

Rev. K. Koole and Rev. A. Lanning were appointed by the Contact Committee of Synod to visit the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore and stop also in Tasmania to visit and celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Evangelical Presbyterian Churches of Australia. With the permission of Rev. Andy Lanning, we present here the series of letters he submitted to his congregation, Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, MI. He sent these to the congregation not only, but also to family and friends. They were of a quality and interest so that it seemed worthwhile to share them with all those who might be interested. His sense of humor but especially is obvious interest and concern about fellow saints far removed from our shores should become very obvious. The letters give a good understanding of those churches and express the continuing interest of the Prot. Ref. Churches in the saints in those places.

Thank you, Rev. Lanning, for being willing to share these with all of us.

Rev. G. Van Baren

Singapore via Shanghai

Dear all,

There is so much to take in here that I hardly know where to begin.

Hmmm . . . I guess we'll back up a day and begin in an airport. If our entire trip goes the way of this incident, then we are in trouble.

Our route took us through Shanghai, China, and for a little while, we seriously wondered whether we would spend the entire three weeks just trying to get through the airport there, Pudong International. Their system of getting passengers from one flight to the next is very inefficient and confusing. So, Rev. Koole and I being the savvy international travelers that we are, we quickly got separated from each other, nearly got lost, and were befuddled by an elevator.

We were only supposed to be passing through Shanghai, but the city requires that all arrivals behave as if they are entering the country. This involves filling out entry documents, getting a photo taken, collecting one's luggage, passing through customs, and leaving the security checkpoint. Once that is finished, you go upstairs and do it all in reverse as if you have been staying in China for some time and are now just leaving again.

At some point in that whole process, Rev. Koole disappeared. One minute he had been showing his passport to an agent a few lines over, and the next minute he was gone.

Meanwhile, I was being hustled from one customs agent to another, all the while swiveling my head in search of Rev. Koole. By the time my passport was stamped and returned, there was still no sign of him.

Not knowing what else to do, I wandered over to the luggage carousel to see if he was there. Nope, but here comes our luggage, so I hauled it off the belt onto a cart and wandered some more. After a few minutes of worst-case scenarios rushing through my head, I came to the sinking conclusion: Rev. Koole is lost in Shanghai.

Truth be told, I was just as lost as he was, but at least I had the luggage.

As it turned out, Rev. Koole was not lost at all. He had been hustled to a different set of customs agents and had to fill out some other forms. What kept us from being permanently separated was our noticeable height advantage. We can stand in a Shanghai crowd and not really feel lost, because we can see over the heads of everyone. Before long, we spotted each other and continued on our way.

The next hurdle we had to overcome was an elevator. We had to go from floor one to floor three. No big deal, right? It shouldn't have been, except that this elevator did whatever it wanted regardless of our instructions to it. Push the "UP" button, and it goes down. Push floor 3, and it goes to floor 2. After several trips to all floors but the one we

needed, the elevator was finally pleased to deposit us in the correct place. Hope no one was watching too closely.

Well, one of the deacons from church is here to pick us up, so I have to bring this to a close. To make a long story short, we finally got our tickets, got onto the plane, and arrived in Singapore.

Thinking of you and remembering you in prayer.

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

An Afternoon with the Youth

Dear all,

It seems to be a universal truth that the church of Jesus Christ treasures her children and youth. The saints in Singapore are no exception. In many ways, the youth are the crown jewel of the congregation. Today, we had an opportunity to spend some time with them.

The young people's society here is called "Covenant Keepers," or CK for short. The senior young people's society is called CKS - Covenant Keepers Seniors. CKS is commemorating its third anniversary and invited the congregation for an afternoon program to celebrate. The program was very well done, and it was particularly impressive considering that the young people organized and ran the program themselves.

The centerpiece of the anniversary was an address by Pastor Lau Chin Kwee. Pastor Lau underwent a simultaneous heart and liver transplant a few years ago, and he has been slowly recovering ever since. His recovery has been marked by many setbacks, including his feeling very sick for the last few weeks. Nevertheless, he was able to attend the celebration and give an exhortation to the young people. It really was quite a sight. He walked down the aisle pushing a wheelchair to support himself. Arriving at the front, he sank into a chair. Without meaning any disrespect, the only way I can describe him is: skin and bones. The man simply has nothing but a voice left, and even that is soft and weak, though steady. A striking example of the fact that preachers are nothing but earthen vessels, weak and failing in themselves. But with that weak voice, Pastor Lau spoke the most powerful words that ever rang through the creation: the gospel of Jesus Christ. A striking example of the fact that the treasure of the gospel is given in earthen vessels that the glory might go to Him whose gospel it is.

Following the program, everyone moved to the lunch room for games. There, we tried to keep up with the energy of the youth as they raced to complete the challenges assigned to them. The young people were happy to be with each other, and the adults were happy that the young people were happy with their fellow saints. Precious treasures are the youth, indeed. They gleamed, and we beamed.

Ah, the young people. Not of CERC, now, but of Faith. In spite of the overwhelming rush of new sights, sounds, and people here in Singapore, thoughts of home and congregation are never far away. Seeing the young people in action today, and the congregation's love for them, I was reminded of our own treasures the Lord has given us. I look forward to seeing them, and all of you, again.

