



Missions Newsletter

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Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." – Matthew 28:18-20

Greetings!

Dear Readers of the ICRC Newsletter,

Here it is: the next issue of the ICRC Newsletter. As (some of) you may know: the Dutch have a saying to this effect, "He who perseveres, wins". ("De aanhouder wint".) You may indeed have been wondering: Where is the next issue of the Newsletter? Yes, it has been a long time since the last issue of the Newsletter appeared (April of 2011). The reason? Our co-editor, the Rev. John Goris, had to deal with a great personal hardship, the loss of his beloved wife, Diane. Diane had not been feeling well for some time when she was diagnosed to have cancer. The Lord called her to her eternal home with Him in glory on February 18 after nearly three months in the hospital. It was in mid-February that John was told by the doctors that they were "virtually giving up hope". Soon thereafter the end came – a wonderful blessing for Diane, a great burden and sorrow for John and the children. It is our prayer that the Lord richly comfort you, John, with the blessed assurance that nothing can separate us from the love and care of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May He abundantly bless you and continue to use you in the service of His church and kingdom.

In this issue of the Newsletter, you will read an article about a meeting of the Asia Pacific Regional Conference which met this year at Dehradun, India as well as the first instalment of articles on the Mission work and ministry outreach of member ICRC churches as reported at a meeting of the ICRC Missions Committee with representatives of World Mission Agencies of their churches. I trust that this issue of the Newsletter will be both an informative and an enjoyable read. **RJS**

Reflections on the India Conference



It was a privilege to come to India, a land where Christianity has been known for almost 2000 years. At that time there were most likely already Jewish people living there, just as they were also in China for nearly 2500 years.

Since those early days others have come, e.g. the Moravians, William Carey, Henry Martin, Alexander Duff and Amy Carmichael, as well as native evangelists such as KP Yohanan and others.

We live in a "global" world and in a "pluralistic society", in which God's people are to shine as lights of the world.

In October 2011 some two dozen delegates came together and met in Dehradun at the PTS. We enjoyed wonderful hospitality from the PTS community and had some scenic trips to "touristy" spots in NW India. All in all, it was a good and encouraging ICRC conference for the Asia-Pacific region.

Our first speaker was the Rev Heon Soo Kim, representing the IRC of Korea. He spoke on "*The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*". In dealing with the context of the Gospel and Pluralism he researched the work of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, who lived and worked in India for many years. Newbigin was also a leading figure in the International Missionary Council. The pluralism he encountered in India was of a religious sort, while back in Europe he found a broader plurality. In presenting aspects of Newbigin's contribution, bro Kim noted especially points on the Uniqueness of Christ, the Trinity, and Missional Ecclesiology, underscoring the strengths and weaknesses of Newbigin in his presentation. The paper was very informative.

Dr Mohan Chacko, Principal of the PTS, addressed the meeting on the subject "*Persecution and Tolerance in a Pluralist Society*". He began by saying that the overall theme of the conference had great significance for our understanding and practice of mission and theology in Asia. However, religious pluralism (plurality) also continues to be a formidable enemy of biblical Christianity and Christian mission. In India, as in other Asian countries, Christians live together with those of other faiths and are confronted with the practical implications of religious pluralism. There is a pluralism which says, "all religions lead to God", while the exclusivist view is that "Jesus Christ is the only Saviour of the world". Plurality in society forces one to interact with others. This is where tolerance comes in, sometimes even to the point of syncretism. However, there is in fact a far greater current trend of intolerance, and an increase in persecution. From the Christian perspective, to preach Jesus as the One Truth by which we are saved, should at the same time make us truly humble, open and tolerant.

