

Aruba and Colombia

July 6, 2017

Dear Friends,

The second half of 2017 is already upon us. How time flies! Thanks to God's traveling graces, here are a few notes about our travels from the end of November to the beginning of May.

Aruba (November 28—December 5, 2016) (written by Mary)

We enjoyed a relaxing week in Aruba; swimming, walking, talking, dining, and trying to limit our exposure to the harsh rays of the sun. Of course no vacation is complete without much reading, writing, and editing for Joel. I enjoy reading too, but he is more intense about it. We spent time with friends Dave and Gerda Vande Vrede from New Jersey. They are familiar with the island, so they guided us to places of delicious dining. We also toured the north-east side of the island, where instead of calm sandy beaches, the strong trade winds cause powerful waves to pound the rough coral and the huge rocks. The beauty of God's creation blends with its majesty and power, causing us to exclaim, "Oh Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!"

Aruba is twenty miles long and six miles wide and is situated eighteen miles off the coast of Venezuela. Tourism is the main source of income, due to the hot, dry climate and its location outside of "hurricane alley." The country doesn't produce oil but does have a refinery to process oil, so tankers wait offshore to load or unload the oil. Water comes from a desalination plant. Flooding is rare, but the people experienced that last week. Water was still sitting in low areas, since it can't be absorbed by the bedrock. Aloe grows very well in Aruba and is exported in skin care products and nutritional products. We toured Aruba Aloe Museum and Factory, which was very interesting.



With friends Dave and Gerda Vande Vrede.



The known history of Aruba dates back to 1000 A.D. when Indians paddled their canoes from Venezuela. Spain colonized Aruba for more than a century, and the Netherlands acquired it in 1636. Aruba is a constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, which means its government is independent of the Netherlands, but its ruler is King Willem-Alexander. Oranjestad is the capital. One cannot miss the Dutch influence seen in the architecture and heard in the conversation on this island. Aruban children learn Dutch, English, Spanish, and the local language Papiamentu. Aruba's population is about 104,000, of which 75 percent are a mixture of European/Amerindian/African; 15 percent are Black, and 10 percent are other ethnicities. We had interesting conversations with the people we met. Joel is great at directing conversation



Kerki Protestant Piedra Plat

to the gospel, and God is helping me to become more comfortable in contributing in a natural and heartfelt way. We pray that we leave the aroma of Christ wherever we go.

Joel preached twice on Sunday for the church where our seminary student Pieter VanderHoek interned. The morning service was in the Protestant Congregation of San Nicolaas. It was on the Canaanite woman, which is always a great sermon to help those suffering through trials. The evening service was at Kerki Protestant Piedra Plat, where Joel preached on “The Only Way to Live and Die.” He thought it didn’t go so well, but I did.

Pastor Peter Hazenoot shepherds both flocks and lives in the parsonage next to the Piedra Plat church with his wife, Madeleine, and their two small, blond

children. They served us a delicious lunch and supper. Peter is very out-going and friendly. Madeleine serves wholeheartedly at his side, though she is more shy. It was helpful that Gerda, Joel, and I could speak some Dutch.

The church has grown since the Hazenoots arrived in January. Peter feels particularly called to minister to those trapped in sex trafficking. Men lure women from Colombia and other countries by promising them work. The women arrive thinking they will be doing housekeeping, but they are enslaved as prostitutes and are required to earn money to pay back their travel and room and board. They can’t get out of debt, let alone earn money to send home. The only deliverance is when their visas run out, and they must return home. Often they are too ashamed to ask for help.

Pastor Peter reaches out to the women and to the men who come as customers, to try to break the cycle of sin and misery. It seems that nowhere does Satan slink so low as in this business. Lies, perversion, love of money, cruelty, and slavery are all elements of this evil trade which is the antithesis of God’s royal law to love our neighbor. Won’t you pray with us that God will stem this tide of evil that is growing around the world?

