

Clarion

An aerial photograph of a vast landscape featuring rolling green hills. A small, calm lake is visible on the right side, and a winding road or path cuts through the hills. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

Foreign Mission Issue

What's Inside

Our special Foreign Mission issue is led with an article by a missionary who will go by the name of "Barnabas" for the safety purposes of publishing about his work in the Far East.

Besides our Treasures, New & Old meditation and a letter to the editor, we are very excited to bring our readers an issue devoted to the many foreign mission projects that our federation supports around the globe. Some may be more well-known to you than others; some have been established more recently than others. It is our hope that readers find this issue not only interesting but inspiring, and that our federation continues to find ways to support these projects with our prayers and many varied gifts

Laura Veenendaal

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Clarion

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LEAD ARTICLE



Wudalianchi

By Barnabas

Unless you are a UNESCO fan, you have probably never heard of this strange sounding place. It is located in Heilongjiang province in northern China. If you can find it on a map, you will see that it is not far from the Russian border, close to Siberia.

It is a fascinating place dotted with volcanoes. Indeed, the landscape is dominated by the sight of fourteen huge cinder cones that are really dormant volcanoes. In summer it is filled with tourists from Russia who come there to take advantage of its healing springs and numerous health spas. In winter it is cold and forbidding. It is also rather remote and far off the beaten path.

So why mention this place? Well, from time to time we who are involved in reaching out to China receive requests to relate some of our experiences. We are asked as to what it is like to promote the gospel in this foreign land? Needless to say, the stories are many and there is not time to relate them all. A choice needs to be made, and here is one of them.

A request

So, let me get on with the story. A number of years ago, the Asia Mission Board received a request from the leaders of a large group of Christians from northern China. They wanted us to come over and help them. In due time, the decision was made to respond positively to this request. (By the way, if you happen to be connected to the Chinese government and you are reading this, do not panic. Our involvement in China is not political as we do not encourage people to agitate for democracy and oppose the Communist Party. We realize that China needs a strong central government if there is to be stability and prosperity for its people. In addition, we tell those we meet and teach to be good citizens. They should honour their government, pray for their rulers, pay their taxes, and obey the laws of the land. So, we are not your enemies.)

When the time of departure came, Missionary X (henceforth, MX) and I set out. From Beijing we took the airplane north to Qiqihar, from there we went by train to Nehe, and from Nehe we made the trek to Wudalianchi. The first two legs of the journey were easy, as the planes in China are mostly new and the rail system is a marvel of modern engineering. Once we left for the final leg of the journey, however, things changed rapidly. A wide paved road ended too soon, and it was on to a narrow side road, then to a still smaller, bumpy, and winding road. As we looked out of the frosted windows of the car, all we saw was a flat and barren landscape, white with snow and devoid of vehicles and people. It felt and looked like the dead of winter. Soon the snow began to fall and the wind picked up. A mini blizzard was in the making.

At about the time that we began to get a little anxious, we crossed a ridge and suddenly all sorts of strange, large volcanic cones rising up hundreds of feet into the air came into view. It was an eerie sight. Yet civilization was not far away. A city was on the horizon.

An abandoned city

Only, it was a virtually deserted city. There were no people to be seen and no cars on the road. We drove down the main street and it was lined with large, imposing buildings. On many of them we could make out the name "sanitarium" in English. (Instantly my mind flashed back to my youth and I thought of the insane asylum that had been located behind my childhood home. Had we stumbled on a whole city devoted to the mentally ill? Later I discovered that the Chinese think the English word "sanitarium" means "spa.")

But I digress. After looking down the street, it became obvious that there was something else besides the name that was strange about these buildings. They were all locked up for the winter – no gates were open, no lights were on, no tracks could be seen in the snow, and no smoke was belching from the chimneys. Where in the world were we ever going to sleep, eat, and find shelter?

My fears were soon proven groundless as we came finally to a sanitarium that was open. Down the lane we drove and into the building we stepped. But my, was it ever hot! To this day we remember it as one of the hottest buildings we have ever been in.

Yet it was not only very hot, it was also very quiet. Soon MX and I discovered why, as we learned that we were the only guests in this huge edifice! They were keeping the heat on just for the two of us! And the same applied to the dining room adjacent to our hotel-sanitarium. It could accommodate hundreds of guests, but night after night we were the only diners. Every day we ate together under the scrutiny of an army of waiters, cooks, and onlookers. A strange feeling, indeed!

After eating and talking for some time, we made our way to our rooms. They were small, bare, and hot. The bathrooms were basic. The beds were hard. I expected that and had prepared for it and so I pulled my inflatable camping mattress out of my suitcase, opened the valve and watched it fill out. I placed it under the bed sheet. If you travel far and wide in China, you just never know on what you will be sleeping. Accommodations tend to extremes and in this place my bed consisted of a metal frame, a sheet of plywood, a bed sheet covering it and a blanket. In other words, no mattress.

Teaching and coal dust

The next morning, we were up early as usual. After breakfast, a car was waiting to take us to the meeting place. The drive was short and brought us to the outskirts of town where the houses were small and primitive. We drove down an alley and eventually we went into a farmyard with a long steel corrugated shed. Beside it was a huge pile of straw that served as fuel. Upon entering the shed, we saw that it had been converted into a large, low classroom. Desks filled the room, as did wires, pipes, straw, concrete, and dirt. All in all, it was adequate but not enticing.

Oh, and it was hot too. A pair of potbelly stoves, one at the front and the other at the back, belched out heat, fumes, and dust. Only, it was not ordinary dust. It was coal dust. At first I

did not realize it, but I soon noticed that after teaching for a day my computer keyboard was covered with soot and whenever I blew my nose the Kleenex was always black.

Still, our hosts had done their best to create a teaching site and we made the best of it. Every day we came there early in the morning and departed late in the afternoon. Every day thirty Chinese students were there to greet us with their smiles and eager anticipation. One of the real joys of teaching in China is the hunger of the students to learn. And learn they did, about Scripture and doctrine, church history and Christian conduct. All in all, it proved to be a most enriching week for students and teacher alike.

Of course, you may wonder how it all works teaching in Chinese when the teacher is not fluent in Mandarin. Well, for that I had my trusty partner MX. He and I have teamed up often over the years and developed a certain rapport. The result is that I trust him completely. He knows my teaching style and always conveys accurately what I mean. At the same time, he has a real sense of humour, so it is not unusual to hear the students burst out in laughter, and I have not even said anything funny. By now I know that that is MX spicing up my lectures and sprinkling them with one or other wonderful comical Chinese story.

Blizzard

Before we realized it the week was over, and it was time to say “farewell.” Only, there was a problem, and it had to do with the weather. A blizzard was in the forecast. The result was that the taxi we had reserved to bring us to the nearest town with a train station was a no show. The driver had decided it was too dangerous. We were stranded! But then our local friends sprang into action. They searched far and wide and finally found a brave soul who was willing to drive us.