The third paper, presented by Dr Stewart Lauer, focused on "*Strategies of Reformed Witness in a Religiously Pluralist Society*", or more precisely, "Strategies for Reformed proclamation of Christ...". In working out an approach, Dr Lauer considered the apostolic line of proclamation, particularly that of the "apostle to the Gentiles" in Acts 14:15-17; and Acts 17:16-34. The apostle stated that God

had not left Himself without a witness. In fact, God's self-witness was rooted in His faithfulness to His promises in the Noachic Covenant (Gen 8.9), which was a covenant implicating all Noah's descendants. This basic background in Paul's preaching helps us to have a foundational starting point in Genesis (esp. Gen 1-12). We discover there the entrance of sin, and the degeneration of the human race, and God's preservation of the godly seed, ultimately leading to the further covenant with Abraham, and the promises of the Deliverer, Jesus Christ.

By the end of the conference several proposals were put forward as to the theme, time and place of the next AP Regional. The churches in Korea will be convening the Regional planned for 2014/15, DV. The theme? Perhaps: Eschatology. **JG**

Report on the Mission Work of ICRC Member Churches

The ICRC MC met in May last year at the offices of the OPC in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. Our Agenda called, among other things, for a meeting with Representatives of the World Missions Agencies of the ICRC Member Churches. A number of such Representatives were indeed in attendance at our meeting; they shared with the MC information on the Mission work done and the challenges faced by their federation in fulfilling the Mission task of the church.

It is the intention of the editors of the Newsletter to include excerpts of what was reported by each of the Representatives present at our May meeting in this and following issues of the Newsletter. It is our hope and prayer that reading this information will encourage and challenge our readers to press on with the Mission task of the Church as well as enhance the co-ordination and mutual support of Mission work in areas where two or more of the ICRC member-churches are engaged in the work of Missions.

The Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), Dr. Arjan de Visser reporting

Dr. de Visser began by giving a bit of background to the CanRC's work in foreign missions. That work was begun by local congregations sending out missionaries and those missionaries then reporting back only to their sending churches. There is now an attempt to establish a Canadian Reformed Mission Association that would provide a platform for the various sending churches and organizations to share their expertise with one another. A founding meeting for this association is planned for September 2011.

Presently the CanRC is working in three areas. The work in North Eastern Brazil boasts a forty year history. Currently there are two sending churches with three missionaries engaged in this work. They have developed a reading room and an internet training school, and are in the process of developing theological training.

There is, secondly, Mission work on-going in Papua, New Guinea where work is being conducted in Port Moresby and in Lae. This work is the joint effort of three federations, namely, the CanRC, the RCNZ and the FRC.

A third project is Mission work in China. This work was started with a Chinese graduate of the CanRC Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ont. They are working with leaders of house churches in China. Pastors and professors of the CanRC go on short-term Mission trips to help train the leadership for the church in China. They are also attempting to develop on-line training.

Additionally, there are CanRC churches working in Mexico, in South Africa and among Native North Americans. There are also churches supporting the work of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF).

Dr. de Visser also spoke briefly about some of the challenges that the CanRC churches have faced when seeking to set up programs for the training of indigenous leadership. Many questions must be asked and answered, he said, such as: How big do you start? Do you try to reach a broader group? What can you expect in terms of indigenous financial contributions? How will the indigenous church be able to take over the work? Important questions, worthy of careful reflection/answers. **RJS**

The Free Reformed Church of North America (FRCNA), Mr. Michael Laman reporting

Mr. Laman reported that the largest work of the FRCNA is located in Guatemala where they have a school and six churches. The FRCNA is working closely with the Central Presbyterian Church in Guatemala City, hoping eventually to transfer the responsibility of the outreach churches to the indigenous churches. They have a man working in Guatemala City and in Cubulco.

The work in Cubulco is among the Achi Indian people. Eight teachers are working in the public school system. This is going very well. A primary concern is to serve the Achi Indian people in their own language. To that end, a team of bilingual Achi people in Cubulco is translating the Scriptures in their own language.