As we leave warm Aruba and head back to chilly Grand Rapids, via rainy Atlanta, we are rested and ready to jump back into work, thankful for our tropical vacation, and thankful too that we live in an area of four distinct seasons. And we are anxious to be home to await the imminent arrival of our grandchild, praying that everything goes well for Calvin and Laura and the little one! (Note: Edelette Wilma was born on December 19. All turned out well, and we love her immensely.)



Pastor Peter Hazenoot



With Micah Shin

Northern Wisconsin (January 6–7, 2017)

On the first Friday of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, I flew to Green Bay, Wisconsin, where I was picked up by Micah Shin, a former Korean student at PRTS, who was to be ordained that night by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as pastor of two small churches, one in Menominee and the other in Old Stockbridge. He hopes to preach in both churches each Lord’s Day.

In the afternoon, Micah drove me from my motel about a half hour to the Menominee Church (organized in 1981) on an Indian reservation. The church was larger than I anticipated and well kept—more than adequate for a congregation of ten! Most of the members have some Indian blood in them and belong to one family. (By the way, if you don’t have at least 17 percent of Indian blood in you, you



Micah Shin's ordination

are not allowed to stay overnight anywhere on the reservation. Many in the reservation view the reservation as an island or country by itself.) So, it is quite unusual to see a Korean pastor on an Indian reservation where there are no Koreans!

We then drove another half hour to Old Stockbridge (a congregation of about twenty-five souls organized in 1937), where Micah was ordained into the ministry in the evening, with about seventy-five people in attendance. Rev. John Hartley preached from Judges 15:9–15, Rev. Ivan Demaster gave a practical charge to the congregation (as an emeritus minister he had often preached for these two small churches), and I gave the personal charge to Micah from 2 Timothy 4:1–2. All three messages were 20–25 minutes in length. I also participated in

the laying on of hands with about twenty ministers and elders from the OPC. When Micah arose from his knees, I couldn't resist giving him a hug, and all of the ministers and elders followed suit! It was a great evening. Afterwards all the guests that were present from Michigan enjoyed a meal and fellowship together. Please pray for Rev. Micah Shin as he undertakes the challenging task of a double pastorate.

Burgessville and Jordan, Ontario (January 13–16, 2017)

The following week, Mary and I drove to Ontario for three purposes: first, for the ordination on Saturday afternoon of Pieter VanderHoek, another PRTS graduate, in the Heritage Reformed Church of Burgessville, Ontario, where he joins Rev. David Lipsy in pastoring a wonderful, growing flock of 500 members. Rev. Lipsy led the ordination service from 2 Thessalonians 2:11–12, speaking on what it means to be “Called to God’s Service.” Pieter then delivered his inaugural sermon from 2 Corinthians 4:5–6 on the theme, “Christ is Lord!” In speaking on behalf of PRTS, I gave the new minister ten commandments for pastors. Other speakers included Rev. Mark Kelderman on behalf of the HRC denomina-



With Pieter VanderHoek

tion; the local mayor, Mr. Martin; and Elder Neil DenDekker on behalf of the local Burgessville HRC. It was a wonderful afternoon. Pray that Pieter and his wife, Hanneke, and their children, Lois and Tirzah, may adjust well, and that this brother's ministry serves to the upbuilding of God's kingdom and the tearing down of the kingdom of Satan.

On Saturday evening we had a wonderful time celebrating my oldest brother's 70th birthday, together with 22 of 26 of his children (counting the in-laws!). It was a very special evening indeed. My brother and his wife, Miekie, have been blessed with a wonderful God-fearing family of 13 children, all of whom are happily married. They also have 55 grandchildren and many great-grandchildren. They always seem to have at least two or three, if not more children and grandchildren, who are expecting babies. There are few more beautiful things in this world than a large, truly happy Christian family who love each other and spend much of their energy in serving the Lord and His church.

