

Limerick Reformed Fellowship
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Dear saints in the Protestant Reformed Churches,

The young man whom I mentioned in the last newsletter has not returned. In fact, he has not responded to my emails and messages to explain his decision to return to the bosom of Rome. Nor did he come to the special lecture on “The Canon of Sacred Scripture: Which Books Belong in the Bible and Who Decides?” which I gave on November 23. I did not actually expect him to come, but maybe he listened online. My comfort is the truth that God’s Word does not return to him void, but “it shall accomplish that which [he pleases], and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto [he] sent it” (Isa. 55:11). Since coming to Limerick in July 2010, I have seen that twofold effect: the Word quickens, enlivens, strengthens, and blesses some, while it hardens and offends others, and who, as the apostle exclaims in II Corinthians 2:16, “is sufficient for these things?”

I have been continuing a series of sermons on texts related to the authority of Scripture, such as “Taking Heed to the More Sure Word of Scripture” (II Pet. 1:19-21); “The Bereans’ Reception of the Word” (Acts 17:11); “The Apostles Speaking Words that the Spirit Teaches” (I Cor. 2:12-13); and “Receiving the Word as the Word of God” (I Thess. 2:13). In the Heidelberg Catechism we are in the second section, having just finished three sermons on LD 12: Christ as our chief prophet, our only high priest, and our eternal king. In our Bible study we finished II Peter on November 12, and since Noel is our most faithful Bible study attendee, I let him choose the next topic, James. Noel, as you might recall, is blind, but despite that hindrance, participates enthusiastically in the Bible studies and rare-

ly misses a meeting. We do enjoy his positive, upbeat attitude as he rejoices in the Lord despite his afflictions. He recently remarked that he has almost reached his two-year anniversary in the LRF: he came on December 31, 2017, and the first sermon he heard (I looked it up) was “Jehovah Turning Our Mourning into Dancing” (Ps. 30:11-12). The first chapter of the epistle of James teaches us a lot about trials and temptations and about our calling to count such things “all joy,” something for which we need wisdom, which is obtained through prayer.

Our catechism classes continue with the children—three children in Limerick studying New Testament History for Beginners, and three children via video link (my nieces) studying three different books, New Testament History for Beginners, New Testament History for Juniors, and Old Testament history for Seniors. The classes are enjoyable and the children’s participation enthusiastic. This week we will be studying Lesson 15. In addition, I teach an adult class on Essentials of Reformed Doctrine, which recently finished Soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, and transitioned into Ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church.

Speaking of Ecclesiology, not only did we have a special lecture on “The Canon of Scripture” and its relationship to the church (November 23), but also Rev. Stewart plans a special lecture on “The Reformation’s Teaching on the Church” in Limerick on January 10, 2020. Flyers are being designed and ordered, and advertising is being organized, as I write this. Samuel Waterson designs attractive flyers, and my wife liaises with the *Limerick Post* newspaper.

The *Limerick Post* also published a letter that I submitted on October 26, the occasion of which was the recent canonisation of John Henry (Cardinal) Newman

(1801-1890), an apostate Anglican, who joined the Roman Church and was awarded a cardinalship for his contribution to ecumenism. Newman was declared “Venerable” or “mighty in virtue” in 1991; then, he was declared “Blessed” in 2010 because a miracle was attributed to his intercession; finally, Newman was canonised in October (a second miracle being attributed to his intercession) and declared a “saint,” although not infallibly pronounced to be in paradise. In my letter, I criticised Rome’s theology of saints and her dogma of purgatory. An atheist wrote a response, mocking Rome and my letter, but I did not respond to him. In addition, a Roman Catholic lady responded privately to my “attack on purgatory,” appealing to “saved as by fire” in I Corinthians 3:15. Therefore, I preached on that text (December 1) and wrote a blog post on the subject (December 3, <https://www.limerick-reformed.com/blog/2019/12/3/purgatory>).

We always enjoy visitors. First, we had a visit from Mary Gaastra and Denise Haan (Redlands, CA) at the end of October. Mary is the mother-in-law of my brother-in-law (Jeremy), while Denise is the aunt of Kristin Crossett (CPRC). We had enjoyed fellowship with them in Redlands, CA, when we visited there during our honeymoon in April 2018, so it was good to show them a little bit of Ireland when they were here. They also participated in—and enjoyed—our Bible study on October 29. Sadly, they were not here for a Sunday, but there is always a next time, we hope! Second, Rev. and Mary Stewart and Ivan and Lily Reid came at the beginning of November. Rev. and Ivan were here for the annual family visitation in which they visited all the families and regular attendees in the group, which greatly encouraged the people here. Their wives also came, which encouraged my wife. Third, Julian Kennedy (CPRC) and Jonathan and Daniel Moore (Reformed Presbyterian Church) were here towards the end of November, so, as a bonus, they were able to attend the lecture on the Canon of Scripture. Julian and Daniel participated in the Indoor Rowing Championships held at the University of Limerick.

The LRF also had time for a social event. A group of us attended the performance by the Limerick Choral Union of Handel’s Messiah on December 7. My wife would like to join that choir, but sadly they perform *masses*. She sang in the Messiah for many years in the Zeeland Civic Chorus. Unlike her, I am tone deaf—she was trying to explain to me the nuances in the performance, but I did not pick such things up. Still, I greatly enjoyed the performance, as did Noel, who had never heard the Messiah before. He was raving about how magnificent it was.

Larisa and I are making final preparations for our journey to Australia. We (especially I) are trying to figure out how to survive the long flights, the jetlag, and the heat (for it is high summer in Australia). We will arrive, DV, on the evening of December 24 and land in Dublin again on the morning of January 16. I will be speaking at the Youth Camp of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (EPCA), having been asked to speak there by my good friend and former fellow seminarian, (Rev. Dr.) David Torlach (Brisbane EPC). We look forward to fellowship with David and Ruth Torlach and the other saints of God “Down Under.” In my absence, Rev. Stewart will preach for the Fellowship on January 5 and 12.

My latest book, *Born for Our Salvation*, was just published. I probably won’t see it until the end of January, however. Such is life when the author lives so far away from the publisher. Finally, we thank you for the cards and messages that are beginning to arrive here.

In Christian love,
Rev. Martyn and Larisa McGeown