

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church Ballymena, NI

16 March, 2010

Dear saints in the
Protestant Reformed Churches,

Greetings in Christ's name!

Church Visitors

Prof. Dykstra and Elder Pete Vander Schaaf were this year's church visitors to the CPRC (9-19 January). Two of Prof. Dykstra's four sermons, as well as the Bible Study he led, were on II Peter 3 and were especially well received. Mary and I took our two church visitors to Limerick, where Prof. delivered a fine lecture on dispensationalism (which included a critique of Tim LaHaye's books), but I "left behind" the handouts Prof. had prepared! (We passed them out next time we were in Limerick.)

Our two brethren from the PRC visited various CPRC members in their homes. Prof. Dykstra spoke with Francesco De Lucia about PR Seminary requirements, including Greek, for Francesco is to enter the theological school this September (DV). John McAuley took us to meet the town mayor of Ballymena in his office. The photographer from the *Ballymena Times* was present, and a picture of our group with the mayor was duly included in this paper, along with a blurb including a reference to Pete as "Professor Vander Schaaf"!

This was Prof. Dykstra's first time and Pete's second time in Northern Ireland, so we showed them various parts of the "Emerald Isle," though much of it was white with snow, for we have had an unusually cold winter. Along with trips to the Giant's Causeway and the Norman castle at Carrickfergus, Pete even joined some of the young adults for an evening's go-karting.

The visit of our two brethren from the US was of great benefit to the CPRC. The coming of the church visitors is always a highlight of our church year.

CPRC Activities

The night for our annual church dinner (8 January) was the coldest I have ever seen in Northern Ireland: -12°C or 10°F! Bad weather in the US meant delays in a connecting flight, so our two church visitors missed their trans-Atlantic flight and thereby missed the congregational dinner. Bad weather in Ireland meant that the saints from the Limerick Reformed Fellowship could not make it either. Anganeta Dyck from Germany, who was staying in Northern Ireland, was present—our only foreign guest. But those who were there, including our friends the Steeles from Londonderry, had a great night of fellowship and a fine quiz, ably organized by William Graham.

The British Reformed Fellowship's Conference Booking Secretary, Stephen Rushton from Bradford, England, joined us for a long weekend (12-15 February) and was able also to attend his first Limerick lecture.

In January and February, I preached a series of six sermons on "The Outrage at Gibeah" (Judges 19-21) at the request of one of our members who wanted this difficult and strange passage explained. A gross public sin in Israel led to a dismembered concubine being sent to the twelve tribes. Soon the whole tribe of Benjamin is put under discipline and almost wiped out. The audios and videos of the six sermons are on-line (www.cprf.co.uk/audio/OTseries.htm#gibeah), and Stephen Murray has produced a fine cover for the box sets of CDs and DVDs. Currently we are part way through an exposition of "Joash, King of Judah" (II Chron. 22-24), including his wonderful deliverance from Athaliah while a baby, his coronation as a boy of seven, and his repairing the temple.

Our Wednesday night, congregational Bible

study has been dealing of late with immensely practical matters in I Peter 4: being of a sound mind, watching unto prayer, and love's covering the multitude of sins. We had have had several visitors too from outside of the congregation brought by those who regularly attend.

Over the last few months, I have been holding membership classes with Julian and Marie Kennedy, who moved to Ballymena from the south coast of England to join the CPRC.

Various Forms of Witness

On 1 March, the CPRC opened a Facebook account providing updates on our church building, photos, sermon audios, YouTube videos, *Covenant Reformed News*, upcoming lectures, etc. Please feel free to subscribe (a link to the CPRC Facebook is in the top left corner of our main website: www.cprc.co.uk). A good number of saints from around the world, including the PRC, have signed up as “Fans” already (I wish the website designers had used another word). There is even a picture of the pope, Benedict XVI, in the “fan photo” section in the left hand column. I kid you not!

The idea of going on Facebook came through looking at the Facebook account of the Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane. Though many people use Facebook (and other forms of communication) to spread gossip or slander or pornography, it can also be used (like Christian witness via radio or books or websites) to spread the truth and promote fellowship.

Now the CPRC has three different types of websites, which complement each other. Our main website (www.cprc.co.uk) contains mainly written and audio materials. Our second website provides audio visuals (www.youtube.com/cprcni). Our third website, the CPRC Facebook, adds to the other two, because it is a better forum for news updates, personal interaction, and photos.