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

Odds and Ends

Dear all,

Just a few notes in no particular order on some of our experiences in Singapore:

-I have received quite a few comments on my youth. The members of CERC come up to me and say, "Oh, you look so young!" In their gracious way, they are paying me a compliment, and I appreciate it. But I am here to tell you that in this part of the world, my outstanding physical characteristic is not my youth. It is partly my height, but especially my girth. Everyone here is fit as a fiddle, and I am profoundly not. They look at my, shall we say, "full" face and see a baby face. And so the compliment, "Oh, you look so young!" sounds better than the reality, "Oh, you look so round!"

-When Pastor Lau addressed the young people Saturday, he took nothing with him except his cell phone.

Everything he needed for his speech was loaded on his phone, including his Bible and his sermon notes.

When he read Scripture, he read from his phone. As he



delivered his speech, he looked to his phone. Though I noticed it, it was not a distraction.

In fact, it was very convenient for Pastor Lau, especially considering his condition.

Perhaps I am underestimating his strength, but I wonder if he could have even held a Bible for any length of time. Anyway, it was interesting to see how technology can be used by God to facilitate the bringing of His Word. (Though you need not fear that this will now become the practice at Faith!)

-It was almost impossible to sing at times today. Too moving. After experiencing it in the Philippines, I should have been prepared for how emotional it can be to worship with God's saints in far-off lands. I was not at all prepared. All of a sudden it hit me that, though I did not personally know these people last week, we are one in the faith, and now we are praising our Father together. It always seems to hit hardest during the singing.

Reminds me of Revelation 7:9, 10. "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." Of that, we have been given the smallest taste here, and I want more.

Come, Lord Jesus; yea, come quickly.

There is more to write, but not tonight.

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

Jet Lag

Dear all,

We are mostly adjusted to the time difference, but there are a few lingering effects of missing a day. These are a few of the things we have been seen doing the last few days:

-Nodding off mid-conversation, and then unconvincingly trying to pretend that we were just stretching.

-Standing at the hotel room door, jamming the key card into the reader over and over with no success, until we finally realize we are not only at the wrong door, but we are on the wrong floor altogether.

-Immediately losing every object we just pick up. A common phrase heard in our room: "Now where in the world . . . ?"

-Leaving my wallet with all of the cash that I brought along on the hotel washing machine, and then returning half an hour later to find all of the contents still present.

At least, we think these things are due to jet lag.

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

Passing Greetings

Dear all,

Every time anything happens over here, I want to tell you about it. In fact, right now I have eight e-mails to you started and waiting in a folder to be finished. We have been busy, and there are many things to report. Unfortunately, all of that busyness means there is not much time or energy left to tell it all. So, for now, some of the more important things are going to have to wait. Too bad, because there are some people that I very much want to "introduce" you to and some interesting work that should be reported on. But I do at least want to tell you this one thing.



Prof. Dykstra asked me to pass greetings from himself and Carol to Pastor Lau Chin Kwee and his wife. When I did, Pastor Lau spoke warmly of his relationship with the Dykstras and asked me to pass greetings back. And out of the blue, with that simple exchange, I gained a whole new perspective on the relationship between the PRC and the CERC.

In many ways I am new to the relationship between us. Not that I have been ignorant of our relationship: I have read the reports of delegations and followed the decisions of synod regarding CERC. But the relationship was rather removed from my day to day life. It was there all

right, but I was not all that involved in it.

Things changed when Rev. Koole and I arrived in Singapore. Now we were meeting the people of CERC, shaking their hands, working with them, worshipping with them, hearing their stories and telling some of our own, breaking bread together, marveling together at God's grace that unites in the truth believers from other ends of the globe. The connection was instant. What had been a relationship was now a RELATIONSHIP! What had been important (maybe) was now IMPORTANT (definitely)! What had been sort-of-fellowship was now the wonderful, moving, blessed communion of the saints. With wide-eyed wonder I thought, "We've got to pursue this and promote this and preserve this!"

And then the Dykstras and the Laus exchanged greetings.

And it hit me: this has been going on for years. Just because I finally get it, doesn't mean the relationship has been any less real before. God has been forging this for a generation and more already. Funny how one's perspective can unexpectedly gain such breadth and depth in just a moment.

And in another generation? Who will be passing greetings then? And who will be having their eyes opened then to how beautiful the bride of Christ is in her catholicity? "Father, nourish the bond between our churches, and strengthen the unity that is ours in Him who hath redeemed His church out of every tribe and tongue. Though separated now by great distance, may we manifest the oneness that thou hast given us in the faith, until the day we forever join together in the great congregation assembled before thy throne. Amen."

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

Given to Hospitality

Dear all,

Time for a brief introduction.

All of the members of CERC have been friendly and welcoming, and it has been a joy to get to know them. But one family in particular has gone out of their way to accommodate us: Felix and Angela Chan.

Felix and Angela are members of CERC with their three children: one son - Isaac (currently studying abroad), and two daughters - Iva and Isa. Felix is a deacon in the church, so we have had quite a bit of interaction with him as a member of the Session (Council). Angela has taken on the job of host, and she has taken care of almost every aspect of our stay in Singapore.

Angela's job hosting us is not so easy. As it turns out, Rev. Koole and I are virtually helpless. Arranging schedules, doing laundry, and even getting an extra chair in our hotel room are nearly insurmountable obstacles.