And what a drive it was! As we left Wudalianchi, the snow was coming down steadily, but once outside the city it increased greatly, the temperature dropped, and the wind picked up. Soon visibility was down to zero. We were in a full-blown blizzard. Still, our driver was not to be deterred, kilometre after kilometre and hour after hour, he plowed on. Inside his vehicle there was little heat, and it could not keep the windows defrosted, so we had to wipe the windows constantly by hand. When we did

get the odd glimpse of the landscape, all we saw was barren and wind-swept wilderness. There was no sign of life anywhere. Would we survive? In my mind I started to think that perhaps we would not and that in due time the Canadian newspapers would report the death of two Canadians in a Chinese snowstorm.

The Lord, however, had other plans. After over five hours of blizzard driving, we finally started to see signs of civilization. We entered a town and eventually made it to the train station. Whew, what a relief and an answer to prayer!


We thanked our driver profusely, tipped him generously, and made our way to the train. New problem. The train was stuck and going nowhere. There was just too much snow for it to move. So, we hunkered down in our train compartment with its triple high bunks and waited. At least it was warm and safe.

Shovels

After several hours of waiting, we became aware of some new activity. On looking out of our train window we suddenly saw soldiers, hundreds and hundreds of soldiers. They came out of a fleet of military trucks dressed warmly in suitable winter gear and promptly lined up. For as far as the eye could see, there were soldiers. Yet, there was something different about them, for while they were armed, it was not with rifles, but with shovels. Beside the train there was this huge shovel brigade! In due time, a command rang out and these soldiers started to march forward. Another command was heard and they started to dig.

My, my, did they dig! They used their shovels to move the three metres of snow that covered the rail bed for as far as the eye could see. The result was that, after several hours, the train began to move slowly. Meanwhile, the soldiers kept right on digging. They cleared the tracks by hand kilometre after kilometre.

Safe at last

Were we ever thankful! Once again, the Lord had heard our prayers. After an eight-hour train ride, we were back in Qiqihar and civilization, relieved and refreshed. Another exciting episode in bringing the gospel to China and in helping Chinese Christians had come to a close. And so, the work goes on, one adventure after adventure. 

The Potter and His Clay

“O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done?” declares the Lord. ‘Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.’” (JEREMIAH 18:6)

There are many things that impact our lives and that shape us into who we are as unique individuals. We are shaped by the kinds of things, good or bad, that happen to us, by the decisions we make, by the company we keep, by the popular culture of today through mass media, by so many things. All these factors make us who we are.

But where does God come into the picture? Is he just one of the many influences in our life? The world thinks that life is a pot of clay, and it depends mostly on man as to what becomes of it. That is also what the nation of Israel thought just before they were sent into exile. Israel thought that they could determine their own destiny.

At the time that Jeremiah gives this prophecy, the powerful nations of Egypt and Assyria were fighting it out for supremacy. The Northern kingdom had already been driven into exile and only the Southern kingdom, Judah, was left. Judah was an insignificant nation and a mere pawn in the battle of the great nations. God’s people were at the mercy of whoever would turn out to be the most dominant power.

The great dilemma for Judah was trying to pick the winner. They wanted to be in control of their own future. And so, they played their games of diplomacy and did what they could to stay on the winning side. In so doing, they became like the other nations, thinking that they could do without God.


It is for that reason that God sent a prophet like Jeremiah to warn them of the disastrous consequences of such willful and disobedient actions. But his message fell on deaf ears. And so, the Lord has Jeremiah try a new approach. He sends Jeremiah to the pottery shop where he will give him a clear and unambiguous message to pass on.

When Jeremiah sees the potter at work, he notices that the potter is having difficulty with the clay. It did not cooperate. We are not told what the problem was. It may be that the clay was either too thick, too thin, or not kneaded enough by his assistant. Whatever the case, the potter could not make the kind of

vessel out of it as he would like. And so, he made something else, something not as intricate, but nevertheless quite useful and marketable.

As Jeremiah sees what the potter does, he realizes why the Lord God had sent him there. God is the potter; Israel is the clay. That is the message! And if the pot is spoiled, it is not the fault of the potter, but the fault of the clay. For the clay resists the hand of the potter.

That is what Israel was like, and that is what we are like as well. By nature we too want to be in control of our own destiny and have God in the picture only when we think we need him.

As we go through life many dreadful things will happen which can make us afraid and cause us to look first for earthly remedies while putting God on the back burner. But God always wants us to turn to him first. Whatever calamities and disasters we may face, the answer is always found with God. He wants us to trust him and to turn to him for help. For no matter what, our lives are in God’s loving hands, and only he can shape us into the perfect creatures he wants us to be. 

For Further Study

1. What are the kinds of worldly things that influence you the most?
2. Where does God come into the picture?
3. In what way does God work like a potter?
4. How does he shape us into perfect creatures?



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Mission in México

By **Scott and Annemarie Bredenhof**, *Lewis, Elizabeth, Pearl, Juliet*



Looking back

We first became involved in Mission in México back in 2018, when Scott was in seminary and we heard about a mission project being planned for the city of Querétaro. We were interested in both missions and in Latin America, so we sent a letter to the mission board and began to dialogue back and forth. After Scott finished his Bachelor of Theology, we travelled down to Querétaro to visit for six weeks. That visit helped us decide that this was where God was leading us and shortly after we signed a contract for a five-year term.

After packing our belongings in suitcases and tote bins, we arrived in Querétaro by plane in April of 2019. We set about finding a house to rent, a van to buy, and a language school to attend. We were helped by various people, most notably Jeremy Van Beelen and Duane Vischer, and their families, who are members of Langley Canadian Reformed Church and serving at the Pan de Vida orphanage. This was one of the reasons why



the city of Querétaro was selected as a place to begin a new mission project: there were already Canadian Reformed families in Querétaro and some familiarity from others who had come to visit on mission trips to Pan de Vida. This meant we were not coming into a situation where we would be entirely alone in a completely new setting. That decision has turned out well and especially this past year with COVID we have benefited greatly from the Pan de Vida community.

Our first year in Querétaro was dedicated to learning Spanish and adjusting to a different culture. We were very thankful to be given this time by the mission board and to not feel the pressure of having to begin ministry as soon as possible. It has also given us time to acquire a better knowledge of the area and where we could focus our efforts in the future. We still have a very long way to go with our Spanish, and in many ways it dictates what we are able to do, but that first year was very beneficial.

The plan was that after a year of language study we would do an internship and then begin to transition into full-time ministry. That plan was train-wrecked by COVID, which showed up in México around March of 2020. Everything was shut down, including Scott's Spanish school, and we found ourselves at home in lockdown wondering what to do next.

