

## Reformation Conferences for Its 500th Anniversary

December 13, 2017

Dear Friends,

The 500th anniversary of the Reformation has come and gone. What a flurry of activity it prompted! Most of my itinerary in the last half of this year has revolved around it. Pray with me that all of the messages given, the books written, and the conferences held will bear genuine fruits of reformation, revival, and maturation of the biblical and Christian faith.

### **Grand Rapids Area, Michigan (July 23, 30, August 13, 20, 24–26)**

In four of five successive Lord's Days, I preached in United Reformed Church of Dutton, Highland Hills Baptist Church of Grand Rapids (for the first time), Covenant United Reformed Church of Byron Center, and Harvest Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Wyoming. At Highland Hills, I also did an adult class on "Is the Reformed Faith Evangelistic?"

Once again, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary hosted its annual conference at the beautiful Prince Center in Grand Rapids on August 24–26, 2017. This time the theme was "The Beauty and Glory of the Reformation" in commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The main speakers, in addition to our faculty, were Dr. Ian Hamilton (now teaching at Edinburgh Theological Seminary in Scotland), Dr. Michael Haykin (from Southern Baptist, Louisville, Kentucky), Dr. Elias Medeiros (RTS, Jackson, Mississippi), and Dr. Carl Trueman (WTS, Philadelphia). They spoke on great leaders of the faith including Augustine, Luther, Tyndale, Latimer, and Perkins. My address was "What William Perkins Teaches Us Today." Many listeners said it was one of our best conferences ever. There was a great spirit of fellowship. Nearly five hundred people attended from about twenty states and ten foreign countries.

A highlight of the PRTS Conference is always the Q&A time with speakers on the last evening. This year was no exception. It was the first time I served as moderator, so I didn't have to answer any questions myself. Book sales were brisk; they brought in about \$16,000. Pray that God will bless all the addresses, books, and fellowship to renew a spirit of genuine Reformation among us, and that He would send reformation and revival throughout the world today which so desperately needs it!

### **Sacramento, California (September 1–4)**

I began September at Immanuel Baptist Church in Sacramento, California, speaking for the third annual Sacramento Gospel Conference on "Cultivating Holiness" for about three hundred people. After speaking at a preconference session for office-bearers and their wives, I delivered eight messages in three days to avid listeners and book buyers. These messages included two sermons on the Lord's Day and a Power Point presentation on "The Importance of Sound Reformed Seminaries for Worldwide Vision"

I thoroughly enjoyed visiting with Pastor Robert Briggs and his wife at their home, as well as with his church, which is spiritually vibrant, eager to grow, full of good questions, and warm with hospitality. The only challenge was that the temperature in Sacramento was regularly over 100 degrees and at one point reached 115 degrees!

After the conference was over, I met with two of the pastors about how Puritan Reformed Seminary could assist Reformed Baptists in theological training throughout America. That resulted in follow-up meetings that are still ongoing as I write. Pray that the Lord will use these meetings for the glory of His name and the well-being of Reformed Baptist men called to ministry.



*With Pastor Robert Briggs*

## Lansing, Michigan (September 18)

Monday night Mary and I drove to Lansing, Michigan, to participate in an open forum presented by the Michigan Civil Rights Commission (MCRC) on whether or not to add “sexual orientation and gender identity” to the Elliot Larsen Civil Rights Act. More than 150 people showed up. We were only two of more than sixty people (many of whom were pastors on the one side and homosexuals and transgenders on the other) who were each given two minutes to present our case for or against the proposal. After several hours of testimony and deliberation, MCRC unanimously declined to accept the proposal, largely based on the truth of law that only the state legislature has the authority to make laws, not the MCRC.

It is hard to overstate the importance of this decision. Had the commission voted the other way, Christians and other people of faith would have been subject to legal attack for choosing to live and run their churches, seminaries, schools, and businesses consistent with their faith and conscience. This decision means that the religious liberty and rights of conscience remain safe in Michigan on this issue for now, though we can expect that the LGBT community and their ACLU allies will continue to look for ways to impose their views in Michigan in the future. We came away from the meeting with a profound conviction of the vast chasm of the two radically different worldviews that were expressed as well as of the great need for speaking up on scriptural grounds on occasions like this. God was pleased to bless the efforts of less than a hundred Christians who attended this meeting. We felt grateful for a Christian upbringing but also felt burdened for the souls of the homosexual community and by extension for America. What need people in our country have today for repentance, reformation, and revival!

## Kentucky and Wyoming (September 28 – October 3—written by Mary)

Traveling all day with Joel was a special way to spend my birthday on September 28. We flew to Cincinnati, where we were picked up by Ryan Elliot, one of the founders of the Reforming Families Conference, along with Pastor Geoff Banister. Held at the Creation Museum in its fifth year, the theme was “Finding Joy in a Gloomy World.” Joel spoke on “Believers’ Comprehensive Joy in the Psalms.” The other speakers were Ken Ham, Todd Friel, David Murray, and Armen Thomassian. We had an RHB book table set up. The conference was attended by many homeschooled families, which is always a joy.

