to accept that call to serve our fellow saints there.

After a strict, 6-day quarantine in a hotel in Manila (without their luggage besides), Rev. and Mrs. Holstege returned on November 23 to their house in Antipolo in order to tackle a tall mountain of work regarding their household stuff.

On Sunday, November 28, Rev. Holstege preached a farewell sermon in the Berean PRC on Acts 2:39 ("The Promise to God's People Near and Far") and in the Provident PRC on Philippians 2:14-16 ("Shining As Lights in the World"). This gave both congregations opportunity to say farewell and express the Lord's blessings on him and his family in their new church home in Wingham, Ontario, Canada.

With their moving work completed, Rev. and Mrs. Holstege departed from the field on Wednesday evening, December 1.

We thank Rev. and Mrs. Holstege for their labors in the service of Christ and His Church in the Philippines since their arrival here in January 2017. May the Lord bless and sustain them in their transition into their new church home in Wingham. May the Lord cause them to flourish abundantly and fruitfully as pastor and family in their service and life among our fellow saints there.

Seminary Training

Our student has completed in mid-December 2021 another semester of training, in spite of some disruptions for the first half of the semester as a result of quarantine restrictions. However, by mid-semester, in-

classroom instruction was possible for Hebrew Grammar and Liturgics. The instructors and student are very happy to have returned to face-to-face instruction as seminary training of pastors was meant to be.

In our current semester (January to May) and as scheduled, Rev. Kleyn is teaching Church Polity (Part 1) and Hebrew Grammar (Part 2), and I am teaching NT History and Soteriology. However, with one less instructor this semester, I will also be teaching NT Isagogics.

Classes continue to be held in our subdivision in Antipolo at the Kleyns' guest house: one room serves as a seminary library and the other room serves as a classroom with tables, whiteboard, and projector screen for instruction.

Pray for the instructors that we might be faithful in our instruction. Pray for the student that he might be molded as a faithful pastor and preacher. Pray that the Lord will give the PRCP another student, or students, for seminary training.

Church Visitation

As appointed by Classis of the PRCP, Rev. Kleyn and I visited with the Provident PRC Council on November 21 and with the Berean PRC Council on November 27. I led the meetings, and Rev. Kleyn took minutes of the meeting and examined the record books of the Councils. The questions of church visitation were asked and answered thoroughly with time given for follow-up questions and discussion. It appeared that the Councils enjoyed the meetings and the opportunity to be encouraged in their kingdom labors. May the Lord bless this work for the edification of the PRCP.

Major Events in the PRCP in 2021

- Feb 28: Rev. L. Trinidad became emeritus.
- Mar 1: Maranatha PRC disbanded.
- Mar 31: Elder Alvin Castillo was taken to glory.
- May 16: Bulacan PRC with 2 seminarians seceded.
- Nov 28: Rev. D. Holstege bid the PRCP farewell.

PRCP Classis

Classis met on June 12 and on October 31. Both meetings went smoothly and demonstrated a spirit of unity in Christ and His Word, even though the PRCP experienced the disbanding of one congregation and the painful secession of another with two seminary students in a short time. Classis reorganized its standing committees so that there are now only two that serve the Classis in its work between its meetings. The PRCA missionaries were appointed again by Classis as advisors to those committees. Committee 1 handles matters of seminary training, contact with other

churches, and missions. Committee 2 handles matters of emeritation, finance, student aid, board of trustees, and translation.

PRCA Missions in SNO

Our work in southern Negros Occidental has been on hold because of travel restrictions. This situation is beginning to change with the government recently allowing fully vaccinated travelers to SNO. Of course, there is a list of rules that travellers must follow in order to visit, but at least the door is opening again for a resuming of our mission labors in SNO in 2022, D.V.

The Ending of Two Streaks

After doing some counting and checking our calendars from the past several years, we realized at the beginning of December that we (Kleyns and Smits) both had lengthy streaks for consecutive days that we have lived in the Philippines without leaving for furlough, vacations, weddings, funerals, pulpit supply in neighboring Singapore, or visits to the EPC brethren in Australia. Of course, a significant factor that has contributed to the length of these streaks has been the immigration and travel restrictions due to Covid-19.

By December 8, the Kleyns' streak ended at 903 days since they returned from their extended furlough in June 2019. Their current streak came to an end by an approved vacation break from Dec. 8 to early January in Michigan and Iowa. This visit was not just for a needed break and refreshment, which is always helpful for continued labor here, but particularly for cherished visits with family and aging parents, near the end of their earthly pilgrimage and service in the Lord's kingdom here below. Rev. Kleyn also had the timely opportunity to provide our calling church, the Doon PRC in Doon, Iowa, with pulpit supply for Old Year's Service, the New Year's Service, and for the worship services on Jan. 2, including the installation of officebearers. What an encouraging way to begin the year of service in the mission work here with worship and fellowship in our calling church. We thank the Lord for this opportunity!

For your information, our furlough has been approved by the Doon Council and the FMC to extend from May 31 to July 28, 2022. Thus, we look forward to the end of our streak at 882 days, the Lord willing, with a needed break for refreshment and for visiting with our widowed mothers, children, grandchild, extended family, and church family and friends back home throughout the PRCA.

Foreign Visitors' Travel Ban

One of the ongoing challenges of the work here is that foreign visitors are still banned from entering the country. This has prevented family, relatives, and

delegations, from the Doon Council, FMC, and Contact Committee, from visiting here since March 2020.

Once the country is declared sufficiently vaccinated, we expect the ban to be lifted. Since there is steady progress with vaccinations in the country, it appears possible for the ban to be lifted by the end of 2022. That is our optimistic guess, anyway.

Partaking of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

I had the opportunity to administer and partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper recently on November 14 in the Provident PRC. In connection with the Lord's Supper, I preached from Mark 6:30-32 in which the Lord commands us to "come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while...."

While this event might seem rather ordinary at first, for us it wasn't. This was a highlight recently for my family and me because this was the first time that I administered the sacrament of the Lord's Supper since August 20, 2017, in my former charge of our First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. This was also the first time that my wife and I partook of the sacrament together since November 19, 2017, in First PRC in GR.

Such has been the nature of the labor in the PRCP in the past four years. This experience is not exclusive to us. Our other foreign missionaries, past and present, have had similar experiences of a length of time without administering or partaking of the Lord's Supper. In fact, we ourselves have had the same, but shorter, experience from late 2012 to early 2015. Nevertheless, after patiently waiting for four years, my wife and I were very thankful that we could partake again for assurance and encouragement in our continuing life and labors here. In light of a difficult and disappointing year of work and during the Covid-19 restrictions, receiving the Lord's Supper was indeed a very timely and rich blessing for our comfort and assurance in our labors.

May that enjoyment of heavenly comfort and calm assurance in the midst of your difficulties and disappointments be true for you also when you have the privilege to partake of the Lord's Supper again.

May the Lord bless you richly in the new year of our Lord, 2022.

In His Service,
Rev. Richard J. Smit