

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church Ballymena, NI

5 November, 2021

Dear saints in the
Protestant Reformed Churches,

My last letter to you was on 20 November, 2020, almost one year ago. This is the longest gap between my letters in over 20 years. This last year has been especially busy due to several factors, including the disbanding of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship (LRF) and the encouraging growth in the CPRC.

Church Activities

These are the sermon series preached in the congregation during this time: “The Departure of Jehovah’s Glory” (Ezek. 8-11), “The Lamb, Babylon and the Sickles” (Rev. 14), “Abimelech, the Bramble King” (Judg. 9), “John’s Witness of Christ’s Resurrection” (John 20-21) and (ongoing) “Solomon: Israel’s Wisest King” (I Kings 1-11). The Word of God is always rich and fresh!

There are now 22 children and young people in our four Monday evening catechism classes. Almost 20 years ago, things were very different: we had only one catechumen and she was 16 years old! It reminds me of the beautiful Old Testament prophecy concerning Jerusalem: “the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof” (Zech. 8:5).

In our Tuesday morning Bible studies on saving faith, we have treated its blessed relationships with regeneration, assurance (including the Holy Spirit as earnest and seal), works, and fruit.

Our Wednesday night eschatology classes have covered the two ages (“this age” and “the age to come”) and “the last days” (9 texts from the New Testament and 14 from the Old Testament), and we are most of the way through our discussion of the millennium in Revelation 20. The Bible’s teaching regarding its own time periods is such a helpful way to approach the last things! All of these audios are on-line (www.cprc.co.uk/belgic-confession-class).

Moving from our regular church meetings, we come to various elements in the life of the congrega-

tion. On 20 December 2020, Manuel and Emily-Kate Kuhs became members with their four children, including their youngest, Elizabeth, who was baptized that morning.

The baptism of Jonathan Crossett, the third child of David and Kristin, took place on 2 May, 2021. Jonny is our 20th baptized member.

Most of our family visitation was completed in the summer months, though a few people have not yet been visited. Our Scripture passage this year was (and is) I Corinthians 12, the justly celebrated chapter on believers living and functioning together as members of one body, the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We had warm sunny weather for our congregational barbecue at the manse (Friday, 27 August). Regulations from the civil government ruled it out last summer and Covid issues regarding large crowds meant that even this year we did not invite people outside the congregation. It was great to meet up again like this and the kids especially loved it.

On Wednesday 1 September, we held our Annual General Meeting. I gave an address on church evangelism and personal evangelism. Despite supporting the LRF in its last year or so and providing assistance to the saints who moved from Limerick to the Ballymena area, the CPRC’s income far exceeded its expenditure. We render our heartfelt thanks to our generous members and kind donors from various parts of the world, and especially to our gracious heavenly Father (Phil. 4:19).

This year’s well attended Reformation Day lecture was entitled, “Fulgentius of Ruspe, the Sixth-Century N. African Church and God’s Saving Will” (Friday, 29 October). The speech came with slides and a handout containing a timeline of Fulgentius (c.467 - c.532), as well as excellent quotes. All is available on-line (www.cprc.co.uk/sermons/fulgentius-of-ruspe-the-sixth-century-n-african-church-and-gods-saving-will).



Hailing from what is now called Tunisia, Fulgentius was the greatest North African theologian since Augustine (354-430) and much beloved by Gottschalk, the great German double predestinarian in the ninth century. Fulgentius was exiled with the other orthodox North African bishops to the Mediterranean island of Sardinia by the Arian (anti-Trinitarian) Vandals. There he acted as the spokesman for the North African church against Nestorianism (the heresy that Christ is two persons) and semi-Pelagianism (basically Arminianism in the early church). Fulgentius ably and boldly defended God's sovereign grace, rooted in unconditional election, and refuted the semi-Pelagian, Roman Catholic, Arminian and hypo-Calvinist notion that Almighty God earnestly desires to save the reprobate.