On the Lord's Day, I preached twice for the Jordan, Ontario, Heritage Reformed Church; in the morning on “The Marriage of Christ and the Church in Heaven” and in the evening on “How to Build Biblical Friendships.” The sermon discussion after the morning service by the church members was excellent. One of my little 8-year-old nieces met me at the door after the evening service and handed me this note: “Please come again to my church. Thank you for praying for my Dad. And please pray for me. I am a sinner. Psalm 100:2, ‘Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing.’”

The following day, I received this email note from a girl with Down Syndrome whom we have known for years: “I loved the afternoon sermon about friendship. I have so many friends and they do treat me as a friend, but you doctor Beeke, you are my best friend in the whole world! With love, from your friend.” Is there any joy in the world like the joy of feeding God's dear ones through the Spirit-accompanied preaching of His infallible Word?

Grand Rapids (January 23, 2017)

Even though this is not part of my traveling itinerary, I cannot resist adding this note: On January 23, I had the opportunity to baptize three children, including our grandchild Edalette Wilma Beeke. I preached on Psalm 139:13–16 about how God is Lord of our life from the very moment of conception. It was a wonderful day. Pray with us, please, that Edalette may be baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Fremont, Michigan (February 3, 2017)

Late Friday afternoon, Mary and I drove up to Fremont, Michigan, to speak for the American Decency Association (ADA, led by my passionate friend, Bill Johnson, on “Needed: Genuine Prayer and Repentance.” There was a good spirit among the 100-plus attendees, which was also reflected in their avid purchasing of RHB titles afterward.

I was particularly pleased to meet Richard Johnson, who hails from my home church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Dr. Robert Johnson, a dear friend and former elder in our church (now 96 years of age), is his cousin. My father often spoke of Bert and John Johnson, office-bearers in Kalamazoo, who would be Richard’s uncles. My father was indebted spiritually particularly to Bert Johnson. What a small world this world can be!

Please pray that God will grace us with reformation and revival in every area of our lives, beginning with ourselves, our families, and our churches. Pray also for Bill Johnson and ADA since too often they face lethargic responses from both churches and citizens as they seek to address the burning moral issues of our day.

Kalamazoo, Michigan (February 5, 2017)

On the Lord’s Day morning, my dear wife and I made the 50-mile trek to Kalamazoo (my home town) to preach for one of our former students, Rev. Bill Boekestein, at Immanuel Reformed Church. It was good to serve this church again.

Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary PhD Program (February 21, 2017)

We are grateful to report that The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) Board of Commissioners has approved Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary’s PhD program, effective February 21, 2017. The seminary’s fully accredited doctorate program offers degrees in Biblical Studies and Historical Theology, focusing on the Reformation and Puritan eras. The doctorate program at Puritan provides an advanced and affordable education that promotes robust academic standards and a strong focus on Reformed experiential piety. The program uses



Faculty (Dr. Adrian Neele and Dr. Stephen Myers) and the first students of the PhD program in Historical Studies

the best of hybrid learning through traditional teaching and technology. Here is a picture with a few of the new faculty and students. For more information, visit us online at www.prts.edu/academics-aid/doctoral-program/.

Hampton, Virginia (March 3–4, 2017)

On Friday and Saturday I spoke four times on worship (Private Worship, Family Worship, Public Worship, and Heavenly Worship) for the Reformation Christian Fellowship, organized by two churches and held at Grace Baptist Church of Hampton, Virginia. The conference went well, the people seemed very teachable, and the book-buying was intense. I had the joyous privilege of staying at the home of the pastor—Rev. J. Ryan Davidson and his wife, with their four children—three redheads and one blondie!



Rev. J. Ryan Davidson and his family

After the conference, several pastors and elders and their spouses from various Reformed and Presbyterian churches met at the pastor's home where I was staying for fellowship and food. For more than two hours, I was peppered with questions about godly piety and how a Reformed church should worship God and be run. On a scale of one to ten, the fellowship and conversation was an eleven. It was great to meet new pastors and their wives and to have meaningful conversation in Christ at the very first meeting. "I believe in the communion of saints."