We had an opportunity to evangelize our taxi driver at 7:00 the next morning. He and his wife had their first child when they were fourteen years old. They married at age nineteen, had six children, and now at thirty-four years of age they have two grandchildren. He admitted they should go to church more. We strongly encouraged him to avail himself of the means of grace, emphasizing God’s invitation to sinners. I gave him one of my hubby’s books on various aspects of the Christian life.

Next we went to Trinity Bible Church in Powell, Wyoming, which was holding its first Yellowstone Reformation Conference. The theme was “Ever Reforming.” We met many loving, down-to-earth people. Pastor Don Thomas started the church twenty-two years ago. The other church leaders were Doug Siggins, retired from the National Guard (he does counseling for church members and local folks as a form of outreach), and Tim Feathers, a retired police chief who preaches and helps out the congregation in many ways. Joel spoke on God’s fatherly sovereignty, the Puritans on marriage and family, Calvin’s piety, and Calvin’s evan-



*With two pastors from Trinity Bible Church*



*With Pastor Rick Anderson, his wife, and friends*

gelism. The other main speaker, Pastor Rick Anderson from Oxnard, California, spoke on the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, and the five solas of the Reformation. A number of people said they learned so much about what the Reformers and Puritans taught, as well as how they now admire and love their teachings. One person said she would never have come to the conference if she had known it was on Calvinism, because some “Calvinists” had hurt her and her loved ones. But by learning about the true beliefs of Calvin and how they align with Scripture, she realized the people who had claimed to be Reformed were acting out of sinful, human motives. With

tears she told us that her entire attitude to the Reformed faith had been turned around during this conference. If book buying was any indication (nine and-a-half out of ten boxes shipped in advance were sold), the conference attendees were hungry to learn more.

On Sunday, Joel preached “How Am I Justified Before God? A Personal Charge” in the morning, and then gave a PowerPoint address for an adult class on “The Importance of Sound Reformed Seminaries for Worldwide Vision.” In the evening, Pastor Anderson preached “How am I Sanctified—A Personal Charge.” It was a wonderful day, in which the amazing grace of the triune God inspired us to go out and live the Christian life. What a fitting send-off!

A couple years ago, Trinity moved from its little church building to the public elementary school that they acquired for \$200,000. At the time, Wyoming oil money devoted to education was used to tear down old schools and build new ones. After seeing a few perfectly useful buildings demolished, the townspeople demanded that the last remaining school be offered for sale. Trinity Bible Church was the only bidder. The congregation transformed four classrooms into a beautiful wood and stone sanctuary, then partitioned off the playground and sold it to a housing developer. Four classrooms are now rented by a small Christian school, and the rest of the space, including four classrooms, two kitchens, a gym, and various offices are used by the church.



*David and Joanna Marquis*

view of Eagle’s Nest Creek feeding into the Shoshone River, aspen trees turning yellow, and the foothills of the Rockies.

Monday we went to Yellowstone Park. Our main goal was to find the place where fifty years ago, at fourteen years of age, Joel was on a camping trip with his brother Jim and Tom Moerdyk. He wanted to find God on that trip. They were at Mammoth Hot Springs campground and had to leave it to travel many miles that day. They couldn’t find their keys. They looked everywhere. Jim and Tom went into the woods to find a stick to pry the trunk open, as that was the only place they hadn’t checked. Joel went into the tent, fell on his knees, and cried out to God for His help. Suddenly he felt something hard under his knee. Lifting up the sleeping bag, where they had looked before, he found the keys. This small providence was a big turning point in his life. God became genuinely real for him. He was deeply convicted of his sins and cried out for mercy. When he arrived back home, he had to part with his friends. He read every book in his dad’s bookcase. After about fifteen months, Rev. Arie Elshout’s words to Joel’s grandpa, “For you too there is a possibility of escape in Christ Jesus,” went straight to Joel’s heart, and he was delivered from his sins. About a year later the Lord called him to the ministry. Thus began Joel’s journey with God.



*In the campground where the Lord converted me as a teenager*

We stayed in the basement apartment of Dave and Joanna Marquis. Christian hospitality doesn’t get any better than this. We had an awesome



*In David and Joanna’s backyard*

The campground was still there and unchanged since 1939, we were told! We told the ranger the story, and she directed us to the tent area. Joel’s memories came flooding back. We both prayed at a picnic table to thank God for half a century of grace, setting up an Ebenezer stone, as it were, saying, “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us!” It was wonderful for me to see this spot. I thank God for all He has used Joel to spread the gospel and to train ministers to do the same. This was definitely the highlight of the trip.