God provided a way forward when in June/July we started distributing food parcels to families and neighbourhoods in need. After the implementation of the COVID lockdown, unemployment rose considerably and we had many people coming through our neighbourhood, knocking on doors and asking for help. Through a couple of key persons, we were able to connect with people who could use the food parcels. Many communities have been hit hard by the pandemic, and while the government has provided some assistance, it's not nearly enough.

At present

We distribute food parcels several times a month, and each time we try to share a short gospel message and give out Bibles. This has led to two Bible studies which we were able to start back in November and in January. We also put together craft bags for kids and handed them out in one neighbourhood around Christmas time. Our plan is to continue the food parcels until the COVID restrictions are eased and unemployment begins to decline. We are mindful of not creating dependency and view the project as crisis relief, rather than a long-term solution. We believe God has opened some doors for us so we hope to continue to minister in some of the communities we have been to, but it remains to be seen exactly how we would be able to do that. One idea would be to do an annual Vacation Bible School or something along those lines.

For much of last year we were unable to go to Pan de Vida, since they were closed to visitors. Thankfully, back in October, Scott was able to return and begin teaching English classes again in the Pan de Vida school. Annemarie also taught sewing classes for a few months at the beginning of 2021. Through these classes we are able to get to know some of the kids at the orphanage a bit better and it is our hope that that would also open doors in the future for discipleship and support. We are also currently attending the church at Pan de Vida, which has meant that since November we have been able to attend in-person services every Sunday. Truly a blessing during these times!

At the time of writing, we are on the other side of México in the city of Tepic; about eight to nine hours drive from Querétaro. We are here for a seven week internship with Rev. Matt Van Dyken of the United Reformed Church. A church plant was begun in Tepic around twenty years ago and today there is a group of about thirty members and a good number of regular guests who attend. We have been learning a lot here and it is helpful to see both the challenges and successes of planting a church in México.

Looking forward


That brings us to the plan going forward. The long-term vision for Mission for México has always been to plant a gospel-centred, Reformed church in México. That remains the goal, and we are of the firm belief that the local church is the most effective way of ministering the gospel in a particular location. Our task

has been, and continues to be, to determine how to arrive at that end goal, and then begin working in that direction.

The COVID-19 virus has certainly presented a challenge for us as we begin this work, and this past year has been quite strange, as it has been for people across the globe. However, we also have been able to see God's blessing in it all. We are thankful that we were already in México when the pandemic started and that we did not have to return to Canada because of it. We know missionaries who either were stuck in their home country trying to get to the field, or who were on the field and had to return. We are also thankful that the pandemic started while we were finishing up language school, because it meant that there was no ministry or church that we had to try to keep going through the varying and ever-changing restrictions. God opened doors for us to minister to people and we just kept doing the next thing that was in front of us.

With all that being said, COVID still presents us with challenges going forward and there is much uncertainty. We do hope to return to Canada in the summer to see family and friends and to meet with the mission board and evaluate our next steps forward. We would like to narrow our focus to one specific area, while possibly keeping contact with people we have met through the food parcels. In addition to that, we plan to continue being involved at Pan de Vida.

We should also add that Mission in México is seeking to call and send an ordained missionary to work with us in Querétaro. If that is of interest to you and you have a heart to serve God cross-culturally, feel free to contact us or the mission board and we'd love to chat. We are obviously biased, but we think Querétaro is a good place to live and work. It is one of the safest cities in México, receives lots of sunshine, and has a lot of history and old colonial buildings. There are lots of interesting places to visit and we enjoy going on little adventures to explore the area. Plus, you really can't beat an authentic Mexican taco!

If there is anything that God has taught us during our journey to México, and especially during the COVID pandemic, it is trust. We are called to be faithful and to trust the rest to God. Looking back, we have seen that to be true countless times, even as our trust fluctuates all over the map. Looking forward, the task remains the same: be diligent and faithful in the work and leave everything to God. 

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Blog - www.therabbisburrito.wordpress.com

Mission Work in Brazil

History of our work in Brazil

The mission work that is currently being done under the supervision of the Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church is one of the oldest mission projects in the Canadian Reformed Churches. In 1970, the church of New Westminster (now Surrey Maranatha), representing the churches of Classis West, called Rev. Cornelius VanSpronsen to serve as missionary in Campo Grande in the south-eastern Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul.

The vision for the mission was to evangelize the unreached native tribes of Brazil. It soon became apparent that this initial vision was unrealistic, given the government's firm stance against religious work among native tribes. Therefore, after some searching, the VanSpronsen family relocated to São José da Coroa Grande, a coastal area south of Recife that

was largely unreached. The work began with simple outreach efforts among the locals, forming into Bible studies. Within a few months, a small group of twenty adults and twelve children were worshipping faithfully under the leadership of the missionary. The VanSpronsens were joined by John and Ardis Kuik as mission aid workers, to support the mission work with social services for the locals and to help with Sunday school, Bible classes, and support during the VanSpronsens' furloughs.

The VanSpronsens returned to Canada in 1978, and were replaced by Rev. Ralph Boersema from Calgary, Alberta. P. K. Meijer from The Netherlands was called as a second missionary to expand to Maragogi, eighteen kilometres to the south. In 1989, new work was added in the city of Recife, as some members lived there and effective outreach was started in the



suburbs. Meanwhile, four hours south of Recife, the church of Hamilton began doing mission work in the city of Maceió under the leadership of Rev. John Kroeze, which continues today under Rev. Abram DeGraaf.

In 2000, the federation of Brazilian Reformed Churches (IRB) came into being, with four instituted churches Unaí, São José, Maragogi, and Recife. By 2004, the churches represented some three hundred confessing members, and another two or three hundred baptized members, catechumens, and regular visitors.

In 2000, Rev. Kenneth Wieske arrived in Recife to replace Rev. Boersema. With the establishment of the Center for Reformed Literature in Recife, the churches there grew quickly, expanding at one point to nine congregations under one Council, and now conglomerated into two instituted churches, one in the North, and the other in the South. He was joined in 2007 by Rev. Julius VanSpronsen. Based in Recife, the missionaries preached in the

churches, disciplined believers, organized conferences, visited inquiring churches outside of the federation, and worked in the training of future office-bearers. Already during the 80s, men were being trained for office-bearers, and soon a seminary was established: the John Calvin Institute, which has now graduated several students, and currently has another five students in the four-year program.

Currently

With Rev. VanSpronsen repatriated in 2015 and Rev. Wieske in 2019, the mission work is currently led by Rev. Jim Witteveen and Mission Aid Worker Chris Boersema. I (Jonathan Chase) accepted the call this past year to work as missionary alongside Rev. Witteveen. The IRB is currently made up of nine instituted churches and ten missionary congregations in a number of different regions of the country, thirteen ministers, 690




communicant members, and 348 non-communicant members, totalling 1,038 people. By God's grace, the federation continues to grow year by year.