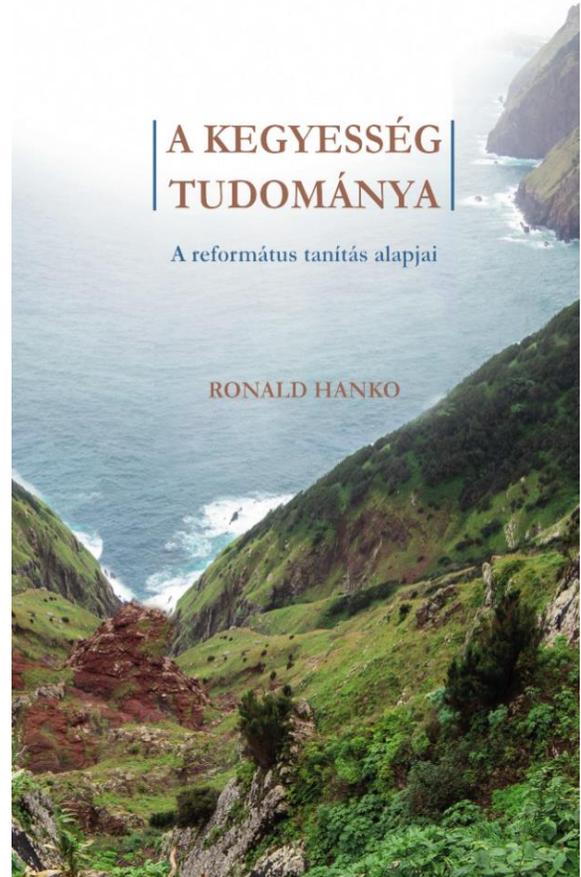
On-Line Witness

We now have 34 on-line resource pages (www.cprc.co.uk/topical-resources). These are special webpages that list articles, audios, books, *Covenant Reformed News* pieces, pamphlets, quotes, videos, etc., from our website, as well as off-site materials, that deal with important topics. The two resource pages that have recently been added deal with the *Canons of Dordt* and assurance, with the latter being produced in connection with our Tuesday morning classes.

“The Lordship of Christ and the Sovereignty of God” is the excellent subject of a Skype interview I gave for the Reformed Theology Forum (3 December, 2020). I pre-recorded a chapel speech on “Three Young Men and the Fiery Furnace” (Dan. 3:13-27) for Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, Michigan (26 March, 2021). The videos of both are on-line (www.youtube.com/user/CPRCNI).

With 35 translations in the last 11 months, Polish has seen the most growth on our website (www.cprc.co.uk/languages). Marcin in Norway and Sebastian in Poland are our main helpers. Not

only are there over 38 million people in Poland but the Polish diaspora is one of the biggest in the world. There are more people from Poland in Northern Ireland (and, indeed, in the UK as a whole) than from any other part of the world, except perhaps from the Republic of Ireland. May it please the Lord to bring some Polish-speaking people in our own land to our on-line translations and to our church!



These are the other languages in which we have seen the greatest number of additions since my last letter: 29 Spanish (from Jorge in Peru), 29 Hungarian (including from Ádám, a new translator in Budapest), 28 Russian (Viktor in Russia), 12 Macedonian (Vladimir in North Macedonia), 10 Kirundi (Elie in Burundi), and 7 Dutch (Gerben in the Netherlands).

Near the end of 2020, Bálint Vásárhelyi, with the help of several friends, sent to the press his Hungarian translation of *Doctrine According to Godliness* by Rev. Ron Hanko, our former pastor. The CPRC paid for the publication of these 500 hardback books to edify and strengthen Reformed believers in central Europe.

Others

On the 20th anniversary of my ordination, Mary and I were in Limerick for the last services of the LRF (Sunday, 4 July, 2020). After the evening meeting and with 15 people in attendance, I gave a brief presentation on the LRF—its history, people, purpose, benefits, etc.—thus bringing to an end 17 years of our witness to the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ in Limerick.

For many years, our hope and prayer for the LRF was that it would grow so as to be instituted as a church in order to form a (small) Reformed denomination with the CPRC. Judging by what transpired in God's providence, His (main) goal with the LRF was that it would be used to build up the CPRC, for now three families and one individual have moved from Limerick to the Ballymena area.

Sadly, we can only do a few things to help those who are left behind. Former members of the LRF receive the monthly *Covenant Reformed News*. Every week Stephen Murray posts free CDs and DVDs of the CPRC Sunday services to two saints in Limerick. Hopefully, some will be able to visit the CPRC or come to a British Reformed Fellowship conference. Bill Davies, an elderly Welshman, through whom the LRF started, has told me that after his death I will be contacted to conduct his funeral.

