

PROTESTANT REFORMED FOREIGN MISSIONS

- THE PHILIPPINES -

- DECEMBER 2013 NEWSLETTER -

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Dear fellow saints,

It is expected that mission work is difficult, having trials and challenges, and our labors in the Philippines are no exception.

We have our crosses to bear as families and missionaries while we live and labor in the Philippines for the sake of the Lord's church, gathered also here. Some of the challenges include living separated by the vast Pacific Ocean from family in North America, being disconnected from the day to day struggles and joys of their lives, missing out sometimes on significant family events, and having the desire to help family members in their afflictions even though it is not possible for our helping hands to reach across the gap of that distance. There are the challenges of everyday things of life in a foreign culture, of effective communication in a foreign language and manner of communication, and of daily life in a tropical climate.

Apart from those daily challenges, to which by now we have grown accustomed somewhat, there is the care of the churches and mission groups here. There is the work of the preaching and catechism. There is the challenge of travelling to the churches and mission stations. There is the work of patient instruction of new converts to the Reformed Faith and its teachings on doctrine, worship, and church membership. There is the work, when asked, of assistance to young consistories in the labors of their own congregations or in their labors together towards a federation. With all of the work, there are joys and times of thanksgiving, as well as times of surprises, disappointments, and sadness. There are times when our work goes well, and there are times when it needs adjustment. There are times when it seems the Lord grants to our work an increase, and when the Lord does not provide such an increase that we often seek in prayer.

As such, our mission seems rather normal, even with its ups and downs. We have our crosses to bear here, just as you do in your homes where the Lord has called you to be His faithful disciples.

Undoubtedly, you have heard and seen the news broadcasts about the devastation that the Lord caused through Typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan in the island of Leyte and Samar in the Visayan region of the Philippines on November 7 and 8. The devastation also affected the

families of the Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Albuera, Leyte, which is south of Ormoc only a 15 minute drive by jeepney. The city of Ormoc is a major sea port on the western side of the island, which was not affected by the ocean storm surge that flooded and destroyed large areas of the eastern seaboard of Leyte, including Tacloban City. Although the land where our fellow saints live was spared the storm surge, yet it was stripped bare by the violent typhoon winds so that their houses were either destroyed or severely damaged.

In response, the Consistory of the First Reformed Church in Bulacan, the calling church of the mission work in Albuera, visited the saints there as soon as it was possible and safe. They visited during the week of November 17 for several days to assess the need and provide preliminary benevolent help. This benevolence was distributed with proper visits with each family by Pastor Flores and Deacon Lito Trias. In addition, work was begun on the rebuilding of the worship building of the PRFA so that they could resume Sunday worship again on November 24.

The next visit is scheduled for December 7 to 9 which will include Lord's Day preaching as well as diaconal visits to the 12 families and a number of individuals that attend the PRFA.

At this time, the First Reformed consistory reports that the benevolence needs of the PRFA families are being met. If benevolence needs are greater than what is expected and than what is being met by current benevolence giving in the FRCB as well as assistance from 2 foreign diaconates according to the benevolence protocol, then requests for assistance will be broadened to more diaconates as the short-term and long-term needs require.

We with the First Reformed Church are very thankful to the Lord for the overwhelming concern and love expressed for the families of the PRF in Albuera from many in the PRCA, CERCS, and CPRCNI. We are very humbled to see a clear example of the fact that when some of the body of Christ suffer, the other members, though separated by a gap of great distance, yet suffer with them. May God be praised by His saints and through our common concern and compassion for one another in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In addition to the December 7-9 visit, the First

Reformed Consistory has planned a second visit this month on December 28-30. If there are any significant changes in the needs of the PRF families, we will be sure that our churches will be informed, especially if the need for benevolent giving and assistance must be broadened.

A cause for recent disappointment was the delay in the organization of the Berean Protestant Reformed Church (Cubao, Metro Manila) and the First Reformed Church (Muzon, Bulacan) into a new federation. The delay was caused by a problem with the registration of the desired name of the denomination: "The Federation of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines, Inc." The consistories decided to make a second attempt to register the name of the denomination as closely as possible to the name of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America and in Northern Ireland, God willing. However, the likelihood, that the government agency will accept that name, seems slim because the initials of the desired name (PRCP) may be too close to the initials of the Philippine Red Cross (PRC). Having initials close to or the same as another organization is something prohibited by Philippine law according to a ruling by the Supreme Court. At the next meeting of the combined consistories on December 24, we will find out what name was approved by the Securities and Exchange Commission, either the first choice or one of the other choices.

A growing concern in the mission work of the Berean PRC in their work in the All of Grace Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Gabaldon, Nueva Ecija, is the lack of attendance at the mission fellowship in Gabaldon. It was expected that when Pastor Ibe began preaching there, and that when Pastor Andres also began preaching there recently, that this would help improve attendance somewhat because both are fluent in Tagalog. However, there was not much change. Another concern is the fact that usually there has been only 1 man/father in attendance. In response to this, the Berean consistory has tried a few things to spark interest in the community: a Bible study and a worship service later in the afternoons on Sundays. The consistory faces the question of how long it should continue its mission work there.

The health of Pastor Flores was a concern a few months ago in September. Pastor Flores lost his voice and was unable to preach. This was primarily due to the need to have his tonsils removed. What was a routine surgery in October, turned out to be a bit more difficult for the surgeon than expected. However, after several weeks of rest and recovery in October, Pastor Flores has resumed his full time labors again in the First Reformed congregation as well as in help with the visits to the PRF in Albuera.

First Reformed Church recently did some major repair to the roof of its church building. Now, no more does it leak during worship services and meetings when the heavy rains come. The church was very thankful for the improvement, especially because it was completed in time to be of help during part of the rainy season.

The Berean PRC has recently purchased some property and a house that will serve as a worship venue and provide a residence for Pastor Ibe and his family. This property is located on the east side of Metro Manila in a part of Antipolo which is about a 30 minute drive from where we live. When renovations to the house are completed at some time in the future, the church will begin to worship at this location, and Pastor Ibe and his family will live there.

We have begun leading a Bible Study on the Monday night that we are in Bacolod City in connection with our pastors' classes, south of Bacolod, on the 3rd Tuesday mornings and afternoons of each month. The location of the Bacolod Bible Study is on the second floor of the building which houses Lilia's Pet Shop. The owners, Mr. and Mrs. Rudy Corpus, are part of the group which have requested that we lead their Bible Study for instruction in Reformed Essentials and Reformed church government. While various exotic fish and creeping things live in their respective tanks and cages on the main floor of the pet shop, we are safely upstairs enjoying fellowship together in the Word of God according to the Reformed Faith. The group wants us to lead their worship services on January 19.

Another item of news is the continued and steady support of the Philippine Book Fund. In this past year, the fund has helped subsidize the cost of RFPA books, Bibles, and Psalters. Recently, the Fund has also covered the cost of copies for the pastors in our 7M and SNO classes of our Dogmatics, Church Order, and various lecture notes, as well as copies of complete sets of Heidelberg Catechism sermons and lessons. We and many who have benefited from the Book Fund express our hearty thanks to the churches for your generosity.

The end of another swiftly passing year is at hand. On behalf of all of the Kleyns and Smits, I wish you all a blessed time of thanksgiving for Jehovah's great faithfulness to us in our Blessed and Wonderful Saviour, Immanuel, our Lord Jesus Christ. May He continue to be your hope for the years to come.

In His service,

Rev. Richard J Smit

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