The FRCNA has begun a five-year support program directed at teaching elders (obrerros). This support ministry is scaled down over a five-year period. A church (or several churches) commit to supporting a teaching elder with decreasing/scaled-down support offered by the FRCNA so that after five years the FRCNA support of that teaching elder is ended. During the five years they teach the churches to tithe – so as to enable the local church to support the teaching elder. When a church thereafter calls a teaching elder to the ministry, it has to take on the responsibility of supporting him since he will now become its pastor.

The FRCNA is also involved in the support of the Christian Medical Center in Cubulco. This medical center, actually a small hospital, provides medical

care for the people in and around Cubulco and serves as a witness to the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ. This hospital is managed by an American organization, AMG, Advancing Ministries of the Gospel.

There is a strong link between the FRCNA and the ministry of "Word and Deed". Many projects are funded by this International Reformed Relief Foundation to which the churches of the FRCNA regularly contribute.

Mr. Laman pointed to some areas of concern. The Internet poses a problem since it presents the opportunity for men to look at pornography. There have also been serious dependency issues, alcohol abuse issues, as well as control issues – that is, men thinking that the church belongs to them, therefore acting not as servants of the church but as lords over the church. The FRCNA has challenged the local leaders to teach the Ten Commandments. They are also in need of using a Church Order.

The FRCNA is confronted on the home front with challenges concerning financial support. Offerings are indeed being taken in the churches, but these are now competing with other individuals and organizations that are appealing to the churches for their support.

The FRCNA has started a foreign missions website at – <http://www.frcmissions.org> **RJS**

The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA), the Rev. Dirk Boersma reporting

The Rev. Boersma reported that the FRCSA is involved in Mission work among the Colored people of Cape Town as well as among the black people in and around Pretoria. The Dutch churches began this ministry and then turned it over to the church in South Africa. The pastors of the churches are indigenous black men. Most of the funding comes from Dutch churches located in the northern part of the Netherlands. Australian churches are supporting the work as well.

The work around Pretoria began in the 1960s. In the 1990s more churches began to be planted in the cities. The hope is that the churches will be multi-racial. They are establishing preaching points and leading them to become instituted churches. Part of the approach is to have a missionary work in a preaching station with the goal of leading it to institution. This however limits the number of preaching points to the number of missionaries available. Some are rethinking the idea of having one mission work for each missionary.

The missionary works with students and tries to keep the men on track. There is a lot of pressure on youth to join gangs. The churches have had gang violence affect the youth of their churches. Ministering to the people of the community includes encouraging the people to have a good burial policy – challenging them to consider which cultural practices should be retained and which should be avoided. The mission team proposes a ministry policy which must receive approval from the church council.

The FRCSA is working with the theological school at Mukhanyo. They also tried to have theological training for the white students who use a different language. The challenges include the fact that there are very few men involved in church attendance. Parents don't attend Sunday school. Christian school is a very difficult project because of the inability of the parents to pay for it. There are a limited number of men who are qualified to be elders.

Financial independence is also very difficult. They teach tithing and people do give, but the question is: Are the members giving appropriately? They have difficulty training people to manage the finances of the church as well as their personal finances. There is also difficulty in getting people of different races to worship and to work with each other. Then too, there is the challenge presented by the African traditional religions occasioned especially by a renaissance of African culture. At the same time, there is a growing secularism and materialism.

The work around Cape Town presents its own challenges. It is a "mixed work", a work engaged in by coloreds and whites. They are equipping people to spread the gospel by focussing on teaching courses which are designed to help the participants to reach people outside the church as it strengthens those who are within. There are many people who think that they are Christians, but question is: Do they read their Bibles and do they truly believe?

Another challenge is the radical growth of the mission work. It is a big project involving assets and missionaries; the voluntary Mission Board feels it doesn't have the ability to oversee the work. The churches planted in poor areas are looking into having one church council to oversee several works. Additionally, there is a problem presented by the supporting churches. They want to fund missionaries but not evangelism; a serious problem indeed. **RJS**

Our next issue

The Euro Regional Conference in Ukraine was held recently, and will be reported on in our next issue, along with more reports from conference in Philadelphia.

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