Over the years, the mission work in Brazil has had to evolve, especially with a movement towards the large cities and urban centres of Brazil. The metropolitan area of Recife has some 3.7 million people, and that of São Paulo, where one Brazilian missionary works, has a breathtaking 21.5 million.

It is sometimes asked why we would do mission work in a country that identifies as nearly 90% Christian (65% Roman Catholic and 22% Protestant). While these numbers might give the impression that Brazil is "evangelized," a closer inspection reveals that this "Christianity" does not run very deep. Seven of the twenty most dangerous cities in the world by murder rates are found in Brazil. On the Roman Catholic side, most are nominal Christians. On the Protestant side, most belong to one of the forms of Pentecostalism that have swept through the country, which are not only rampant with spiritual and financial abuse, but also suspiciously resemble the Afro-Brazilian spiritist religions from which much of their membership typically derives. However, this wave of Pentecostalism that has swept the

country in the last decades is leaving in its wake an innumerable multitude of churches and Christians who, now acquainted with some of the core concepts of the Christian faith, long for truly biblical preaching, a biblical view of the sovereignty, majesty, holiness, and grace of God, and faithful Christian churches in which they can be a part. The IRB, working together with faithful congregations of the Presbyterian Churches of Brazil, are thus in a unique position to work alongside these reforming churches for the greater reform of the whole country of Brazil.

Conclusion

We cannot know what the future will bring, but we believe and trust that God works through the faithful preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments. What we have seen in Brazil bears this pattern out, and it is our great joy to see believers from every corner of the country and every imaginable walk of life discovering the grace and sanctifying power of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ. We pray that God would continue to bless the relationship between the IRB and our churches here in Canada, and that together we would have the joy of seeing a rich and beautiful harvest. 

Jonathan Chase *Missionary in Brazil*
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the Reformational Study Centre

“**W**hat can we do to help those who have next to no resources?” That question, posed some years ago by a minister in our sister churches in South Africa, would in time give rise to the Reformational Study Centre (RSC). The minister, Rev. Jopie van der Linden, had developed significant health issues that forced him to give up pastoral ministry not long after entering the ministry. Now what? What good could the Lord bring out of this?

Our sister churches in South Africa have always been active in mission work. The pastors of their local black mission churches, however, had limited financial resources. That inspired the above question: “How can we, with our abundance of biblical and theological material, help?”

Thus, the Lord opened a door for Rev. van der Linden. He began to provide the pastors with digital resources for sermon preparation and for growing in their ministries. But it wasn't long before other African pastors caught wind of the work and started submitting their requests too. And these were not strictly Reformed ministers; they were of all sorts



An aerial shot of the office and physical library of the Reformational Study Centre, adjoined to the home of the general manager, Rev. Jopie van der Linden, and family.

of theological persuasions. The common denominator: all were in dire need of help in studying the Scriptures. Statistics indicate that 1.8 million ministers in Africa are underqualified for their work. Many of them would like to study the Word of God, but simply do not have the funds and resources they need. Often, they only have a Bible. The help that is needed is enormous!

In a span of one hundred years, Christianity in Africa alone (to say nothing of the rest of the world) has grown from 7.5 million Christians to 504 million. That means that the amount of converts per day is no less than 10,000! Can you imagine that?! At the very least, it's a great indicator of who wants/needs

preaching. Do you know of any seminary that can prepare seventy new pastors a day?

So yes: "What can we do?" Enter the RSC, which officially began its work in 2008, near Pretoria, with Rev. van der Linden as general manager.

Our main projects

Of the several projects that have emerged since our humble beginnings, the following four comprise the core. We divide our services into essentially two categories, private and public services.

Private services

Wherever possible, we make material publicly available through our public services. But where that is not possible, we share privately, and in accordance with copyright law. Under such law, we may make up to ten percent of a book available. To do so, however, we have to actually own the book ourselves. And so, building our physical library is very important to us!

Preaching Library: This is a library that has come to hold over 16,000 documents on specific Scripture passages. The large majority of these documents are commentary materials, to be shared with the pastors in order to help them in their sermon preparation.

Timothy Project: Using the same technology as The Preaching Library, this project offers a comprehensive library of theological resources on all topics covered in the ministry that are non-sermon related. Such resources range from theology handbooks to reference works to other books as well as articles. Currently we receive and serve upwards of 1,700 requests per month.

For the last several years, Lincoln-Vineyard CanRC has been helping to raise funds for a couple of theologians involved in this project. We deeply treasure Lincoln's help!

Public services

Christian Library: The aim of this public project (christianstudy-library.org) is to build a digital library of Reformed material for all subjects under the sun. We have organized it in such a way that the user can find the right material as quickly as possible. There are hundreds of categories that can help the user make his search very specific. And every article that is uploaded has a summary with keywords, to facilitate good searches. What kind of material is made available? All sorts! We upload material from Reformed and Presbyterian ministers; we process articles from back issues of church magazines; we make links to material from websites with Reformed material; and we provide translated and transcribed material. The Christian Library has more than 17,700 articles publicly available. Please check out this resource!

Vox Viva: This project, whose Latin name means "Living Voice," aims to supply (in multiple languages, DV) simple but comprehensive expository and application notes on all Scripture passages for the untrained preachers to make their own sermons. If you keep in mind that the Bible has over 31,000 verses, this project alone will keep us busy for the next 100 years anyway!

Quotes:

"You have the best library that I know of. I was looking for material everywhere, but nowhere did I see so much good material as what I received from you. I have worked through all the documents, and thanks to you I can now help my church in this crisis [conflicts on life after death]."

T. Tophane (Ethiopia)

"We have many challenges in our church in Iran, but God is good and he looks after his church. We had a good conference, and your articles helped me a lot for my speech. I am thankful for the Internet, so that I can have your library with me."

D. Farrokhzad (Iran)

"I am impressed with all the great articles that you have gathered. I have been using this library for three years now, and every time I ask for material on other topics, you have material ready. Thank you for how you have helped my ministry through the years!"

Z. Liao (Taiwan)

"You have been a great blessing to me and my church the past few years. Thank you that I can always come and ask for help, and then you help. I have told many other pastors from our church about your service at our yearly meeting. May the Lord make you strong through his power."

Pastor T. Sesokole (Tanzania)



Some of the theologians at the Reformatational Study Centre are here having a brainstorming session with other pastors in relation to Vox Viva, our sermon outline project.

The Reformatational Study Centre

The project's public release is expected within a couple months' time. In the meantime, trained and qualified ministers have been busy already for some time contributing notes to the project. We are very excited to see how the Lord will use this project for the young church!