We're like two sheep who have unexpectedly come to a new path and don't know what to do with it. Slightly vacant stares, mouths open in mid-chew, and one of us is facing sideways. Anyway, every time we need help with something, off we go,

bleating, "Aa-aa-aa-ngela. Aa-aa-aa-ngela." And Angela takes care of it. I suspect she has gone quite a bit out of her way to make our stay pleasant, but she has done so with enormous energy and a friendly smile.



As for Felix, he is a very capable officebearer in CERC. He led a book study/Bible study on paedocommunion the other night with several families and young people. The question of whether children may be present at the Lord's Supper is somewhat difficult.

The difficulty is not that the answer is unclear: I Corinthians 11 is plain enough. Rather, the difficulty is that defenders of paedocommunion ground their view in the doctrine of the covenant, which is with believers and their seed. If children are members of the covenant, why may they not partake of the covenant meal? In spite of this difficulty, Felix did a fine job of guiding the discussion and pointing us to the biblical qualification

for coming to the Lord's Supper, namely, a proper discernment of the Lord's body through self-examination and a believing reception of the sacrament.

We have seen Felix and Angela and Iva almost every day since we have been here. Every time we do, I can't help but think of a verse from Romans 12 that describes them perfectly: "given to hospitality."

Iva, the Chan's 20-year old daughter, is planning a visit to the States this July with some other young adults from CERC. Iva and the others are by no means helpless, but it would be nice if they could find the PRC as hospitable as they have made Singapore for us.

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

Angela's Conversion

Dear all,

We have been hearing a phrase here to describe people that we do not hear so often in the PRC: first generation Christian. It is a description that I have had a hard time grasping, because most of us in the PRC have been Christian for generations. How many of us could even determine when our ancestors were first converted to Christianity, it happened so long ago? In the CERC, things are much different. Most, if not all, of the adults in CERC were born and raised as unbelievers and came to the faith as teens and young adults. We have been hearing some of their incredible stories, and I wanted to share one with you.

Angela Chan is the youngest of nine children and was raised in the Chinese religion of Taoism. Her father was a man of few words, but very religious, and the family was expected to maintain the religion. When Angela was nine years old, her brother, who had already been converted, brought her to church for the first time. She spent several years learning the Christian faith, and at nineteen, became convinced that she must join the church through baptism.

That's when the persecution started.

Persecution from strangers may leave scars on the body; persecution from family members scars the soul. Angela's parents were strongly opposed to her being baptized, and let her know in no uncertain terms. The most painful sorrow came when her father, who spoke little, suddenly had much to say to his daughter about his displeasure with her. Angela's parents even called up one of the elders of the church to meet with him so that they could register their objections. Angela stood firm, though she was wounded deeply, and was baptized in the name of the Triune God.



As Angela herself will tell you, this is not the story of an 'angelic' young woman, but the story of God's sovereign grace. Is there any power in all the world greater? A nineteen-

year old girl confessed Christ over the objections of her beloved parents, in a culture that values respect for parents as one of the greatest virtues, because God's grace is irresistible. All whom God graciously draws, must come, regardless of the obstacles.

Want more of that grace? Here it is: her father continued to spend time with his daughter, was converted himself, and was baptized at 87 years old, two years before he died. Her mother also became a Christian, along with seven of the nine children.

Angela's story is just one of the many similar stories of God's saints in CERC. Almost unimaginable, very moving, and a cause of deep thanksgiving.

There is another phrase the members of CERC use now, made up of some of the sweetest words in all the world to them: second generation Christians. Their children - born, baptized, and raised in the church - are second generation Christians! What a precious, dear covenant God has made with His people! His fellowship and grace does not end with the first converts here, but is continued in the line of generations. To see the youth and children of CERC is to see the promise of Genesis 17:7 - "thee and thy seed after thee."

First generation Christians.

Second generation Christians.

And the promise: "A faithful Church shall serve Him, till generations end" (Psalter #50, stanza 3).

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

Whirlwind Tourism

Dear all,

In between our official work of preaching, lecturing, participating in Bible Studies and Young People's Societies, and meeting with the CERC Session, Rev. Koole and I have been trying to tour as much of Singapore as possible. We are here just over a week, so our schedule has been crammed. Whirlwind tourism, you might say.

All the details of our sight-seeing would probably get tedious, so get ready for a speedy overview. Whirlwind e-tourism, you might say. Here we go.

Singapore Zoo

-Imagine a tropical rain forest with walking paths and huge, exotic animals, and you are looking at the Singapore Zoo. It is located in one of the few undeveloped areas of the island, and it is beautiful. The animals are impressive, but so is the setting. Bright and colorful tropical flowers burst out of plants with leaves as big as a man. The whole atmosphere is bathed in the lush green light of the forest canopy. I was going to say "cool green light," however the atmosphere is anything but cool.

Warm, warmer, warmest - and sticky humid. Still beautiful, though.

-The zoo has several shows with animals throughout the day. We watched a sea lion do amazing tricks in the water, and then we watched elephants do even more amazing tricks in the water. By that time it was noon, and we were so hot we were ready to do some amazing tricks in the water ourselves. Instead, we ate an amazing amount of chicken in the air-conditioning. Original Recipe chicken from KFC, I might add.



Little India

-Singapore has several ethnic districts. The first one we visited was Little India, where, as you might guess, the residents from India work and shop. The shops were tightly packed along the sidewalk, and sold everything from food to clothing to jewelry to electronics. It is one of those places where I can easily get overwhelmed. The sights and sounds are unfamiliar, and it all washes over me without my having much of a chance to take it all in. Plus, it all smells faintly of curry, a popular seasoning in the Indian food sitting everywhere.