Speaking of the other two CPRC websites, since my last bi-monthly letter we have added 30 translations (13 Italian, 9 German, 5 Portuguese, 2 Filipino, and 1 Dutch), and we now have 107 sermons, etc., on YouTube.

Our YouTube website—and especially the

videos of the Calvinism and Charismaticism debates—is our most successful means of gaining new subscribers to the *Covenant Reformed News*. With the troubles in our church several years ago, etc., the *News* list was reduced by more than half. Only now, some eight years later, have the years that the locusts have eaten, so to speak, been restored. Excluding members of the CPRC and PRC, we post or e-mail the *News* in English to 820 addresses, some of whom receive 2 to 11 copies for handing out to others.

The *Ballymena Times*' “Paper Pulpit” printed the article I wrote for them on “God's Covenant Friendship” (www.cprf.co.uk/articles/covenant_friendship.htm). The current issue of the *English Churchman* carries a book review of *Always Reforming* (edited by Prof. Engelsma), for we had sent them a review copy.

Limerick

Since my last letter, we have had several meetings in Limerick. On Sunday, 10 January, with Prof. Dykstra preaching for the CPRC, Mary and I drove south and I led the two services for the Limerick Reformed Fellowship. The Friday after that, Prof. Dykstra lectured there (15 January), as I mentioned earlier. On 12 February, I gave a speech on “Preaching: the Voice of Christ.” By this time, the University of Limerick had started its new semester and several students were also present.

A recent open door near Limerick arose in a most circuitous, though providential, way. Pastor John Flores from the Philippines e-mailed me through our website some months ago. I referred him to the two PR missionaries in his country, Revs. D. Kleyn and Smit. Later, Rev. Kleyn e-mailed me to say that Pastor Flores has a sister, Joanne Cesar, who lives not far from Limerick and who would like a Bible Study in her home. So I phoned Joanne, and we arranged to have a Bible study for her and her Filipino friends on Ephesians 2:1-10. We had a great night with the five of them (Thursday, 11 March) and discussed many things and left them sermon series on cassettes, CDs of sermons by Seminarian McGeown on Ephesians 2, *Standard Bearers*, DVDs, pamphlets, etc.

Mary and I stayed the night at a Travelodge,

and next evening I gave a lecture in Limerick on “The Real St. Patrick” (Friday, 12 March), for St. Patrick's Day is coming up (17 March). We had a fine evening and were delighted that Chris and Joanne Cesar came with their daughter, Colleen. The fellowship after the speech was especially good, and we sold a fair number of books, CDs and DVDs.

Our holding more meetings in Limerick of late is due in large part to Martyn McGeown's nearing the completion of his studies at the PR Seminary. In a few months, we hope to have two ministers labouring in the British Isles, and signs of progress in Limerick are especially encouraging. Please join us in praying not only for the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church, but also for the Limerick Reformed Fellowship.

CPRC Church Building

The latest news on the new CPRC church building is that the concrete poured on the floors upstairs and downstairs has hardened and the external doors have been fitted. The pews, the platform at the front of the auditorium, the pulpit, the font, the psalmody boards, and the floating lectern have been ordered. Lights (inside and outside), switches, radiators, etc., have been fitted. The sewers, the main water drains, and the storm drains have been placed under the road at the church site. They are to be connected during the next few days. We are very pleased with the progress.



Alison Graham has access to a colour photocopier and she helped us with low-cost photocopies of photos of the church building that we sent out with the February issue of the *Covenant Reformed News*. The flyer also contained an advance invitation to the official opening on Thursday, 5 August, with Profs. Hanko and Engelsma taking part. We were very encouraged at the interest and positive response from the readers of the *News*, some of whom hope to attend the dedication service.



Several friends in the US have indicated that they intend to join us on this happy occasion. You are very welcome! The British Reformed Fellowship Conference in South Wales (7-14 August) starts two days after our church dedication, so why not cross the Atlantic for both (www.cprf.co.uk/articles/brfconference.htm)? At present, the US dollar is strong against the UK pound—that helps too!

May the Lord bless you and keep you, and may we all labour to spread the Word, for the night comes when no man can work (John 9:4).

In Christ,
Rev. & Mary Stewart