Those are our main projects in a nutshell. Through the faithful labours of some twenty staff members and over ninety-five volunteers, we are currently helping over 11,000 ministers in over seventy developing countries. Praise the Lord!

My role


Since the start of 2018, I have been working for the RSC, as a "theological gatekeeper." Mainly, that means I am to ensure that what is made publicly available is Reformed. So, that applies to both the Christian Library and Vox Viva, with the majority of my time on the latter project. A large part of my work consists of editing the contributions of others to Vox Viva, yet I myself am also contributing sermon notes to the project.

Since mid-2018, I have also been fulfilling my role at the Study Centre as the missionary of Dunnville CanRC. By the gracious leading of our Lord, the awareness and support of Dunnville's mission work is growing, such that at the start of 2021, the neighbouring church of Niagara South began to support us!

Your role

I hope you see that we greatly need your help. There are still many more pastors across the world who really want to study the Word. May the Lord help us to reach them! To that end, please wrestle in prayer with us. Pray that the Lord would guide us to find more of his servants. Pray that the ministers would benefit from our labours and grow in faith and the ability to preach the pure gospel.

And, if you want to get on board with the work, there are many ways to do so. If you have an interest in translation, transcribing, IT, admin work, please reach out! We are at this time looking especially for (copy) editors, so if you have abilities in that area, we'd love to hear from you! And if you want to support us financially, that too would be welcome.

May the Lord of the church glorify himself by adding to his kingdom through the ministry of the gospel! 



Ryan Kampen *Minister*
Dunnville Canadian Reformed Church
functioning as its missionary called to work
for the Reformatational Study Centre
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Mission Among the Chinese People

By Barnabas

Let me say it upfront: this is a very hard article to write. Why? Because in part we are dealing in it with a country that is making life difficult for many Christians and that, at the same time, is monitoring the press around the world. For example, just recently an article was sent to me about a restaurant in Vancouver whose daily activities and guests were under surveillance by a foreign power. Far away in that distant country they

can tell exactly who is visiting this establishment and what is being said by the guests. Scary – right? Orwellian too.

Who was that power? We shall not say it, but I am sure that many of our readers can guess. In short, this very large country is monitoring people around the world. So, what you read below is written with the awareness that Big Brother in another country is most likely reading it too.

A whole new generation is being trained for service

In spite of that, this story needs to be told. Why? Because it is a story about the marvelous march of the gospel into many lives.

Years ago, some of our churches in Canada, together with some local sister churches in faraway Australia, began the work of bringing the gospel to those of Chinese extraction. As you may know, the Chinese, as the world's most populous people, are everywhere today. They are also known everywhere for their scholarship, especially in the maths and sciences, for their financial skills, for their commitment to hard work, and for their friendly disposition.

Church planting

In any case, a good number of them have been and are still settling in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Several of our churches in that area were keen to reach them with the gospel. They called a native Chinese-speaking man who was thoroughly educated in Reformed theology, ordained him as a minister/missionary, and charged him to plant a church. We shall call him Missionary X.

It took him a few years of hard work, but the Lord blessed his efforts, and, in due time, a group of Chinese believers gathered together every Sunday. Of course, there were disappointments and setbacks. Some people called on Missionary X often and occupied much of his time, but in the end, it became obvious that they were only using him as a means to settle down in a strange land. They were not really interested in the faith that he talked about, but only about getting ahead in Canada. Be that as it may, the Lord nevertheless blessed his work and today there is a thriving and growing Chinese congregation within our federation.

Website development

Still, church planting was not Missionary X's only task. He was also charged with setting up a website that would offer all sorts of Reformed study material in Mandarin. Naively, it was at first assumed that this would be a bilingual Chinese-English website, but over time the English was forgotten. Today it is almost entirely in Mandarin.

But, you might ask, "If we can't read it, what's in it?" First, there is a new and fresh translation of the Three Forms of Unity. The original intention was to republish the translations that were already in use; however, Missionary X soon had to report that such was impossible, seeing all of the mistakes, and even heresies, in these translations. Hence, it was back to the drawing board, and in time a new edition of the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort appeared. Added to these Reformed confessions, one can also find on this website a translation of the entire Book of Praise: creeds, psalms, hymns, prayers, forms, church order. Thereafter, one can find many sermons and articles. One can also find entire books by Bouwman, deGraaf, Meesters, Stam, Van Dam, VanDelden, Visscher, and others.

Suffice it to say, that this website is a gold mine. Every day our two very capable, full-time translators situated in Langley, BC, as well as a number of freelancers, add more and more material and upload it all on to the web for international viewing and learning.

The result is that the website receives thousands of hits every month from all over the world. There have also been many attempts to disrupt it and take it down. Surprisingly, most of these attempts are not coming from Asia, but from Turkey, where a radical Muslim group that hates all things Christian is actively attacking it.

Federation building

So, we have a local church and a local website. We also have churches, an ever-growing number of churches that are discovering the Reformed faith, that are being instructed and that are convinced that this is faith that they must embrace. At the moment, there are two groups of churches in different parts of a large unnamed land that are affiliating and organizing themselves. They meet regularly together. Only, everything needs to be done very carefully, in order that church life will not be disrupted.

As this is being written, local churches in many parts of Canada face health restrictions that limit the amount of people who can come into a church building, that insist that masks need



to be worn, that social distancing be observed, and in some cases that members not sing. Now, these are all onerous and disturbing limitations. Their arbitrariness often frustrates and angers us. Nevertheless, compared to what believers face in other parts of the world, these are, sorry to say it, mere inconveniences. Imagine living in a country where being a Christian means that you are not allowed to worship at all, not in small numbers even and certainly not making use of the Internet. Imagine that if you are caught being a Christian your boss will fire you, your apartment will be taken away, your children will be denied an education, and your church leaders will face imprisonment? The struggles of believers at home need to be considered from out of a larger framework and with growing sensitivity to what our brothers and sisters are going through in other parts of the world. When we do that, we can only give thanks for the freedoms we still have and pray that others will soon be experiencing them as well.

An online Bible college

Some years ago, Missionary X and his secretary were charged to meet with Christian leaders throughout our unnamed land and to ask them what they saw as their most pressing needs. Almost all of them said that their churches needed better training for their leaders. So, what did we do? We wanted to start a seminary there, but that would never receive the green light. So, we decided to do the next best thing, and that was to start an off-site online Bible college.

Yet, that is easier said than done. How do you do that? Who do you recruit to teach? What kind of a curriculum do you develop and what sort of courses do you offer? Well, the first thing that we did was to research what was out there. Was there perhaps an established online college somewhere with a well-rounded curriculum? As they say, there is no need to reinvent the wheel if someone else has already done so.

So, we set out on our quest and, in the process of doing so, we came across lots of good, Reformed material; however, there was no curriculum that could be considered complete or fully developed. We found a course here and a course there. At the same time, this course was set up in one way and another course was set up in a totally different way.