-Had an experience that I'm not so proud of (so why not write about it, right?). For some

unfathomable reason, I did not bring a pair of shorts along to one of the warmest climates in the world. For some other unfathomable reason, I decided I would try to buy a pair in Little India, where I am the easiest target for a swindle that ever walked through the door.

Perhaps it is unfair of me, but I suspect every item in the store got four times as expensive as soon as I entered, and my brain was too addled with curry to know any better. My money and I were not parted, however, since the shorts were all made for men of Indian proportions. In plain English: they didn't fit.

Singapore Cable Car

-This cable car takes off from the top of Singapore's second largest hill, climbs up over one of Singapore's harbors, and comes down in the newest resort complex on the island.

The cable cars are nice little compartments that can fit six people. The walls are almost all clear plastic, so you can see just how dizzyingly high you are - almost 30 stories up at the highest point. Of course, it has to be that high these days because a tall ship's mast brought the whole thing down and killed some people in the 1970s. That's the story you hear before you get on and watch the world disappear below you. I never sat so still in my life, I believe.

-At the resort, we watched a very impressive laser light, water, and fire show. The whole thing was staged on a sand beach on the bay at night. Gentle and cool ocean breeze on our faces, distant city lights softly reflected on the water, stars twinkling overhead in the dark sky, ice cream in a cone, the contented murmuring of voices in the pleasant night air - and suddenly the whole thing explodes in a flurry of fireballs, water jets blasting high into the night, holographic images dancing about, and lasers piercing the darkness just above our heads. Nothing like modern technological entertainment to pound one's senses into pulp. Really, though, it was impressive. Was glad to have seen both the gentle night and the technological production.



Chinatown

-Every large city in America has a Chinatown. We are close enough to China here that I had not expected to find one in Singapore. Apparently, Chinatown is universal in large cities. Although probably not in Beijing.

-We visited a Buddhist temple. Interesting, and eerie. Monks in orange robes chanting, incense burning, statues of happy Buddhas, people bowing and

crying - and a huge golden room behind glass protection housing one of Buddhas molars. Really. You could pay \$5,000 to have a golden tile placed in the golden temple. Ahhh, and therein lies the significance of the tooth: it brings in revenue. Lot of money to be made in idolatry, just as in Demetrius' day.

-Several of the members of CERC were raised Buddhist, so this was a real eye-opener.

Do we have any idea how liberating the gospel of Jesus Christ is? To go from bowing to a molar to being a child of the King? To go from mountains of guilt to perfect righteousness? Yes, we do know how liberating the gospel of Jesus Christ is, because it liberates us too. Let us never forget the power of that gospel to save sinners. Even Buddhists. Even us.

Well, the e-tour is just about finished. I did want to tell you about the best part of our tourism here before concluding. On all of these trips, we have had members of the CERC as our guides. We are not just seeing Singapore, we are communing with our fellow saints. The tourism is really just an excuse for fellowship, and for many precious conversations. We only have a few moments together, it seems, before we have to go away again. We are trying to spend as many of those moments together as possible.

But, fellowship with saints in Singapore means we are missing out on fellowship with saints at home. Our time here is precious, but I am counting the days until I can see you again. We often find ourselves here in the strange position of both wanting this trip to continue and wanting it to end. To continue, because of love for the saints of CERC; to end, because of love for the saints of Faith. I suppose in a way that conflict is really a yearning for heaven, for there comes a day when we will not have to choose communion with one group of saints over communion with another. Oh, for the day of our Lord, when we can "tour" together that Paradise, whose wonders eye hath not yet seen.

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

Rev. Koole's Perspective

Dear all,

Rev. Koole wrote the following note in his bulletin to Grandville's congregation. Thought you might like to read it too.



Dear congregation:

Things go well in Singapore. It was a joy to see the saints here in Singapore once again as well as their new place of worship for the first time. Rev. Lanning is seeing everything and meeting everyone for the first time. His reaction is "The half has not been told me."

He has been impressed not only with the size and orderliness of the city, but with the spirituality and hospitality of the congregation, as well as their interest in the Word and the Reformed faith. Our meeting with the session went well. Their slightly revised CO in our estimation is very acceptable and they are more than ready to proceed to finalizing full sister relations. Pastor Lau celebrated his 60th birthday this past Tuesday. We were privileged to express our gratitude to God for sparing him so far and for his faithful and unflagging service for the cause of God and truth in Singapore for the past 30+ years. Monday we fly to Tasmania to discuss various matters with the EPCA and celebrate with them 50 years of existence as a denomination in the Reformed and Biblical faith. See you end of the month, D.V. Rev. K Koole

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

The CERC Session

Dear all,

We have already come to the end of our stay in Singapore, and I have not yet written about our meeting with the CERC Session. This meeting was the main reason for our stop in Singapore, so a report is long overdue.

Although there is no formal and official ecclesiastical relationship between the PRC and the CERC, there is already a very strong informal relationship. The Contact Committee regularly corresponds with the CERC Session, delegations visit Singapore to preach and teach as often as the PRC can spare men, and a young man from CERC is studying in the States with a view to entering the PRC Seminary.

The PRC and CERC have been working for several years to make this unofficial relationship into the official ecclesiastical bond of a sister church relationship. It is this work that brings Rev. Koole and I to Singapore. Our task was to meet with the Session of CERC to discuss the final details of becoming sister churches.