Greenville, South Carolina (March 13–15, 2017)

On Monday, I flew to Greenville, South Carolina, for the Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary conference. I first went to the office where Steven Lee, owner of sermonaudio.com works. There, at Steven's request, I gave a mini-sermon of encouragement from Hebrews 12:1–2 to his staff of people who work at this wonderful ministry. I also had a meeting with a potentially new donor for the seminary that went well. Afterward, Dr. Steve Pettit, president of Bob Jones University, gave

me a tour of the university, then took me out to dinner with Dr. Sam Horn, Vice President for Ministerial Advancement at BJU's seminary.

Tuesday I went to the Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary conference attended by about 400 people. Here I am with the seminary's president, Joey Pipa, my good friend for the last three decades. Dr. Pipa delivered a great address on *sola gratia* from Ephesians 2:8–10. My opening address of the conference on *sola Scriptura* did not go as well as I had hoped but I pray that the Lord will still bless all the addresses of this excellent conference.

Reformation Heritage Books was the major display of books at this conference and did very well. It was great fun for me, as always, to



With Dr. Joey Pipa

spend several hours helping people buy the best books for their needs.

I flew back early on Wednesday morning, arriving home at 11:40 a.m., just in time to give a two-hour lecture for Anthropology to my own PRTS students at noon.

Bogota, Colombia (March 28–30, 2017) (written by Mary)

The third annual Gospel Through Colombia conference took place in Bogota, the capital city of Colombia, nestled in a crater in the Andes Mountains, at an altitude of 8,800 feet. The conferences of past years, which we were able to attend as well, were held in Cartagena and Medellin. The addresses focused on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The speakers covered a variety of subjects. Burk Parsons urged young pastors to humbly soak up the wisdom of older pastors and to live like Christ. Sam Waldron spoke from Romans 4 on how we receive Christ by grace through faith. Paul Rowland emphasized the importance of adhering to Scripture. Joel gave five addresses: (1) Calvin's Piety: The Heartbeat of the Reformation, (2) God's Fatherly Sovereignty: The Marrow of the Reformation; (3)



Gospel Through Colombia conference



With a young, gifted, Venezuelan pastor

Calvin's Evangelism: The Spread of the Reformation; (4) The Puritans on Marriage and Family: The Practice of the Reformation; and (5) The Five Solas: The Outworking of the Reformation. He was pleased to have Pastor Eduardo Fergusson as his translator again. Eduardo is a humble young man who is one of the best translators Joel has ever used anywhere in the world.

The audience numbered about 700 and was comprised of ministers, some of their wives, and church workers, mostly from Colombia, but also from other South American countries. Joel was particularly pleased to meet with a young, gifted minister from Venezuela, who is the co-pastor of our Venezuelan student at PRTS. Thank the Lord that the gospel is prospering not only in Colombia but also in Venezuela at this time of great need and hardship in that country.

Joel particularly enjoyed meeting again with Dr. Neal Hegeman, a fellow speaker at the Bogota, Colombia, conference. As academic dean of Miami International Theological Seminary (MINTS), Neal supervises distance education for pastors in seventy-plus countries around the world. He travels extensively throughout Latin America, teaching classes to pastors of churches who lack a desirable level of education. Neal's father was Joel's predecessor at his first congregation in Sioux Center, Iowa, nearly four decades ago, so with their common backgrounds and common interest in training men for ministry around the world, they had lots of memories and ideas to share!

Joel also enjoyed his time with Rev. Sugel Michelen, another speaker at the Bogota, Colombia, Reformation Conference. Sugel pastors a large church in Dominican Republic. He is known as a soundly Reformed and gifted preacher throughout Spanish-speaking Latin America.



With Dr. Neal Hegeman



With Rev. Sugel Michelen

It was also good to visit with Bill Greendyk and Paul Rowland from the Trinitarian Bible Society (TBS) at the Bogota conference. Here we are, near the end of the conference, taking a short break (the only one!) at a coffee shop to buy some famous Colombian coffee. TBS does a great deal to promote sound Bible translations all around the world and is in the process of producing a new Spanish translation. The NT translation is already out and is being received well.