To make a long story short, in the end we decided that we had no alternative but to develop our own curriculum, recruit our own teachers, and develop our own templates for courses and lectures. And that is what we did! Thankfully, the Lord blessed our efforts and everything fell into place in due time.

At present we can offer to our over 100 students a complete curriculum for training church leaders with courses in Old Testament, New Testament, Doctrine, Creeds, Church History, Church Government, and Applied Theology. Each course is roughly the same length, namely fifteen lectures. Each lesson has assignments that need to be completed. Testing is done regularly.

The result is that men are graduating and going on to become church leaders: pastors, elders, and deacons. Other students are going on to play other valuable roles in church life. A whole new generation is being trained for service in God's church and kingdom.

Preaching workshops

Not so long ago we identified another area that needed help, namely preaching the Word. Unfortunately, what passes for preaching in much of the world is poor and does not feed the hearers. So, how to correct that? We decided to set up an online preaching workshop! Now, every week a teacher, a translator and six students come together and work through a Bible book. The first book selected was Philippians and the teacher and students prepared and discussed sixteen sermon outlines. At present the book of Judges has the attention of teacher and students and eleven sermon outlines have been prepared and critiqued. After a summer break the Lord's doings through Samson, that super-strong, long-haired, and romantically-naïve judge, will be on the docket.

Of course, six students do not make a lot of preachers; however, we will soon be launching another preaching workshop with another group of budding pulpiteers. Truly, the maxim remains true that the harvest is plentiful. Now if only we had more workers. May the Lord be gracious and grant that as well and may he see fit to bless these humble efforts to bring his Word to the largest people group in the world. 

Theological Assistance

for the Philippines

By Herman van Barneveld

A project of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton

.....

This yearning
is the work of the
Holy Spirit

.....

An invitation to help

Almost ten years ago, a Filipino preacher by the name of Glem Melo found an article about the Belgic Confession written by Rev. Wes Bredenhof, our former minister. Subsequent exchanges between the two resulted in Bredenhof going to the Philippines to visit Rev. Melo for two weeks. Bredenhof gave lectures on a variety of topics related to Reformed theology. He noted that there was a very great eagerness among our Filipino brothers and sisters to learn more about the Reformed faith. Many of them had been born into the Roman Catholic Church; but, understanding that much of the teachings there weren't biblical, they tried Evangelical or Pentecostal churches. The realization that many of these teachings did not align with the Scriptures either

resulted in much searching, including the search that Melo did online and allowed him to connect with Bredenhof.

On that first visit, Bredenhof noted the eagerness of church leaders, elders, and ministers to learn more about the Reformed faith. They rejoiced at the amazing amount of literature that was available to them from Reformed sources, but they wanted to be taught in a more formal way. Thus, the idea was hatched to set up a Theological Assistance for the Philippines (TAP) committee made up of members of our church in Hamilton, Ontario to organize semi-annual lectures in the Philippines, centring around the Cagayan d'Oro region. In the meantime, the Baldivis church under Rev. 'tHart had also made connections with some of the brothers in this country. They have organized lectures in the Philippines on a regular basis as well.


Guest teachers

From 2012 to 2019, our committee, besides our counterpart in Baldivis and in addition to Rev. W. Bredenhof, has been blessed to be able to send the following ministers or elders to the Philippines: Rev. J. de Gelder, Rev. R. Sikkema, Rev. J. Witteveen, Rev. J. A. Bouwers, Rev. R. Aasman, Dr. A. Witten, and Dr. J. Byl. They have lectured on topics such as God's Providence, Church History, Christianity and Science, Biblical Exegesis, the Covenant of Love, Canons of Dordt, Grace, the Pentateuch, and the Church Order. Often these men were accompanied by brothers John Langendoen and Joe Bontekoe, who helped these speakers to navigate the airports, the roads, and the culture, and to

introduce the speakers to the many contacts that had been made in the past. It helps when someone is with you who can tell you that safety is an important consideration in this country, but no, you don't have to be afraid to go to the mall; those two men with guns near the entrance are guards who are there to protect you.

One of those contacts found his way to the seminary. Brother Kim Lapiz, who joined our church in 2018, was not able to continue his studies in person at the seminary this year because of COVID travel restrictions. He is continuing his studies at the seminary online.

Blessings

Indeed, it is such a blessing to see so many Christians yearning for more scriptural knowledge. As a matter of fact, when the speakers travel from Canada to the Philippines, their suitcases are quite a bit heavier than on the return trip, due to the fact that every space in the suitcase is filled up with books on Reformed theology. While our contacts navigate the insanely busy streets of Cagayan d'Oro, they can't stop talking about Schilder's or Bavinck's writings, making for some harrowing experiences; they have to look you in the eye while they're talking of course. This yearning is the work of the Holy Spirit. He has plans for his church in the Philippines; he gathers people to himself from wherever and whenever he wills, and it is humbling to us as Canadians to play a very small part in that plan. May his Name be praised and glorified as more people embrace the Saviour. 



Digital Subscription No. 1659 - Janette Dewit

Mission Work in Timor

The proper author for a piece on the mission work occurring in Timor would obviously be Rev. Edwer Dethan himself. On Easter Sunday, however, Cyclone Seroja inflicted such damage to the area of his labour that he at the moment does not have access to the electricity needed to write up a report, let alone send it. That little challenge, though, ought not to mean that Clarion readers receive no update on what's happening in Smithville's mission field. So, here's an update from another computer - from a town that has electricity.

History

Nearly twenty years ago the church in Smithville sent Rev. Dethan to Timor with the mandate to preach the gospel to those who did

not know the Lord. Under the Lord's blessing, his first contacts soon enough led to a preaching point in the eastern suburbs of the city of Kupang and eventually to the institution of a church in the suburb of Noelbaki. In the course of years, more churches were instituted in the Kupang, Barate, and Soe areas of the island, with many (though not all) of those forming these congregations being malnourished Christians wandering without a shepherd but nominally members of the very liberal churches that had once been formed by Dutch mission work a couple of centuries ago. Rev. Dethan found himself needing to preach the gospel in multiple places to people hungry for the gospel, and soon enough needing also to prepare brothers for the offices of the church. These very rapid developments on the field led him,



with the assistance and encouragement of a couple of gifted local men (including a student from Rev. Knigge), to establish a training institute for future office bearers. This Theological College is known by the Indonesian acronym STAKRI.

Rev. Dethan's current mandate has two principle foci: he's to teach in this Seminary (he's responsible for Dogmatics and Homiletics) and he's to engage in office bearer training in the churches. Several graduates from STAKRI have entered the ministry of the Word in the churches as well as in other places on surrounding islands. A happy spinoff to STAKRI's work is that the school has also been able to train young men and women to be teachers for various schools in the congregations and beyond.