The foundation of a sister church relationship is all-important. An ecclesiastical relationship cannot be founded merely on a friendly attitude, although there is much friendliness between the PRC and the CERC. Nor can an ecclesiastical relationship be founded on sentimentality, although it is quite moving to know that there are saints on the other side of the globe who are one in the faith. Rather, an ecclesiastical relationship must be founded on the truth of the Word of God, including the summary of that truth in the Reformed confessions. Without this unity in the truth, there can be no relationship. It is Christ alone who can unite His church in one Lord, one faith, one baptism; therefore all ecclesiastical relationships must be consciously grounded in Him who is the Truth.

Such a foundation the PRC and the CERC have. Past meetings and correspondence have confirmed that we are united in the essentials of doctrine, worship, and practice. The one area that needed to be discussed yet was church polity.

Until this year, CERC did not have their own Church Order. Not that they were without any order in their ecclesiastical life; they basically followed the same Church Order we do. But they had not adopted the Church Order as their own, and so were not bound by it the way the PRC are. After several years of work, the CERC was finally able to adopt a Church Order at the beginning of this year. It is basically the PRC Church Order with some minor modifications. The meeting between our delegation and the CERC was largely taken up with a discussion of this Church Order.

The fruit of our meeting is that we see no further obstacles to the establishment of a sister church relationship. Not only the Session, but the members of CERC expressed their eagerness to enter a sister church relationship. We expressed to them that the Contact Committee shares their eagerness.

Now the matter goes to synod for its decision. May God give the synodical delegates wisdom to make a decision that is pleasing to Him, and that serves to good of His catholic church.

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

The Pain and Profit of Distance

Dear all,

We have arrived safely in Tasmania.

Beautiful place, but I must admit I am having a hard time settling in. My thoughts are still with the saints in Singapore, though they are now 4,000 miles away. In a little over a week, they will be more than 9,000 miles away again. Literally a world apart.

Funny how painful distance can be. Or not so funny, actually. Makes one ache.

The CERC and the PRC are seeking a sister church relationship, but the fact is, we are already family. To meet the saints in Singapore is to meet our spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ. Everything about our time together underscored that reality. These were not just friendly people with whom we worshiped, sang, conversed with, visited, had Bible studies, meetings, and meals with. They were loved ones. They are loved ones. That's what puts the ache in the miles.



(Rev. K. Koole and Rev. A. Lanning at Singapore airport with those who came to see them on their way.)

There is a prayer I have made for you since leaving on this trip: "Heavenly Father, preserve them in thy mercy, and hide them in the palm of thy hand, until we may see each other again." I have not yet been able to pray it with dry eyes. Now that prayer must include the saints of CERC as well, and the eyes grow all the wetter for it.

However, there is another funny thing about distance: distance means nothing to God. Or not so funny, actually. Makes one rejoice! Distance may separate us from each other for a time, but it can never separate us from our omnipresent God. "For I am persuaded that neither . . . height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39).

As a matter of fact, great and painful distances teach us a great and comforting spiritual lesson. It is the lesson of the magnitude of God's love for us in Christ. Does 4,000 miles

seem far? Does 9,000? Then let us in the States, in Singapore, in Tasmania, and the world over comprehend together "what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Ephesians 3:18, 19).

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

Autumn Afternoon in Launceston

Dear all,

Things are "backward" south of the equator, including the seasons. It is autumn in Tasmania, and it is lovely. Every season must be nice here, though, because of the spectacular view. Not even pictures can do it justice, and you know how much they are worth compared to words. At any rate, we will have to try to make do with a brief description, impoverished as it may be.

I am sitting in a house on top of a hill. The house overlooks a green valley. On the other side of the valley, a taller bank of hills rise and rise until they become mountains that disappear into the white clouds. This whole scene unfolds over a great distance, so that the mountains are far out on the horizon.

The valley between this hill and those mountains ripples and undulates with smaller hills and rises of its own. The landscape in this valley is a patchwork of forests, fields, and houses, all giving way to each other here and reclaiming the ground there. On the far side of the valley, the fields and farms gradually succumb to the forest as the hills climb.

Everything is green, but there is an endless variety of hues. Some fields are rich and lush and verdant, while others are almost yellow with scrub. The nearer trees glow with an emerald complexion, while the far trees blanketing the mountaintops are so dark they are almost black. Now take all of those colors and add sunlight to some and shadow to the others, and watch as the sun makes a kaleidoscope of the scene, now catching this feature in its light for a moment, now illuminating another over there.

There is little movement, save for a little rivulet of cattle slowly but steadily trickling their way down the side of one of the hills. Some stand and graze, others lie and chew the cud. Watching them makes the world slow down and amble along at their amiable pace, for their progress is marked not in minutes, but hours. Even the sky looks



content. None of the blazing, brilliant blue of the tropics here; just a laid-back hue that lightens nearly to white as it disappears behind the far hills. While the cattle slowly graze their way across the paddock, the clouds float across the sky the other way with equal calm. There is no haste anywhere. Somewhere the world hustles, I am sure, but that somewhere is not here, not today, on the outskirts of Launceston. Here, there is nothing



but the easy drift of an autumn afternoon.

So pastoral is the scene that I think I would not be at all surprised to see David appear over the rise, leading the sheep of his father Jesse. Well . . . at least I would not be at all surprised if it were just such an afternoon in Canaan when David penned, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I

shall not want."

