



## *Eastern Home Missions*

# *Newsletter*

**Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma**  
216 Thornberry Drive  
Pittsburgh, PA 15235  
phone: (412) 371-2277  
willb52@comcast.net

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### **Fellowship Highlights**

There are a number of events in our Fellowship these past couple of months that are worthy of note.

This past Sunday Chad and Kim Skolny announced that they are expecting a baby. Now, I realize that to those of you who belong to a large congregation, this may not seem so out of the ordinary. I can recall when I was pastoring large congregations that the church might have ten or more new births every year. When a church is small, however, the announcement that someone in the congregation is expecting is always big news. You can imagine then the joy when a small Fellowship struggling to grow in order to organize receives news that one of the families is expecting a child.

It is a happy occasion for Chad and Kim. We rejoice that God has granted them the desire of their hearts. But, in my estimation, it goes beyond a personal matter. As a missionary I am always concerned with evidences of positive fruit in our labors here. The longer I labor, the more I am convinced that there are certain objective criteria that need to be met on a mission field before establishing that work as an instituted church. These criteria go beyond the question, "How many people are attending your mission?" As I said before, that is a superficial question that most often arises out of ignorance of mission work. *Mere* numbers is not enough to judge whether a mission group ought to be organized.

The one major criterion (there are lesser ones)

is: does the life of the mission give evidence that God is establishing His covenant there. Are there elderly saints? Are there men who are ready and willing to devote time and labor to the rule of the church? Are there godly parents who take seriously their calling to instruct their children in the fear of God's name? Are there young people who confess their faith in the church? Do young men and women see it as their calling to marry in the Lord? Are there young couples who bring forth the next generation of believers? All of this constitutes life within the covenant that God establishes with believers in their generations.

But, we might say, this sort of life is what goes on in an established church. Exactly! If a mission group is going to be organized into a church, then it must give evidence that it is a church! No doubt, our labors on a mission field take time and patience.

If the Lord wills, the birth of another child into our midst gives us as a mission work special reason for rejoicing. It is to us one of those evidences that the Lord is prospering our work. We are beginning to see fruit on our labors.

A second event that has taken place these past couple of months is the receiving into our midst of a new family. Dave and Bev Reitsma and their two daughters, Anna (15) and Katharyne (12), have been attending by us for some time now. This is the second year that the girls have been attending our catechism classes. Dave and Bev were members of our churches in the Grand Rapids area about 12 years ago before moving to the Pittsburgh area. They had been attending an Orthodox Presbyterian Church before this church merged together with a Presbyterian Church of America. At the time of this merger they began attending by us. It has taken some time and patient labor, but their strong desire to be a part of the Fellowship here has proved their commitment. They reveal a spirit of zeal and enthusiasm toward the life and labors of our Fellowship. We welcome them into our midst!

A third event that ought not to escape notice is that Ben Mahtani's membership papers have been transferred here from our Bethel Protestant Reformed Church. When Rev. Mahtani left to take up his work in Bethel, Ben stayed behind in Pittsburgh. He was going to school at Grove City College, about an hour north of Pittsburgh. Since Ben was a baptized member of Rev. Mahtani's household, his baptism papers were sent to Bethel PRC with the rest of the family's. Now Ben has graduated and landed a job in the Pittsburgh area. (There are job openings in Pittsburgh for

those of you who are without work and are looking for a good job.) Ben has chosen to make Pittsburgh his home. For that reason, we have now received his membership here in our Fellowship too.

Presently, I am meeting with George and Joy Strang. They have been attending for some time now, but decided that they would like to work toward membership in our Fellowship. I mentioned in an earlier newsletter that they came to us from Covenant Orthodox Presbyterian Church. We intend to meet several times to discuss the doctrine and practices of the Protestant Reformed Churches. It is their desire as well as ours to be one in doctrine and faith. This makes for enjoyable and profitable visits.

On Sunday evening, December 20 we had our second annual Christmas program. Since our numbers are few, the program includes more than just the children of the Fellowship. The children did an excellent job giving their speeches and singing their songs. The young people also sang a number, *and* the women of the Fellowship sang for us as well. We men were very appreciative of their singing! Anna Reitsma also contributed to the program with a flute solo. It was an enjoyable evening.

I mentioned in our last newsletter that we began a Reformed doctrines class on Saturday morning with our regular visitors. That class continues with the same four in attendance. This past week Jason Bauman, the son of Keith and Peggy Bauman, also joined the class. Peggy was present too. The discussion continues to be lively and profitable. One of the visitors, John Fennell, made the comment: "There were always things that I was taught in Christianity in the past that just did not make sense to me. The truths we are studying now make sense. They all fit together." This comes as a reminder to us once again. Never ought we to become complacent, smug, or at ease in the truths of God's grace. Our lives must be one of *constant thankfulness* for the salvation given us freely in Christ. We continue to enjoy the time we spend together around God's Word.

## Contacts

Last summer I attended a conference in central Ohio called the Central Ohio Reformation Institute. While there I met a pastor of a small independent church in Ross, Ohio just north of Cincinnati. His name is Scott Price. He has been familiar with our churches for some time and appreciates our emphasis on God's particular grace. He informed me that he held his own conference every year too. He calls it the Christ-Centered Conference.

A few weeks ago he invited me to speak for his conference in May. The conference is entitled: *The Christ of Sovereign Grace*. The subjects assigned me are: "The Christ of Unconditional Election" and "The Christ of Preservation and Perseverance." I have been given approval to speak there. The conference is going to be held on May 21 and 22. If anyone is interested in attending, Scott would be thrilled to have you. You can contact me for more details.

In November I visited for a couple of hours with a Frenchman. He was on his way from France to Haiti. He made a stop in Pittsburgh to look up a friend. Scott Price told him to look me up while here. He emailed me and asked if I would visit with him. Jean-Claude Souillet is a Calvinist missionary whose labors, in the main, take him to West Africa. But he was being sent to Haiti to encourage a small group of believers there. When I asked him about Reformed churches in France, he informed me that they are few and far between. He himself is starved for fellowship with other Reformed ministers and saints. He was grateful for the time we could talk together.

I was reminded by this visit of the last days in which we live. There is indeed a famine of the hearing of God's Word. How good we have it yet as God's people and as churches. We ought not to take for granted what God has yet given to us. Since my visit with Jean-Claude we have maintained some contact via email. He has yet to hear of what has happened to the little churches where he preached while in Port-au-Prince. Remember God's people in Haiti in prayer.

This past week I met with a contact and friend, Jennifer Finley and her husband Lee, in a hospital in Canton, Ohio. Canton is a little more than two hours' driving distance from Pittsburgh. Jennifer was in the hospital for surgery. The fear was that she had ovarian cancer. The surgeon did remove a large tumor, but it was benign. We had an opportunity to read God's Word together and pray. This also gave me a good reason to visit with Lee for a couple of hours. We pray that God will continue to give Jennifer healing mercies.

And so the work continues....