*In Yellowstone after a snowfall*



*Old Faithful*

Tim Feathers led us on a daytrip with others from the conference. Snow the night before made our ride over Dead Indian Pass a winter wonderland. On lower elevations we saw steamy hot springs, including Old Faithful, the Upper Falls from Artist Point, and many other breath-taking vistas. We saw antelope, bison, a coyote, elk, deer, and a grizzly bear.



*Artist Point*

The handiwork of our Creator was evident everywhere, from the trickling streams to the towering mountains. How can anyone deny His existence?

In my exuberance to see as much as possible, I overestimated how much time we had and underestimated how lousy my hubby was feeling. The sun had set as we headed out of the park over Sylvan Pass. It was very dark, though the moonlight helped. I knew that on the other side of the railing a few feet to our right was a deep drop-off. Mountains were huge shadows looming all around. Parts of the road were slushy and the temperature was 26 degrees. Smarter people were off the roads by that time; we were alone. I was relieved to finally reach the park exit. A cozy restaurant invited us to stop. But as we stepped



*Bison in Yellowstone*

outside, I saw two snowflakes and knew that we had to get out of the mountains quickly. Joel took the wheel and maneuvered down the windy roads, in and out of snow squalls. I was scared; he wasn't. Finally we reached lower elevations and higher temps. City lights were never so welcome. Even an overdone hamburger at Dairy Queen tasted good. God had answered our prayers! Upon reflection I resolved to be more considerate of my husband's physical well-being and to listen to his advice not to drive in the mountains at night. The same God who made the beautiful daytime scenery also made the daunting nighttime scenery. We must trust Him to lead us wherever we go.

### **Wyoming, Michigan (October 8, 2017)**

I preached for Harvest Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the morning on how Christ meets all our needs from Luke 22:31-32.

### **Glasgow, Scotland (October 9-11, 2017)**

I gave five addresses in Glasgow, Scotland, on October 10-11: three to the newly established Puritan Reformed Ministerial



*With the board of Puritan Reformed Fellowship*



*With Isaac Guerrero and his new bride*

Fellowship (Puritan Worship, Puritan Preaching, and Puritan Evangelism), and two at the Scottish Reformation Society Conference (one on why the Reformation is still important and the other on its covenantal and experiential piety).

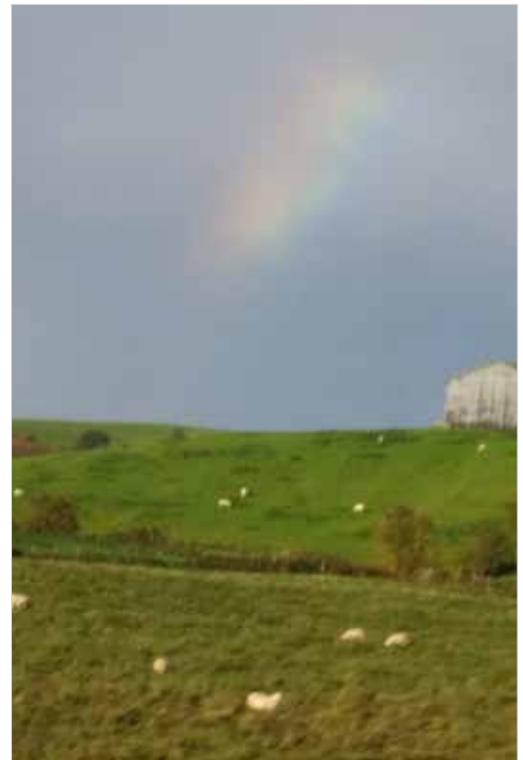
It was good to meet several ministerial friends as well as make new ones. One highlight was meeting Isaac Guerrero and his bride from Chile. Pastor Guerrero told me how he has been influenced by my writings, particularly by one of my articles translated into Spanish on the life and spirituality of John Brown of Haddington. That article motivated him to write a Master's degree thesis on Brown's covenant views. He promised to send me a copy of his work when it is complete. I find it moving, humbling, and thrilling when young men from other cultures are motivated by what I have written and then take it further. This is also one of the great joys of seminary teaching. I pray often that my students will far outdo me in their preaching, pastoring, and study, as well as in godliness.

### **Newcastle, England (October 12–14)**

After giving my addresses for the Puritan Reformed and Scottish Reformation Society conferences in Glasgow, I enjoyed a delicious noon meal with a godly Scottish businessman who is eager to promote the re-publication and distribution of sound Reformed, Puritan-type literature in English and Spanish. Then I traveled by train to Newcastle in northern England. The train ride was often beautiful, overlooking the sea. As we left the station, it stopped raining, the sun came out, and I saw a beautiful rainbow from the train (the picture doesn't do it justice), with sheep in the foreground. God's creation is amazing and His promises will ever stand! Will you and I seek grace to live by those promises again today? Surely that is the best way to truly live, for His promises are the life-giving, life-transforming, and life-fulfilling gospel itself!