Peaceful. Soul-restoring.

Reminds me of my favorite benediction, which is also my prayer for you:

"The LORD bless thee and keep thee;

"The LORD make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;

"The LORD lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. Amen."

And Amen.

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

Durian

Dear all,

As you may know, we are now in Tasmania. Problem is, I still have a pile of unfinished e-mails to you from Singapore. As I find some spare time, I will try to finish them up and send them on. Here is one about one of my goals for this trip. Minor goals, that is.

No trip to the other side of the world is complete without trying the most outrageous food available, right? In Singapore's case, that food is durian.

Durian is a fruit, or so they say. I have my doubts, because the food category "fruit" has a positive connotation. There is nothing positive about durian. I suspect that the food experts could not find a category called "yecchhhh," so they dumped durian in fruit just to get rid of it.

Durian's reputation rests entirely on its rank smell and taste. How bad is it? So bad that it is illegal to take durian on the public trains and buses. So bad that its smell becomes part of you after you eat it, and hangs around in occasional whiffs and sniffs for 24 hours. So bad that it is hard to describe it in anything other than crude terms: dirty baby diaper, sweaty gym socks, curdled milk, rotten eggs. You get the picture.



Actually, the smell is very, very strong and pungent, but there is also something . . . citrusy? . . . about it. Aside from being so terribly strong and pervasive, I did not find the smell to be that bad. It did smell vaguely like a fruit after all. A spoiled-and-rotting-on-the-bottom-of-the-garbage-dumpster-fruit, but fruit none the less.

So, we bought one from a street vendor who had piles and piles of durian in boxes. On the outside, durian looks like, well . . . I don't know what. Its husk is very hard and is covered with spikes that can draw blood. Picture it this way: If a pineapple went out and got tattoos and a mohawk, it would come home a durian.

The vendor cut the husk open with a long, sharp knife by tossing the durian a little way in the air and then "catching" it on his knife, which he swung quite hard. A few more chops revealed five or six big seeds, all covered with the durian meat. Each seed was brown

and a little smaller than a golf ball, and the white meat clung to the seed.

By now the smell was overpowering, and growing less fruity by the moment. From



behind their cans of Chinese beer, a small group of the vendor's friends were all watching and laughing.

They had a little entertainment with their dinner that night: American Eating Durian. OK, here goes.

There is no neat way to eat this stuff. Its consistency is something like the slimy, gooey ooblek you might make in science class. The best way to get it in your

mouth, apparently, is to slurp it from the nut. Then gag, and repeat.

The taste was horrendous, followed by an aftertaste of horrific. Underneath, there was a bouquet of horrible. Someone once famously likened durian's taste to "a rich custard highly flavored with almonds." No way. Not even close. Unless they were almonds that had gone out and gotten tattoos and mohawks

The crowd wanted to know how it tasted. As politely as possible, I replied, "I like the smell better than I like the taste." A good non-answer, if I do say so myself.

Trip complete.

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

Beautiful Singapore

Dear all,

I found a half-finished e-mail about what Singapore looks like. Here is the finished version.

Perhaps the best way to show you around some of the sights and sounds here is to leave the hotel and go on a little walk down to the Singapore River.

Stepping out of the glass double doors of the air-conditioned hotel, we are greeted by a blast of hot, humid air. The day is bright and the atmosphere is heavy, just as it was yesterday, just as it will be tomorrow. Welcome to the tropics.

If the first thing that strikes our senses is the tropical atmosphere, the second is that we are standing in the middle of a large, modern city. Gleaming skyscrapers are everywhere. In those few spots where there are no buildings, giant cranes are building new ones. (Local joke we've heard: What is Singapore's national bird? The crane. Yuk, yuk.)

The city and the jungle exist together in Singapore. Although most of the island is urban, the city is very green. Palm trees, large colorful flowers, plants with leaves as big as a man, and other native flora have been planted everywhere. The result is beautiful. One of the slogans of Singapore is, "City in a Garden."

If the garden in your mind is a lush, tropical one, then that slogan is as good as any to describe this place.



The thing about big cities and jungles is that they are both dirty. Not so in Singapore. It has to be one of the cleanest places on earth. How clean? Well, the other day Rev. Koole and I wanted to sit on a raised curb to wait for our ride. We brushed the curb off with our hands so we could sit, and found that there was nothing to brush away. No dirt, no trash, no fallen tropical foliage, nothing. That curb may as well have been a kitchen table. And that was just the curb; the whole city is that way.

As we walk a little further down the road, we see why. There is an army of workers with brooms, spin-trimmers, rags, wheelbarrows, and other gardening implements sweeping, pruning, mowing, washing, and cleaning the city. Every last detail of keeping a major metropolis spotless is attended to by these immigrants, and there are tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of them.

We have a little trouble finding our way to the river, because the streets go in every direction but straight. Eventually, we reach the river and an entirely new aspect of Singapore opens up: the tourist culture. During the day, the walkways along the river are sparsely populated. But at night, the river comes alive. Lights of every color illuminate the bridges, the pubs, the food joints, the live bands, the thousands and thousands of people. Tour boats glide up and down the river, the passengers craning their necks to see to the top of the brightly-lit steel and glass buildings that rise up from the river's banks. Every detail has been attended to for maximum visual effect. Even the bridges have bright, colorful lights at their bases. The whole city is scrubbed clean and glowing with excitement.

