

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church Ballymena, NI

20 January, 2011

Dear saints in the
Protestant Reformed Churches,

Church Visitors

Rev. Doug Kuiper (Randolph PRC) and Elder Jim Holstege (Southeast PRC) were our church visitors this year (7-14 January). We had a blessed and busy week together.

Rev. Kuiper preached two excellent sermons in Ballymena, led a fine Bible study on Philemon and gave a powerful lecture. Elder Holstege sat in on two catechism classes and brought back the new *British Reformed Journals* for US subscribers (to save postage). Both men transported to us literature from the States in their luggage (pamphlets, Gerrit Vos devotionals, 31 copies of the new book by Herman Hoeksema, *Peace for the Troubled Heart*, etc.). Our two brethren visited various families for dinner (the Halls, the Reids, the Buchanans, and the Grahams) and brought God's Word to saints in their homes (John McAuley, Sinead Hanna, and the Callenders). We also made time to show the church visitors some historical sites and scenic areas and go on coastal and forest walks. It was a very encouraging time of fellowship for us and the CPRC!



Rev. Kuiper and Jim Holstege at the Giant's Causeway

But I should pause to elaborate on two items. First, Rev. Kuiper's speech on "Grieve Not the Spirit: Sins Against the Holy Ghost" (12 January) went especially well. This was the first lecture in our new church building and it was very well received, as was evident from the question time afterwards and the comments. People stayed around for fellowship over tea and coffee and several took pamphlets or bought books or box sets of CDs or DVDs. A lot of visitors attended—through personal witness, the article and advertisement in the *Ballymena Times* (11 January), and ads after our Reformed Witness Hour broadcast and in the *Covenant Reformed News*.

This was the first time Rev. Kuiper preached in the sanctuary of our new church building since on the previous Sunday, the CPRC Council, as he put it, "denied him the pulpit" and he had a "very cold reception!" The problem was that on Sunday (9 January), the church had run out of heating oil! The weather had been extremely cold for us in the previous month, we had the heater on to help dry out the new building further and we were caught out. So that Sunday, Rev. Kuiper preached in the balcony, which is much smaller than the sanctuary and so easier to warm using electric space heaters.

A second highlight of their visit was our annual church dinner (14 January). Almost all the congregation were able to make it, as were, of course, our two guests from the PRC, as well as Rev. McGeown and four young adults from the Limerick Reformed Fellowship (LRF), plus family and friends of the CPRC. The Leighinmohr Hotel in Ballymena laid on an excellent three-course meal and William Graham prepared a fine quiz. Six teams were formed and Rev. Kuiper was on the winning side. He was joined by the Buchanans, the Campbells, the Armstrongs, and Douglas Stewart.

It was about midnight when we left and said

farewell to one another and our church visitors. They spent the night at Rev. McGeown's parents' house and next day he drove our two American brethren to Limerick. Three of the LRF members (Jessie Li and Manuel and Emily-Kate Kuhs) spent the night at the manse before joining several young folk for some games next day before heading south in the evening.

Rev. McGeown can tell you about the time the church visitors spent in Limerick in his next letter, but the two men certainly left their mark with us anyway—literally too. A day after their departure, Mary noticed an addition to the map of the US that hangs in our pantry—the town of Randolph had been marked in Wisconsin. No prizes for guessing by whom!

New Church Members

In November, Cherith Carmichael was received as a member. Cherith's and Lee's two small boys, Taylor and Joshua, were duly baptized on 12 December.



Lee, Cherith, Taylor and Joshua Carmichael

The next week, Julian and Marie Kennedy were received as members (19 December). They had been members of Landsdowne Baptist Church in Bournemouth in England and moved to Ballymena to join the CPRC.



Julian, Marie and Joseph Kennedy

It is great to have these two families in

membership with us! These three adults joined us at the Lord's table (2 January), which had been delayed a few weeks because of the snow. Currently Anga Dyck and Jamie and Debbie Murray are in membership class; we are nearly through our study of the *Canons of Dordt*.