*County Hotel in Newcastle, England*





*With Dr. Bill Schweitzer, Dr. Jon Payne, Dr. Kevin Bidwell, and Dr. Geoff Thomas*

Over the next two days at a small conference of a hundred people, I gave three addresses on Calvin: lessons from his life, his preaching, and his evangelism. Other conference speakers were my good friends: Geoff Thomas, Ian Hamilton, and Jon Payne, as well as new friends, Bill Schweitzer and Kevin Bidwell. The venue for the conference was the County Hotel, a stunning, historic facility that was used as a church from the twelfth century until recently. Though the building was beautiful, I always get a sickening feeling to see such beautiful buildings used for non-church purposes, which is all too common throughout the United Kingdom and continental Europe.

I enjoyed speaking with Colin, who set up a great display of books from the Evangelical Book Shop in Belfast, Ireland.

### **Grand Rapids, Michigan (October 16–17)**

We hosted the Association of Reformed Theological Seminaries (ARTS) for two days at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary this year. ARTS is an accrediting agency for conservative Reformed seminaries that adhere to the Reformed confessions (Three Forms of Unity and/or Westminster Standards). The seminaries help each other improve by enhancing and policing each other. About a dozen seminaries belong to ARTS; the largest of which are PRTS and Greenville Presbyterian Seminary, which are charter members of the association.

### **Ontario, Canada, and Ridgecrest, North Carolina (October 20–27—written mostly by Mary)**

We went to several conferences (eleven for Joel and seven for me) celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation over a three-week period, with some regular conferences in between. Our first stop was Ontario. On Saturday, Joel led a Free Reformed (FRC) men's breakfast in Brantford, speaking on how men should lead their families. He spoke three times on child rearing in a Reformed church in Woodstock, and then returned to the Brantford Living Waters United Reformed (URC) to speak on the Puritan view of marriage and child rearing. Seven times is the most he has ever spoken in one day! He was grateful for Ed Laman, who chauffeured him around, and the Lord's grace in sustaining him during the long day. Meanwhile, I spoke on kindness to a URC women's conference near Brantford, at a cozy retreat center in the woods.



*Family Living conference in Woodstock*



*With Kim and Jan Hamstra*

We stayed at Kim and Jan Hamstra's house. Jan (van't Hof) is a childhood classmate and friend of mine. Right now the Hamstras are between houses, so they are living in Kim's parents' basement granny flat, which looks out on the beautiful Grand River. That became our haven of rest. We could not have been treated better. The spiritual fellowship was good, too.

On Sunday, Joel preached twice in the Brantford, Ontario, Free Reformed Church on how Jesus meets all our needs and on family worship. The consistory was visibly affected, feeling the weight of responsibility for leading their families. Several of the men broke down in tears. It was good to be there, even though our emotions were mixed as Brantford rejoiced over Rev. David VanBrugge accepting its call, while we also grieve about his leaving our Grand Rapids Heritage Reformed Congregation. We are willing to bow under God's will, however. In the afternoon, Joel preached in St. George FRC on Philippians 1:21, feeling God's help in a unique way. It was a very good Lord's Day.

On Monday, we visited with Joel's brother and sister, John and Mieke Beeke, in St. Catherines. We took them out to lunch to commemorate their fiftieth anniversary. What precious friends they are to us, and what a wonderful, God-fearing, large family they have: thirteen children (all happily married!), fifty-four grandchildren, and several great-grandchildren! After meeting with seminary friends in the afternoon, we drove three hours to Goderich, Ontario, where we stayed at the home of our good friends Ralph and Margaret Buffinga in Clinton. The dark, rainy drive through the countryside was made drearier by the news of the son of a URC pastor's son who was killed in a motorcycle accident. We are thankful he was a believer.

On Tuesday we went to Goderich to attend a minister's retreat at the rustic Ben Miller Inn. The hearty fellowship and exuberant singing lifted our spirits to dwell on God's care and provision, though the mood was somber. The conference was attended by seventy URC and Canadian Reformed pastors and their wives. Joel spoke on "Embracing the Ministry's Paradoxes," "Practical Lessons from the Lives of John and Idelette Calvin," and "Coping with Criticism in the Ministry." I spoke on "Little Ones and Little Things." We had a great time and made several new friends.



*Mary speaking at a URC/Canadian Reformed conference*



*United Reformed and Canadian Reformed pastors and their wives*

Unfortunately, we couldn't stay long enough to relax. We headed to Detroit on Wednesday, where I dropped Joel off to fly to North Carolina to speak at the NCFIC Conference (see below). Then I drove back to John and Mieke's and went to a bridal shower. (The next three paragraphs are written by Joel.)