So central is the work of STAKRI that the Smithville Board of Mission put out a request for money last fall to help with an urgently needed expansion project. With deep gratitude I may report that the drive produced enough money to complete the expansion. Thank you very much!! Work on that expansion has begun – but see below....

Some years ago, the churches formed through Rev. Dethan's work saw the need to meet together with a view to mutual encouragement and assistance. Eventually two classes were

formed and three years ago the first Synod was held. The (currently) nine existing churches (plus four preaching posts) officially organized themselves as the "Reformed Churches of Indonesia – Timor," with the Indonesian acronym GGRI-T. The expressed intent was to apply to the next Synod of the GGRI (its churches are on other islands) to be received into that federation. As the GGRI already has ecclesiastical fellowship with the CanRC, such a development would connect the GGRI-T directly to our churches. Due to travel restrictions resulting from COVID, however, that next GGRI synod has not yet been held.

Two other vital aspects of the mission work in Timor should be mentioned. The one is the FM radio station connected to STAKRI, which Rev. Dethan uses together with other staff and students to bring the gospel into the wider community. Sr. Dethan had also used this tool to speak into the community on matters of hygiene and health related to COVID. In fact, when the government shut down schools due to COVID, STAKRI staff took to using the FM radio to get their lectures to the students. The other vital aspect of the mission work is the magazine ("Reformed Torch"), put together by STAKRI staff to give guidance in Christian (Reformed) thinking on the various questions



(At left) The addition to STAKRI coming along nicely.

(Above) The same addition after the cyclone came through.

that come up in daily living. This monthly is much appreciated in the churches and beyond.

Today

As mentioned, in early April Cyclone Seroja did considerable damage to numerous islands in Indonesia, with the city of Kupang scoring a direct hit. Rev. Dethan managed to get a report out to the Board of Mission, from which I'll lift some details so as to give you the latest. He wrote:

All day Saturday it rained heavily with strong gusts of wind, the weather report predicted that this rain would continue for the next couple of days. Waking up Sunday morning we were very surprised that the heavy rain had been reduced to a sprinkle and during the Church service the Sun even peeked through the clouds. We were just about to enjoy a cup of coffee and birthday donuts when our papaya tree came crashing down upon our kitchen roof. The wind had definitely picked up again and the sky looked menacing. Half an hour later it was raining more heavily than ever and the fury of the wind increased to such a degree that we started to worry about the waving palm trees in our yard.

All sorts of things from toys to furniture were flying through the air whereas water was flooding our veranda. The boys tried as much as possible to keep the water from coming into the house by sweeping it out but this proved to be a never ending battle. As they were sweeping they noticed a group of the STAKRI students huddled together in our front lawn. Turns out that a tree had come crashing down on the dormitory roof.... At this point the power had gone off as well as the cell phone connections....

In connection with the Mission work, the Dethan family also oversee an orphanage known as New Hope. Rev Dethan:


At night, the New Hope house parents had tried to connect with us for their situation was more desperate than that of ours. New Hope is located on the flat coastal land about two kilometers away from the Ocean shore. A creek runs behind the home that carries all the rainwater coming down from the mountains toward the ocean. A combination of so much rain and high waves rolling in from the Ocean is ideal ground for a flashflood, thus the Search and Rescue Team evacuated all people living on

the flat areas to grounds higher up.... Checking out the New Hope property, to our horror we saw that the girl's dormitory had come down because of a tree that had fallen over, we were so thankful that no one was in the building at that time and that all were safe in the church.

...we stopped by at STAKRI and the Reformed Sahabat FM radio station, what a devastation! STAKRI's roof had been blown off, huge trees had been uprooted and crashed into the radio station building and the station's tower having toppled, was a tangled mess. I was so disappointed to see everything ravaged and could quite well identify with how Job might have felt. Yet, I was healthy and well and a quiet assurance took over that God would take care of this.

The reference to "STAKRI's roof had been blown off" refers to the new roof that had just been installed on the addition. That's obviously a setback for the project. At the moment of this writing, we don't know what impact this has on the timetable of the work or even on whether the structure sustained any damage as the roof was torn away. Another major source of concern for the mission work is the destruction of the radio tower. It means that this tool Rev. Dethan had used for the spread of the gospel is now gone. Given how essential this tool has proven to be over the years, work will invariably need to be done to repair or replace it.

Gratitude

We in Smithville are deeply thankful for the blessings the Lord has provided on the work Rev. & sr. Dethan could do over the years in Timor. They greatly appreciate the support they receive from the churches back home. Though Smithville supports the work with the cooperation of the churches in Grassie and Lincoln, the Dethans appreciate the bond they have with all the churches across Canada. Perhaps by the time you read this, hydro has been restored to their suburb of Kupang – so that they can again receive emails, etc. The email addresses to use are: eddethan@yahoo.ca or femmy2303@yahoo.ca. 



By Clarence Bouwman *Minister*
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Mission Work in Papua New Guinea

Mission work is exciting! From cross-cultural Bible teaching in a Bible College, to dynamic preaching in a public market, to doing a pastoral visit in an impoverished neighbourhood, there is no end to the unique kinds of tasks that may be done by missionaries here in Papua New Guinea.

The tropical island nation of Papua New Guinea, with vast mountains, stunning waterfalls, and unique animals, has a population of about nine million. PNG has over 800 languages and a mostly rural population spread in small villages all over the country. It is in this country that the Canadian Reformed Churches started its mission labours when they sent Rev. Stephen 'tHart in 1998 to help do some church strengthening and planting work. This Reformed mission work in Papua New Guinea is not just supported by Canada, but also by the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. We will have a brief look at the history of the work, its current condition, and some dreams and plans for the future.

History

The first Reformed church group in PNG began back in the 1960s, when West Papuans left what is now Indonesia and came to settle in the independent country of Papua New Guinea. This small group of believers requested overseas help in establishing a Reformed church. The Free Reformed Churches of Australia answered this call for help and sent Rev. Bruning and some elders in the 1970s and 80s for short periods of time to help the church in its programs and support the work. By 1988, a church was instituted with three elders and two deacons.

Australia then called a missionary, Rev. Koelewyn (1989-1991), to assist the established church and later still they sent a teacher in br. Wes Fokkema (1994-1998). By the time Rev. Stephen 'tHart arrived in 1998, two men were ordained into the ministry and, besides the instituted church in Port Moresby, there was a small church group gathering in Lae and one in Ekor. The former was assisted by Australia, and so Canada came to assist the latter, which was only about an hour's drive from Port Moresby.