The same spirit of zeal and passion to learn and grow in the biblical, Reformed faith was present again this year. We can hardly wait to see what God will do with our Study Bible when it is released in Spanish. We hope to bring it into print less than a year from now. Please pray for God's abundant blessing on this endeavor.

Please pray with us for the people of Mocoa who experienced heavy rains and a landslide, killing 200 people, while we were there.



With Bill Greendyk and Paul Rowland at the coffee shop

Stuart, Florida (March 31–April 4, 2017) (written by Mary)

On Friday we flew to Florida, where Joel led a conference at Grace Presbyterian Church in Stuart. We were hosted by long-time friends Pastor Bernie van Eyk, his wife, Patricia, and their family. We had a great time with this warm and loving Christian family, sharing wonderful meals together and, after busy days at the conference, staying up until midnight each night visiting with numerous ministers and theological students and their wives.

The conference theme was “Glorifying God as a Family,” and Joel spoke on cultivating a godly marriage, biblical parenting, biblical conviction in our children, and family worship. The concluding sermon was on the marriage of Christ and His bride. We found the people attentive, hungry, warm, and responsive. It was a wonderful conference!

God has used Bernie and his family to instill a loving atmosphere in this church. A few years ago, there was an accident near the church, in which an underage driver wrecked the family car. The father came to the scene and was heartbroken. Bernie comforted the family and visited them. The family stayed in the area and is now a vital part of the church.



van Eyk family



Spring Bible Conference



With Pastor Bernie & Patricia van Eyk and Jon & April Newhouse

We also visited John and April Newhouse. John is the brother of our sister-in-law, Marie Beeke. John reminded my husband that they have known each other for fifty years. John was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer fourteen months ago. He is tired and weak from all the chemo, though his numbers are better right now. Through it all, he is living very close to the Lord. As we parted ways, he said, “This uncomfortable moment has come when we have to say good-bye, knowing we probably won’t see each other again this side of the grave. The tears are OK. I am confident of my hope in Jesus Christ.” It was a bittersweet parting. Please remember this dear couple in your prayers.

We also had a little time to relax. The van Eyks took us on a boat ride Saturday afternoon down a Florida canal and river. Joel and I spent Monday relaxing by the ocean, reading, walking, and going out to dinner. Early Tuesday morning we flew home.



Boat ride down a Florida canal and river

Orlando, Florida (April 28–29, 2017)

I flew to Florida to be the keynote speaker for the annual fund raising banquet of the Latin American Reformed Seminary (Seminario Reformado Latinoamericano)—formerly called “Gospel Through Colombia”—in Orlando, Florida to about 300 attendees. The subject given to me was “The Five *Solas* of the Reformation.”

I also spent some time with Chris Larsen who manages Ligonier Ministries in Orlando, and with Burk Parsons, R. C. Sproul’s assistant pastor.



With Chris Larsen



Attendees at LLARS annual banquet



PRTS facility and graduates

Grand Rapids, Michigan (May 5, 2017)

On Friday evening, about 450 friends gathered for PRTS’s graduation of twenty students, hailing from thirteen countries. Dr. Stephen Myers gave a Christ-centered commencement address on vision, based on Revelation 1:12–20. I gave a charge to the students on the need to excel in faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:13). Pray for our graduates as they continue their studies or return to their countries as pastors, church planters, missionaries, or professors.

In a few weeks, we hope to send you an updated letter covering our tour group’s May itinerary in Scotland and England up through the beginning of this month. Every blessing to you and your family during the summer months. May Christ become exceedingly more precious to you, and may we all increasingly run the race set before us by looking to Him (Heb. 12:1-2).

Warmly,
Pastor Joel R. Beeke



With one of our graduates from Malaysia, together with his wife, son and daughter