The architecture is striking. Old British colonial buildings sit side by side with modern designs. Singapore was a British colony for many years, founded by Sir Stamford Raffles. Evidence of British rule can be seen all over, not the least of which is the English language that is (nearly) universally spoken in Singapore.

There is so much going on in every direction that my senses are quickly overwhelmed. It is simply too much to take in all at once. Besides, by midday it is too hot to be out in the sun. Soaked through with sweat, we head back to the hotel to cool off in the air-conditioning and take a nap before dinner. Tough business, this denominational work!



The setting is nice, but it is not the beautiful background that quickens the pulse here. It is the members of CERC. The glitter of a tropical city cannot compare to the dazzling radiance of the bride of Christ who dwells here. For in this "City in a Garden," God has planted His church.

Remembering these things always makes me long for home, and for Home. There comes a better city - New Jerusalem; and there comes a better garden - the Paradise of God. Lord, hasten the day!

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

Kangaroo

Dear all,

Australia has some pretty unique wildlife. In fact, is it even possible to think of Australia without imagining a kangaroo? We have been on the lookout for some of these interesting animals: wombats, wallabies, platypuses, and of course, kangaroos. Especially the six-foot tall gray kangaroos.

Up until today, our sightings had been limited to piles of fur on the road. Tasmanians whop wallabies with their cars like Michiganders whop raccoons and opossums. I guess those piles of fur technically count as wallaby sightings, but it would be more satisfying to see one bounding merrily along.

On a walk through a river gorge today, we finally spotted one. Rev. Koole was walking in front, and I was close behind. As we came around a bend, something gray shambled off into the undergrowth. Not exactly merry, and not exactly bounding, and we only saw it a couple of seconds. But at least we have now seen a wild wallaby that was not wearing tire tracks.



Then, at lunch, we easily topped the wallaby. Not only did we see a kangaroo; we ate a kangaroo. Yes, ate it. No, I didn't know that you could eat them, either. But eat it we did. Rev. Mark Shand's wife, Susie, had a kangaroo roast that she cooked up and served as a sandwich. It was maybe a little lighter in color than a beef roast, but tasted a lot like beef to me.

Actually, I'm kind of surprised that it is legal to eat kangaroo. It is, after all, the official national emblem of Australia. Seems like there would be something in place to prevent tourists like us from being served slices of their symbol. "This great animal represents our country. Here, try a piece."

Anyway, we plan to keep our eyes - and mouths - open for more great wildlife.

Right after we double-check to make sure there are no kangaroo-sized piles of fur on the road outside the Shands' house.

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

Fifty Years

Dear all,

The saints of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia had quite a day today. They are celebrating their 50th Anniversary as a denomination with speeches, recollections, pictures, songs, and worship.

Fifty years, and few of them easy. Listening to the history of the EPCA is exhausting. It is filled with trials, divisions, departures, losses, splits, and sorrows. If listening to that history is draining, I cannot imagine having lived it.

The Protestant Reformed Churches know a little something about that kind of history. More than a little something. Some of the stories we heard today from EPC members reminded me of stories from PRC members in years past. Ministers



that taught false doctrine; members that stirred up trouble; families split down the middle. The PRC and EPC both have learned by experience that the marching orders are not, "Eat, drink, and be merry," but, "Take up your cross, and follow me."

And there is not a doubt in anyone's mind that it was all worth it. For the sake of the truth! More precisely, for the sake of Him who is the Truth. For Him, no price is too high. Our denominations have the scars to prove it.

So, what does one do after fifty years of this? Celebrate. Worship. Give Thanks! The gates of hell have assaulted, and have not prevailed! The church still stands, founded on the Rock that cannot be moved. The theme of the anniversary is not, "Fifty Years of Our Sorrow," but, "Fifty Years Under Cover of God's Wings." Sorrows and losses may hurt, but the focus all along is never on us. It is on Him, for whose glory we live.

Really, on a day like today, how could the EPCA do anything but rejoice? A choir of energetic youth poured their vigor into the Psalms and made the air ring. All the pulpits are filled with men committed to the Word. The next generation attended and showed an interest in the shoulders upon which they stand. Underneath it all is God's covenant faithfulness.



(The officebearers of the EPC—at the anniversary celebration.)

Rev. Koole and I are privileged to represent the PRC during these celebrations. These saints' tears and laughter are contagious, and we finished the first day blessed.

To be sure, we are mindful of our differences. We do not celebrate with the EPC as sisters, but as cousins. Or, as it is officially known, we celebrate as churches in a Corresponding Relationship. But we are also mindful of our common heritage, both the PRC and EPC defending the doctrines of grace and standing for the confessional Reformed faith. And both of us bearing wounds for that faith.

Fifty years. A jubilee.

To God be the glory!

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

A Blunder Down Under

Dear all,

A couple of random notes from the past few days.

-First, the blunder. When people ask if I've ever been to Tasmania, my response has been, "No, in fact, this is my first time south of the hemisphere."

Ummm . . . no. "South of the equator" works. So does, "In the southern hemisphere."
But not, "South of the hemisphere."

That's outer space.



(Rev. Mark and Susie Shand and their mothers)

-We have been spending some time with Rev. Mark and Susie Shand. In addition to hosting Rev. Koole, they have taken it upon themselves to show the two of us around during the few pockets of spare time. I can see why they made so many friends during their time in the States for seminary. Delightful couple. And Susie is a remarkable host, friendly and kind. In many ways, Rev. and Susie have been the "face" of Tasmania for us. It has become the face of a friend, and one we would like to see again.