I spent Thursday speaking for the NCFIC Reformation conference on repentance to about 1,100 people. I was interviewed about next year's theme on the glory of Christ, then participated in a group of ministers who had preached their way through 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, a few verses at a time. I also helped sell books at our RHB booth. On the way to the conference, our book manager, Steve Renkema (pictured on the right below, together with my good friend Pastor Rob Ventura, and a Spanish translator for the messages), felt the brakes on his truck failing as he traveled down the highway. He managed to coast to the side of the highway and gradually came to a full stop without any injury—thanks be to God! The repairs cost \$1,400. At the conference, a dear brother gave RHB a check of \$1,400, saying, "I am so grateful for RHB's presence at this conference every year that I want to pay for your repairs."



*A family of seven children at our RHB book table*



*Steve Renkema (right) together with Pastor Rob Ventura (center) and a Spanish translator*

Many families at the NCFIC conference are quite remarkable. It is not unusual to meet families with ten or more children. This year I met a family with sixteen children. I particularly enjoyed meeting a “smaller” family of seven children at our book table (see picture on previous page). What a sweet family they are, and how the children love to read good books. I slipped one of the boys an extra copy of a book. He was incredibly grateful.

I got up at 3:30 a.m. on Friday to take the early morning flight from Asheville to Toronto, where Mary picked me up around noon. That evening I spoke to nearly a thousand people for the Reformation Rally at Redeemer College. Afterwards, hundreds of people went to the book tables, buying nearly \$5,000 worth of Reformed literature. (Now, back to Mary’s writing.)



*Speaking for the Reformation Rally at Redeemer College*



*Reformation Rally at Redeemer College*

At the Reformation Rally, we enjoyed the beautiful singing of well-known Reformation tunes led by the skilled Mrs. Reita Julien on the pipe organ. Joel spoke on “Ten Reasons to Celebrate the Reformation’s 500th Birthday,” stressing the urgent need for reformation today. We can’t simply observe history, but with God’s blessing, we must prayerfully strive for the same reformation in our day by returning to Scripture, gospel preaching, experiential piety, Christian freedom in society, Christian work and family, but most of all, true worship of God. Reformed Book Services provided a book table. The *Family Worship Bible Guide* was a big seller tonight and throughout this past week; many people talked about how their families have been blessed doing family worship. Pray that more families and churches will be brought closer to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Late Friday evening we returned to the Hamstra home. Their precious ten-year-old grandson (pictured here with my husband) who lost an eye due to cancer when he was young, loves the Lord and loves to read good Reformed books. After we came home from the Reformation Rally in Hamilton on Friday night, the boy stayed up until midnight as we visited with our hosts and talked about God and His goodness. The boy wants to read our new two-volume set of expositional sermons on



*A ten-year-old reading VanderGroe!*

the Heidelberg Catechism by Theodorus VanderGroe (1705–1784), freshly translated into English, so Joel showed him the best way to do that. What a joy it is to see a ten-year-old reading VanderGroe!

On Saturday, I had to say good-bye to Joel as I drove home and he flew out of Toronto to do conferences in California and Thailand.



*Pastor Glenn Gerdes*

### **Ripon, California (October 28–29)**

I felt God’s grace as I preached at a conservative CRC church in Ripon, California, on the Lord’s Day, October 29. I first spoke to about a hundred adults in a church school class on family worship. Afterward the church gave a copy of my “Family Worship” book to each couple that attended. Pictured here is Pastor Glenn Gerdes, who became a new friend over the weekend, standing behind the “Family Worship” book table. He has been the pastor here for ten years, serving the flock faithfully and humbly.

Next, I preached a Reformation sermon on justification by faith alone to the church of about five hundred people. Afterward, we visited with many people. I had a



*With a God-fearing family in Ripon*



*With another family, earnestly desirous to serve the Lord*



*With an old retired pastor and Pastor Glenn Gerdes*

wonderful time speaking to the family pictured here after church on Sunday morning in Ripon, California, particularly as the mother shared with tears and deep conviction how God has used my preaching and books to bless the family. Then she introduced me to her husband who is a voracious reader of the Puritans. What an encouragement this couple was to me!

On Sunday afternoon, I enjoyed great fellowship and a delicious meal at the home of Mark and Deb VanGroningen, together with several of the church office-bearers and their spouses. The VanGroningens have a large almond and walnut farm.

In the evening, four or five churches met together. I preached for them on how comprehensive biblical piety was the heartbeat of the Reformation.