New Church Equipment

With our new church building up, we are gradually adding various items. A wooden cabinet has been fitted in the balcony to house the audio equipment and the CCTV equipment. A refurbished photocopier was bought for the manse and the old one is now in the council room, where the council, the Ladies Discussion Group, and others can use it.

We also now rent a franking (postal) machine from Pitney Bowes, a Connecticut-based company. This enables us to post the monthly *CR News* and our various books and pamphlets, etc., more cheaply.

Our thanks to AIM (Active in Missions), for they not only paid most of the cost in shipping two pallets of literature to us some months ago, but they also took care of a bill of over \$2,700 which we owed the Protestant Reformed Seminary (for books, pamphlets, etc.)! We are grateful to all in the PRC for the offerings for our building fund, which ceased with December, 2010. This has been a great help to us, and we thank our heavenly Father for this financial support from our sister churches in North America.

We also had a presentation for Tommy Hamill, our church building project manager, over tea and sandwiches after a Sunday evening service (2 January). Brian Crossett presented Tommy with a cheque and card as a mark of appreciation for the long hours he laboured and his superb work on our behalf and in furtherance of the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Church Activities

Having finished a six-sermon series on “Christian Discipleship” (Luke 14:25-35), I recently started a series on Ruth 1, entitled “Moving House for God's Church.” In *Heidelberg Catechism* preaching, we are about to begin the section on man's sin and misery (Lord's Days 2f.).

Rev. McGeown and I had our second pulpit swap on Sunday, 26 December to allow him to spend his first Christmas in five years with his family. It was good to see the saints in the LRF again. The following Monday morning, on our way back home, Mary and I dropped Manuel and Emily-Kate off at Dublin airport for their trip to Berlin, Germany for a few days. When we returned to the manse, we discovered that we were without water. The uncharacteristically cold weather led to many burst pipes in the Northern Ireland water system. Going three days without water, we had to resort to putting in our toilet cistern the snowman built by Anga and Jessie Li (who had stayed with us 17-20 December)!

We are now in the last half of our catechism season. In our Tuesday morning Bible study, we are discussing Antichrist in II Thessalonians 2—a big subject!

The Wednesday night classes on the *Belgic Confession* are being recorded in audio and put on-line (www.cprf.co.uk/audio/belgicconfessionclass.htm). The first thirteen classes on the first seven articles were put on twelve CDs and made into an attractive box set by Stephen Murray entitled “God and Scripture.” We now have ten CD and DVD box sets of sermons, conference speeches and classes for sale (www.cprf.co.uk/audio/boxsets.htm) and are pleased at the interest in the UK and from abroad. It is good to see a number of visitors at the *Belgic Confession*

class. On several occasions after our meeting, the saints helped by putting CPRC Bookstore stickers on hundreds of pamphlets. Many hands make light work!

Book sales are going well. More than half of the copies of Hoeksema's *Peace for the Troubled Heart* that Jim Holstege brought have been sold already, and we have not even advertised it yet in the *CR News*! Rev. McGeown's review of Prof. Engelsma's *Bound to Join* was published in the current *British Reformed Journal*, and Michael Kimmitt's review of Prof. Engelsma's *The Reformed Faith of John Calvin* was printed in the *Bible League and Quarterly*.

Translations of Protestant Reformed materials keep coming in: 1 Chinese (Jessie Li), 1 Tagalog (Pastor John Flores in the Philippines), 3 Portuguese (Nuno Pinheiro in Portugal), and 11 German (Anga Dyck).

Our thanks to all those who sent us letters, Christmas cards, and family photos. They are hanging up in our kitchen. Please take this as our response if we have not managed to reply to you personally! We appreciate the prayers and immense support of the PRC.

May the Lord be with you all in 2011!

In Christ,
Rev. & Mary Stewart