-Ah yes, faces of friends. Our time here is drawing to a close, and we look forward to seeing your faces again soon. One more day of EPC anniversary celebrations, a day of meeting with the EPC Contact Committee, and then home we go.

Oh, does that sound good: home we go!

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

The Loveliest Building in Singapore

Dear all,

Quick "trip" back to Singapore for a moment to look at their new church building.

CERC does not have a building of its own. Instead, it has secured the entire fourth floor of an industrial building for its use. Underneath them on the lower floors, machines rumble along throughout the day.

The machines are not a bother, and I did not notice any noise from them interrupting the worship service. There are, however, a few seats in the sanctuary that are right above one of the machines. If you sit in one of those seats, you will feel a constant rumble through the floor.

The location and the outside of the building would not be considered beautiful by Singaporean or American standards. There are many other churches in Singapore with large, impressive buildings. There are many temples to idols that are ornate and grand to the eye. CERC worships in a factory.

And yet, CERC's place of worship is by far the loveliest place in Singapore.



The saints have transformed the fourth floor from a shop to a clean, comfortable place of worship. Included on their premises are a beautiful sanctuary; a kitchen and fellowship hall with tables where they share Sunday meals; many meeting rooms, including a nice consistory room and pastor's study; a library with good Reformed literature; and bathrooms. In other words, a nicely appointed, fully functional place of worship. Everything we are used to, and just as nice.

But the fine arrangements are not the real beauty of the place. For that, one must look at the church of Jesus Christ that worships there.

She is breathtaking.

Many of her members are former heathens. Quite a word to describe someone, isn't it? Heathens? But that is what many were. Now they are saints. Again, quite a word to describe someone, isn't it? Saints? Saints of God!

Some of them were converted decades ago. Some of them only recently, especially among the young people. And there is an entire generation of young people who were born into the church.

The zeal of the congregation for the Word is contagious, especially among the youth. They hunger for the Reformed faith, and they waste no opportunity to grow in it. Sit down with them once, and before long the searching questions are bound to begin. Not questions to challenge; questions to understand.

Beautiful, isn't she?

Not in herself, but because she is the bride of the Bridegroom. It is His beauty that shines in her.

There is a very appropriate passage in Ephesians 2:19-22 that describes her. "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

As it turns out, that building - that Building - is the loveliest place in Singapore after all.

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning

Concluding Thoughts

Dear all,

As I write, we are spending our last night on the far side of the world. In the morning - Tasmania's morning, anyway - we will begin the 27 hour process of flying home.

That means it is time to bring these e-mail updates to a close.



I am glad to go home, but many, many things about our trip sit half-said in unfinished e-mails. Some of the things are important, such as what it is like to worship in different cultures; an introduction to a few men and women who have stood bravely for the truth; and a report on some meetings that have implications for the PRC's relationship with other denominations (all positive, I am glad to report). Some of the things are not so important, but may be of interest to you, such as what it is like to travel with Rev. Koole. (By the way, all kidding aside, I have learned an immense amount from Rev. Koole on this trip. His approach to the church local, and to the church universal, ought to be mandatory courses for every young minister and seminarian, in my judgment.)



(The pastors of the Evangelical Presbyterian Churches—except Rev. Brian Dole could not come.)

Perhaps some of the e-mails can be finished and sent later. Perhaps. But I know myself well enough to know that it is a very small perhaps.

Permit me at least to leave you with a few concluding thoughts.

One concluding thought, really. The unity of the church of Jesus Christ is one of the greatest and most beautiful wonders of God's grace. Race, culture, language, and distance are no obstacles to the Spirit of truth, who binds Christ's body together in His own unity. That makes the relationships God has given us with the CERC of Singapore and the EPC of Australia precious and valuable. Worth maintaining. Worth promoting!

When we are so far away from each other, it can seem that these relationships are made out of paper. As though they are merely things that synods write about.

Far, far from it!

These relationships are real, as real as the Reformed faith itself. In fact, the Reformed faith is the fabric out of which these relationships are woven. Not our feelings, not our personalities, not anything that man can make; but the truth.

It is the truth that makes these relationships personal and moving. I will never get over the thrill of meeting complete strangers and instantly having a relationship with them that is as deep and rich and full as the Reformed faith itself. They may be strangers, but they are strangers you have known all your life. They are like you, family with you, culture and the rest notwithstanding. Their joys are instantly yours; their sorrows instantly moving. And familiar, because they are the joys and sorrows of God's children.

Worth maintaining. Worth promoting!

This is not a call to unity at the expense of the truth. The truth is, after all, the only foundation upon which any ecclesiastical relationship can rest. Neither is this a call for proceeding with wild abandon in these relationships. Care, wisdom, and patience are required in our ecclesiastical relationships, just as in our personal relationships.

But where the Spirit of truth works, where He forms relationships by His truth, there we endeavor to keep His unity in the bond of peace.

One concluding thought, I said. And here I've rambled on. But there are faces to the relationship now, and that makes a difference.

However, that's enough for now. Time for me to wrap up not only this e-mail, but to conclude these reports.

I have enjoyed "telling" you about some of our work and experiences. Cannot wait to see you again!

And so, here is an e-mail "Farewell."

Which will soon, Lord willing, turn into a personal "Hello!"

In Christ's love,

Rev. Lanning