### **Bangkok, Thailand (October 30–November 3)**

Early Monday morning I flew from San Francisco to Bangkok, Thailand, via China, and arrived in time to speak for a conference of 425 “underground” Chinese house-church pastors and church workers who had flown from mainland China to Bangkok to attend. The conference was simply called, “Commemorating the 500th Anniversary of Reformation.” I gave two addresses: “Biblical Piety, the Heartbeat of the Reformation: A Case Study of John Calvin” and “Practical Applications for Chinese Churches from Calvin’s Evangelism.” I also gave



*View from my motel room in Bangkok*



*Signing Family Worship (Chinese version)*

a summary of PRTS, provided a ten-minute response to a paper given by Dr. Jonathon Wu, titled “God’s Face Alone: Toward a Reformation with Chinese Characteristics,” and participated in a meeting with seminary presidents and professors on how to improve seminary training in China.

Here I am signing (see picture) the last copies of my new family worship book in Chinese at the conference in Bangkok. I brought 250 copies with me on the plane so each couple at the conference could receive their own copy. There is a great need for material on family worship

in Chinese Reformed churches. Please pray that God will bless His church in China through family worship.

And here I am with Rev. Mark Kelderman, our dean of spiritual formation at PRTS, and Alan, one of our Chinese students at PRTS, as we are about to leave the conference in Bangkok, Thailand, to fly back to the United States. These men were a great help to me in our days here at the Chinese conference. Please pray that God's blessing may continue to rest upon the Chinese believers after our departure and that our addresses, meetings, and work here may reap God-honoring fruit.



*With Pastor Mark Kelderman and Alan*

### **Boise, Idaho, Brazil (November 3–5—written by Mary)**

On November 3, I flew from Grand Rapids to Boise, Idaho, and Joel flew into Boise from Bangkok. He was three hours late because of snow in Seattle. As I waited I bought a cup of coffee. I asked the young man waiting on me if he was named after the Isaiah of the Bible.

“Yes, but it’s kind of ironic because I’m an atheist,” he said.

I asked him why. “Well my mom is a Christian, and my Uncle Matt is a ‘pasture’ but I just don’t see enough evidence to believe that there is a God.”

I said, “Just look in the mirror!”

“Yeah, I’m ugly.”

“No! You are fearfully and wonderfully made!”

He didn’t accept any of my lines of reasoning though he was friendly. I finally said, “Just please pray, ‘God, if you are real, just show me.’ And if you ever are in trouble, go to God for help.”

Due to Joel’s late arrival in Boise, we walked into the conference just as Dr. Steven Myers (my husband’s colleague at PRTS) was beginning to speak on lessons from the life of Martin Luther. Six URC churches combined efforts to put on the Reformation Boise Conference. A local radio station aggressively promoted it, yet the conference leaders were surprised to have 700 people attend! A number of folks were of Dutch descent; many have moved here to the high desert from California to escape crowding and high cost of living. Joel spoke that evening on lessons from the life of John Calvin. On Saturday, Dr. Myers and Joel spoke on the five *solas* of the Reformation.

People were excited as they discussed what they were learning. A Jewish man came because he was intrigued by the word “Reformed,” which he thinks of as a type of Jew. His wife is Christian, so he has read the New Testament and discussed it with her, but he is still very Jewish, though open to learning. He told us the Jews focus on the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, and the Psalms. That explains, in part, their neglect of the prophecies and their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

People bought nearly \$7,000 worth of books at the conference; we sold every book that we shipped in twenty boxes and took a few dozen back orders as well. I was pleasantly surprised to meet a former sixth grade student of mine, Jason Cooke. It was fun reminiscing and meeting his family. It was also a joy to stay with Pastor Russ and Laura Herman. Joel performed their wedding twenty-three years ago, and Russ is a PRTS alumnus. Laura’s parents were also visiting: Dr. Cornie and Ardith Bleeker, friends and members of Joel’s first congregation in Sioux Center, Iowa. On Sunday, Joel preached on



*With Pastor Russ and Laura Herman*



*With a Jewish friend*

“Christ Maturing Our Faith” in Cloverdale URC, which Russ pastors. In the three years he has been there, the church has grown from 175 to 225. In the evening service, Joel preached on “Enduring to the End.” That service was combined with other area churches, so the sanctuary was full (nearly 400 attendees) and fellowship afterward was lively.

**Manaus, Brazil (November 6–8—written by Mary)**



*Eating out with Dr. Solano and Betty Portela and the Silva family*

We traveled on Monday from early morning to past midnight: Boise to Phoenix to Miami to Manaus, Brazil, a large city in the Amazon jungle. That meant eleven hours of flying and lots of airport and napping time. Francisco Silva and his seventeen-year-old son Afonso met us and took us to their home. Francisco lived in the interior of Brazil as a boy, but he and his family moved to Manaus because of a drought. Like most Brazilians, they were Roman Catholic, but as an adult he became disillusioned with that church. He and his wife, Maria, tried different churches, including Pentecostal. But one day they drove by *Igreja Presbiteriana Cidade Nova* and decided to check it out. Even though they had friends in the other church, Francisco, “as head of my house,” decided to stay. The couple has been there ever since. They started a business with a tiny grocery store, and now they have expanded to three large ones. He is a “get the job done now” type of person.