For their last few weeks on the island of Ireland, while waiting for the US visa that would enable them to move to Providence PRC in Michigan, Rev. and Larisa McGeown stayed with his parents of Cookstown, Northern Ireland and attended the CPRC. The congregation held a farewell lunch for the McGeowns at the park in Antrim, where the Six Mile Water River enters Lough Neagh (Saturday, 31 July). A presentation was made to our missionary for his 11 years of gospel service in the LRF after the evening meeting on Sunday, 1 August. Larisa received an emerald necklace (from the Emerald Isle!) and coasters with photos of places in Northern Ireland by Edna Crossett.

Near the start of 2021, Mary and I booked flights for three weeks in America in the summer. However, international travel regulations did not improve the way we had hoped. Three Covid tests per person, masking from the time one enters an airport and while on a plane, etc., left us unable to

secure pulpit supply from America, so we came very near cancelling the trip.

However, the delay with Pastor McGeown's visa meant that he would be able to preach for the CPRC at least some of the time we were away. Also we very much wanted to attend our niece's wedding in Michigan. Moreover, we had not been in Redlands PRC in California for 14 years and, with only three days of holiday last year because of Covid, we felt the need for a break. So two or three weeks before our departure date, we decided that we would go. This left us with a lot of things yet to arrange regarding our trip and things at home!

During our first week in the US, Mary and I camped in Yosemite with Dave and Joan Hanko and some of their family, and in week two we hiked in Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks. We spent two weekends in Yucaipa, staying with Brian and Jennifer Bleyenbergh, who were excellent hosts. Brian even took us to our first rodeo!

I preached at the services of Redlands PRC on 1 and 8 August, giving a PowerPoint presentation on the British Reformed Fellowship conferences and the CPRC on the evening of the first Sunday, and a lecture on a very relevant subject: "Two Men From Trier: Karl Marx (and Communism) and Caspar Olevianus (and the *Heidelberg Catechism*)" (9 August). We met with the Redlands evangelism committee, especially to discuss Spanish translations, and enjoyed fellowship over meals with several families in the congregation: Rev. and Sarah Kortus, Isaac and Libby VanBaren, Dan and Dawn Howerzyl, Brandon and Breanna Feenstra, and Wayne and Michelle Buitter. We also benefited from communing with many saints after the various meetings.

After flying from San Francisco (10 August), we had five days in W. Michigan, spending time with family and friends. At the request of Carleen Dykstra, our niece, and Keith VanOverloop, I spoke on Psalm 121 at their wedding in Trinity PRC (13 August). Like a number of others at that happy event, I caught a vomiting bug. I was fine during the Sunday morning service at Unity PRC (and while having a lovely lunch with Sid and Lisa Miedema, and Rev. and Jenn Eriks, and members of their families) but, after a few restarts, was unable to complete the afternoon sermon at Providence PRC. Thus the evening service at Grace PRC had

to be cancelled, sadly. Next morning, I was feeling considerably better, ready to pack RFPA books to bring back to the CPRC Bookstore and drive to Chicago to catch our flight.

After a very worthwhile trip, Mary and I arrived home on Tuesday 17 August, the same day on which the McGeowns flew to Michigan. Rev. McGeown's visa had been delayed further so he ended up being able to preach for the CPRC on all of the three Sundays we were away (1, 8, & 15 August)!

The hassle with Covid regulations has greatly limited the number of travellers (and book couriers) between W. Michigan and Northern Ireland, making it very difficult to obtain stock of new RFPA titles for us to sell. An anonymous donor paid for the shipping of a small pallet containing 20 copies of each of the seven most recent RFPA publications, plus many of their other fine books. With this delivery in late August of this year and the last pallet (29 June, 2020), plus over 100 box set titles in CD and/or DVD, the CPRC Bookstore has more stock than ever before!

Given that it has been cancelled both last year and this year, the 16th British Reformed Fellowship conference is surely the most anticipated conference yet! The venue is appealing: Castlewellan Castle in County Down, Northern Ireland. Profs. David Engelsma and Brian Huizinga will develop our beautiful theme of "Union With Christ" (9-16 July, 2022). More details are available on-line (www.cprc.co.uk/articles/brfconference2020) and prices will be announced around the start of 2022, DV. We hope that many of you will be able to join us for a great week of Reformed teaching and fellowship!



May the Lord bless and preserve you all.

Yours by grace,
Rev. & Mary Stewart