Rev. 'tHart focused his work on establishing a church plant in Ekor (today: Beretete). He taught from the catechism and helped to appoint leaders. He also assisted the instituted church in Port Moresby as much as possible, but this church was growing weaker and focusing on West Papuan freedom issues rather than the gospel of Jesus Christ. As a result, the instituted church in Port Moresby shrank considerably in number, and by 2011, when many of the members left due to land issues, only one pastor

and elder remained and the congregation was unable to function independently anymore as an instituted church.

Despite the decline of the West Papuan (Port Moresby) church, the time of Rev. 'tHart may be characterized as one of church growth and the establishment of church groups filled with Papua New Guineans (not West Papuans). In 2003, the church groups of Beregoro and Veifa'a were added. In the following year, the church group of Vanagi started up, which later became East Boroko and changed locations.

All this church growth in the Port Moresby area led to the need for more trained leadership. And so, the Reformed Churches Bible College opened its doors in 2007 with a Certificate Program to help teach the basics of the History of Salvation, Doctrine, and Church Ministries. In February 2010, the Diploma Program started in order to train ministers of the Word. At this time, while Australia continued its work in the Lae area, the Canadian Reformed Churches started to support one missionary minister and one teacher, while the Reformed Churches of New Zealand also came to assist by sending and supporting one full time missionary minister.

Current situation

Currently Australia supports two missionaries and one mission worker, who focus particularly on the Lae and Highlands areas of PNG; New Zealand supports one missionary and one Bible College campus manager; Canada supports one missionary



Resurrection weekend in Veifa'a to serve the Reformed Church group there. We had to leave our vehicle in the village and take the boat out ... the kinds of adventures missionaries get into!



An historical picture of the church of Kamkumung (the only one now instituted) in its early years in 2001. Bob Bouway (one of the first national pastors for the Reformed Churches of PNG) and his wife Ruth are furthest right. The mission workers of that time, sent out by Australia, are Justin and Karen Bolhuis.



Reformed Churches Bible College students with their wives and children

and one teacher who both work at the Bible College as well. Currently the Reformed Churches Bible College continues to operate and train church members for works of service in the churches, but is particularly focused on training ministers of the Word and church leaders.

The Reformed Churches of Papua New Guinea currently consist of one instituted church called the Living Waters Reformed Church, situated in Kamkumung, a suburb of Lae. This church has its own minister, two elders, and a deacon. The church has been served by missionaries in the past, particularly Rev. Ian Wildeboer, and has therefore had some solid teaching and preaching over the years.

The Bethel Reformed Church at Beretete (previously Ekoro) may also not be that far away from institution. It has also had missionary work done there as Rev. 'tHart served among them. This congregation supports its own minister and has a long-time elder as well as another church leader that help give leadership. One of the biggest hurdles working towards institution remains a shortage of men in the congregation.

A third church group, the Covenant Reformed Church at Nine Mile, is thriving, growing fast, and the Lord willing also not that far away from being instituted. Although in 2012 this church, consisting at the time mainly of West Papuans, was tiny and falling apart, today it is thriving and consists mainly of Papua New Guineans. It is ably led by a national pastor, a candidate elder who also studied at the Bible College, and a candidate deacon. Hopefully soon more men in the congregation can begin to help with the leadership, because there is plenty of work to do to teach and support all the people that come.

A fourth church group is situated, a three-hour drive west of Port Moresby, in a village called Veifa'a. This church group has quite a bit of Bible knowledge with many previous Bible translators in the congregation, but it lacks maturity. It is currently led by a candidate pastor, but there are currently no further leaders, and so as the missionary I am quite involved here. The congregation is small, and yet, there is great potential, because many in the community have witnessed that in the Reformed church there is biblical preaching.

A fifth church group, the Emmanuel Reformed Church at East Boroko, is situated in a settlement of Port Moresby. This fledgling church group has a church leader that is very busy with his employment and struggles to show any leadership apart from on Sundays. As missionary, I am currently helping

them, as is the leadership of the close-by Covenant Reformed Church at Nine Mile.


A sixth church group, the Logos Reformed Church at Wantun is situated in a small, isolated village in a valley three hours-drive from Lae. The congregation is led by a national pastor and a candidate elder. Although the number of people coming to church is growing, the church still has a lot of maturing to do and knowledge remains low.

Finally, in January 2021, a seventh church group started up in a highlands-village called Hila. This village is the home village of the national pastor of Nine Mile and, on his holidays, he has been busy working there. This church group has officially started worship services and its three leaders are wanting a lot more training and help in leading the few members that turn up each Sunday.

There is also a growing relationship with another federation of churches that came out of the United Church of PNG. They call themselves the United Reform Churches and are currently sending some of their ministry students to our Bible College. We can only hope and pray that the LORD will reform those churches and give them a stronger biblical foundation.

The future

Only the Lord knows the future of the work in PNG, but as a Reformed Ministries team (which consists of all the Reformed mission personnel in PNG whether from Australia, New Zealand, or Canada) we have created a Strategic Plan with a mission and vision for 2030. We are prayerfully working towards establishing five instituted churches, ten church plants, and fifteen national pastors by 2030.

Although this is an ambitious goal considering our current situation, we also believe this is possible with the blessing of the LORD. It seems we may be entering into an expansion phase again, as happened in 2003 and 2004. With outreach programs and direct church planting work, we prayerfully work towards that end. But, at the end of the day, we rest in the hands of our Faithful Father, who has privileged us to work here in Papua New Guinea and see the spiritual growth of many people. It is exciting work whether teaching at the Bible College, going on outreach tours, or leading in the churches and throughout the federation. May the LORD establish the work of our hands for his glory. 

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear editors,

I just finished reading "Mutual Encouragement in the Church" in Volume 70, Number 9.

I appreciate the very end of this letter, where we are encouraged to look out for one another. But I did not find the path to get to this last comment encouraging. I actually found it quite discouraging, and I fear the overall tone of the letter will only fuel anyone who is bitter and feeling a lack of communion and fellowship within their church or family.

We are given a story where it sounds like assumptions are being made, then a second one where the story has not been heard first-hand and we don't know the background behind the circumstances. In both circumstances we are given a statement about a father and a minister that could very likely be unfair accusations that aren't true. This is not what we are being taught in Titus 2. This passage mentions that we are not to slander, and

both these stories could be considered slander. I can't help but also add that the tone and content of the article bordered on "male bashing."

I am also concerned that Clarion has at least twice recently, that I noticed, allowed submissions that were not submitted with a name telling us who has written the submission. Newspapers don't allow submissions without names. I don't believe this is a good trend to start. When we submit letters and articles without a name, it helps us to let down our standard and so say things we may not say if our name is there for all to see. We all need accountability.

*Respectfully,
Michelle Nordeman*

Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication. Submissions can be sent to editor@clarionmagazine.ca and need to adhere to a 750-word limit.

Clarion

To equip God's people for his glory,
in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized
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