Pastor Jaime Marcelino leads the church and the conference (their 18th annual one) that attracts about 350 people. We did this conference

in 2013, along with Dr. Elias and Fokjelina Medeiros. We hit it off, so Pastor Jaime persuaded us to come again this year. Unfortunately, Fokjelina wasn’t feeling well and wasn’t able to come. The theme was “The Gracious Family of God,” focusing on how the family can learn from the Reformation’s emphasis on the covenant of grace. Joel spoke four times on “Encouraging the Family by God’s Covenant”: (1) “Abraham’s Calling to a New Life with His Family” (Gen. 12:1–3), (2) “God Covenanting with Abraham and His Seed” (Gen. 15:17–18a), (3) “Leading Our Families, Like Abraham, as God’s Prophets” (Gen. 18:19), and (4) “Leading Our



*With conference speakers Elias Medeiros, Jaime Marcelino, Solano Portela, and Tarcizio Carvalho*



*With my able translator, Dr. Solano Portela*

Children, Like Abraham, as God’s Priests and Kings” (Job 1:1–5; Eph. 6:4). I spoke to the women on “The Godly Wife” from Titus 2. Beside Jaime, Elias, and me, the other speakers were Solano Portela and Tarcizio Carvalho.

Joel’s interpreter was Solano Portela, and mine was his wife, Betty, who is a Dutch-Canadian and whose maiden name is Zeckveld. We enjoyed getting closer to this couple. Solano is in charge of developing Christian curricula for MacKenzie schools. He is a businessman but has always been an enthusiastic supporter of Christian education. Betty is involved in ministering to women and writing.

**Curitiba, Brazil (November 9–13—written by Mary)**

On Friday morning, we headed to the airport at 3:30 a.m., arriving at 3:50 a.m. for our 4:45 flight to Curitiba, in southern Brazil. But there was a problem; the flight had left one hour earlier (just a few minutes before we arrived), and the airline had not notified us. Few people know English, but we finally found a ticket agent, and after a long discussion, he booked us later in the day by a different route. We were given a hotel room so we could sleep a few hours. Instead of arriving at noon, we would arrive at 11:00 p.m., but Joel was supposed to speak that evening. We emailed the conference organizers and thankfully the other speaker, Rev. Kenneth Wieske, a Canadian Reformed pastor and friend for more than two decades, was able to deliver his own address to fill Joel’s slot instead of preaching the following day. These are some of the



*Rev. Kenneth and Tamara Wieske*



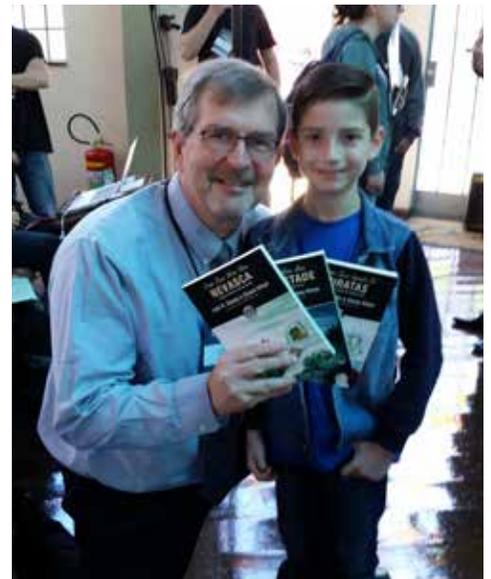
*With my faithful translator,  
Leandro Pasquine*

conundrums of travel, but they are also the times when we pray most because we have no control over the situation. Actually, there are many situations we have no control over, like riding with drivers with various skills. We tend not to pray as much when things go well. We dropped into our cozy 9 x 15 room at an Ibis hotel in Curitiba at 1:40 a.m. We felt blessed that God had made things work out well.

At breakfast the next morning, we learned that two weeks earlier Rev. Wieske was told he has a cancerous tumor in his colon. He teaches at a small seminary in Brazil and helps with the Puritan Project and other Reformed endeavors, so all his work is on hold right now. The news sent him, Tamara, and their family reeling at first, but now they feel very close to God and are resting in Him. Their spiritual submission and joy in the Lord is truly remarkable. Please pray that God may intervene for this dear couple and their six children by granting His healing graces to this brother.

On Saturday, Joel spoke four times on the theme “Justification by Faith Alone”: what it is, how we experience it, how we live by faith, and how to persevere in faith until the end. I spoke on the kindness of Christ.

The Brazilians are very warm, affectionate, and emotional. They love to talk and hug. The 300 people at the conference conveyed that kind of warmth and love we have grown accustomed to. They were so grateful that we came to the south of Brazil where the numbers at conferences are lower and the Lord’s work has only begun to see revival. Leandro Pasquine was Joel’s translator for the entire weekend of four addresses and two Lord’s Day sermons. Kenneth Wieske was greatly encouraged by Joel’s sermons on Sunday on Christ maturing our faith through affliction and on marriage between Christ and the church in heaven.



