

PRCA FOREIGN MISSIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES

AUGUST 2020 NEWSLETTER

Rev. D. Holstege (daniel.holstege@prca.org) – Rev. D. Kleyn (d.kleyn@prca.org) – Rev. R. Smit (smit@prca.org)

PO Box 1173 ACPO, Antipolo City, Rizal 1870, Philippines

Dear Congregations of the PRCA.

Greetings again from the Philippines. It has been quite a while since we've sent out a newsletter. The reason for this is twofold. We waited, first of all, because you were able in recent months to read and digest a good amount of information about the mission field and work here in the Philippines through the special May 2020 issue of the *Beacon Lights*. But in the second place, we waited so that we could give you updated information concerning the upcoming year of seminary instruction, especially as that (along with everything else) continues to be affected by the coronavirus quarantines here.

COVID-19 has, of course, affected us all. Our day to day lives have changed. Perhaps permanently. For us those changes began with quarantines that were put in place on March 14. And although the quarantine levels have changed from time to time, basically we have had to stay at home. We are allowed to travel outside the home for essentials, but otherwise we are for the most part homebound. The latter is especially true for the children, for the rule is that any who are 21 or under, along with any who are 60 or above (thankfully none of us has reached that ripe old age yet) are on 24 hour curfew.

These restrictions certainly provide challenges for the Holstege and Smit families, as well as for all the families in the churches who have children or elderly in them. One of those challenges was that the previous school year had to be completed from home. That kept the families extra busy, especially the missionary wives. Thankfully they (both children and parents) were able to complete the school year well.

As regards schooling, there will again be no face-to-face classes for the first half (at least) of the upcoming school year. So once again the parents will be busy supervising the education of their children. One significant help is that Irene Smit (who was unable to return to the USA this past June) will be assisting Leah Holstege with this. The Holsteiges have three young

children in school, and supervising their studies takes quite a bit more work than for older students. The plan is for Irene to supervise the twins (Kirsten and Kiley). She hopes to do so by setting up a "classroom" in the guest house at the Kleyn's residence. Irene is eager to do this and we're all thankful that the Lord enables us to help each other in these ways.

The most significant effect of the quarantines, however, has been Sunday worship. To date we have had 5 months of Sundays at home. Initially no public gatherings were allowed at all, and so we preached and/or worshiped at home. Then for a while, with a change in our quarantine level (from Enhanced Community Quarantine to General Community Quarantine), the government allowed up to a maximum of 10 persons for religious gatherings. This enabled some of the churches to hold services with a handful of their members, and thus there were a few times that a few of us could preach in a church building. But just today (August 4) the government transitioned us back to a higher level of quarantine (Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine) and thus the limit is now a maximum of 5 people for religious gatherings. Some of the churches may still meet, but for the most part we will be required to continue staying at home on Sundays for a while to come.

All three of us missionaries have regularly preached to a webcam in our studies, or else to our families in our living rooms while being recorded live for one of the churches. I know that many of our colleagues in the PRCA have done the same. That's far from normal and from how it ought to be. It can be awkward and difficult. The preacher loses and certainly misses the face-to-face contact with the people of God. And we all miss terribly the blessing of corporate worship and of the communion of the saints. But as regards the preaching, we know that God can even use the above-mentioned means for the edification and blessing of His sheep. And we know, too, that He has.

The quarantines have affected various other things, too. The annual delegation visit, which is made up of

representatives from Doon PRC and the Foreign Mission Committee and which was planned for this past March, needed to be canceled. The Holsteges planned furlough during the months of June and July needed to be canceled and rescheduled (they have received approval to come instead for a six-month furlough from the middle of December onwards, DV). The regular PRCP Classis meeting on June 12 was limited to a maximum of 10 people, thus many of the delegates (along with the three missionaries) needed to join the meeting via Zoom. The monthly delegation visits that were being made by the PRC in Bulacan to the Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Albura, Leyte have stopped for now. And our monthly visits to the churches in Negros Occidental, which visits recently began to include weekend stays in order to preach and teach in three of the churches there, have come to a sudden standstill, which could easily continue for the remainder of 2020.

But what about the seminary? The Lord willing, we will begin classes again on August 11. What's exciting about this is that the Lord has given the PRCP two more students for the ministry – a wonderful answer to prayers. As a result, we will have two students in first year (Ace Flores and Emman Jasojaso – both members of Provident PRC), and one student in second year (Jeremiah Pascual – a member of the PRC in Bulacan). Because the government has placed us on a higher level of quarantine again, we will need to teach the classes online (Skype, YouTube, Zoom). One change we recently needed to make to our schedule was to delay the start of Hebrew Grammar, due to the difficulty of teaching this subject online. The plan is to delay this for just one semester, and to teach Reformed Symbols (Creeds) instead. The three of us are therefore scheduled to teach the following:

- Rev. Holstege: Hermeneutics and OT History
- Rev. Kleyn: Reformed Symbols, Homiletics, and Church History (Reformation period)
- Rev. Smit: Dogmatics (Christology), Greek Reading, and NT Exegesis.

From a human perspective these (and many other things as well) can appear to be detrimental to the cause of Christ's kingdom and gospel. But we know that is not so, for all things are directed by Him for the sake of His church (2 Cor. 4:15). We, along with the saints here, are comforted by the knowledge that God is sovereign, Jesus Christ is King, and all things are eternally planned and directed for our good.

One other piece of news is that our wives have started a reading club. One of the motivations was the fact

that our families do not have the freedom to get together as much as before. So Leah, Tricia and Sharon have been reading through some RFPA books together (5 to 10 pages per day). This gives them opportunity to stay in touch regularly through messages as they chat together about their readings (and, of course, about sundry other things, too). Some of the ladies in the churches have also joined in reading through some of the books.

As indicated above, our families have not been able to get together as much as before. However, whenever the quarantine level allowed for up to 10 people to gather, at least two of our families at a time could have fellowship and/or join each other for Sunday worship from time to time. While we do miss the freedom of visiting, doing things together in the neighborhood, going to Faith Academy for swimming and playground activities, and just being able to be out and about more, we make the most of staying in touch and of seeing each other as much as possible. We thank the Lord for whatever He makes possible.

In light of the ongoing restrictions, and especially because of how significantly they affect our Sundays, we have learned, by the grace of God, to long more earnestly and pray more sincerely for what David often did in his life when he too was in similar circumstances and unable to be in the Lord's house on the Sabbath. The following prayers often come to mind: *"One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple"* (Psalm 27:4). *"How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God"* (Psalm 84:1-2). And also Psalm 42:1-2. To these we add the prayer that every saint, by God's grace, prays now (I trust) with added meaning and fervency: "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

We send you our Christian love and also our appreciation for your continued prayers and support for us and our families and for all the saints here. That means more to us than we can express. Be assured, too, that we keep you all in our thoughts and prayers. May God be gracious to our churches, both there and here. And may our Savior return soon to take us to Himself in eternal glory.

In Christian love,
Rev. Daniel Kleyn