*This boy was happy to buy three Building on the Rock books in Portuguese*

“What a beautiful Gospel we have!” he said.

The first church Joel preached at had about 200 people and the second about 100. The second church was just a medium-sized room, so a few dozen people had to sit outside in chairs on the sidewalk close to the road. After the Sunday evening service, we took a group picture at the church where Joel preached of those who are studying his book in Portuguese, *Living for the Glory of God: An Introduction to Calvinism*.



*Enjoying a Brazilian meal*



*Group picture of those studying Living for the Glory of God in Portuguese*

With all these conferences on the Reformation, I am more convinced than ever of the value of studying history and applying it to our lives today. God used Luther, Calvin, and others to break away from the Roman Catholic Church, to open wide the Scriptures to us, and to teach us how to live by them. Rome may have outwardly softened since then (in Curituba an ad pleads, “You’ve been gone a long time: 500 years. Won’t you come back?”), but Rome has not fundamentally changed its beliefs. It is still as semi-pelagian and syncretistic as ever. Other forces fighting against the church are also fierce. The powers of evil are especially affecting families. One woman said privately to me, “My husband is decent to me in public, but he abuses me at home. What do I do?” Another said, “We have reared our children by Christian principles, but our daughter has become an atheist. We are shattered.” We need the Christian armor of Ephesians 6 to stand strong.



*NAPARC delegates*

### **Grand Rapids (November 13–16)**

On Monday, we got up at 2:45 a.m., hoping to take four flights to arrive home by midnight, but we could not disembark from the plane in Orlando for an hour, and thus missed our flight. It took us 3.5 hours to try to get a later flight but all in vain, so we had to overnight in Orlando, and didn’t get home until 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday, shortly after NAPARC (North American and Presbyterian Churches) had begun its annual meetings at our seminary in Grand Rapids. The meetings went well.

Rev. Kelderman delivered an encouraging sermon on Tuesday evening in our church to the delegates from Revelation 1, and I was privileged to speak to the brethren on Wednesday evening on “An Earnest Call to Help Restore Family Worship among Our Church Families” in the motel where most of the delegates were staying. We brought a large number of books there and sold all but six. We also gave a free copy of *Family Worship* and *The Family Worship Bible Study Guide* to all the delegates.

### **Guadalajara, Mexico (November 17–20)**

The day after NAPARC concluded, David Woollin (our RHB marketer and my travel assistant) and I traveled to Guadalajara, Mexico, where I spoke ten times (eight addresses and two hours of Q&A) over the weekend to 500 to 700 people at a Reformation conference. The conference is organized by a local pastor whose work the Lord has blessed mightily in the last seven years. What began in his family’s living room as a small, conservative, Reformed group has grown into a sizable church. Furthermore, through the publishing of sermons on the Internet, interest in the Reformed faith has grown in Mexico City and other cities within a few hours of Guadalajara, so that now there are several Reformed churches that come together for this annual conference. It is wonderful to see what the Lord is doing in Spanish-speaking countries in Mexico and throughout Latin America.



*Reformed Conference in Guadalajara, Mexico*

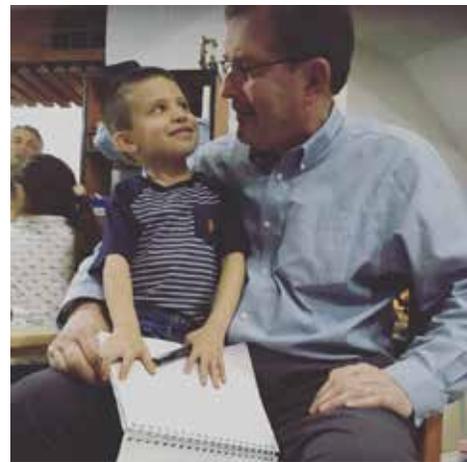
Spanish books sold well at the fourth Reformation Conference in Guadalajara. Here I am with a brother who just purchased my *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* in Spanish. At the moment, I have only a handful of books in Spanish, but more are being translated now as part of RHB’s new Spanish book division. Our *Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible* has been translated and edited and, Lord willing, will be available in print by April of next year. *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*—by Mark



*With David Woollin and three of the key pastors with their families*



*With a brother who purchased Puritan Reformed Spirituality in Spanish*



*Telling stories*

Jones and me—is about two-thirds translated at the present time. Others are also in process. Many people in Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries are eagerly looking forward to these books, even as we wait on God for donors to help finance future projects because books are very expensive for Spanish-speaking people to buy. My biggest surprise was to meet many grateful Mexicans who have already purchased and read our RHB books in English, especially the pastors. This is truly an exciting development!

Here I am with David Woollin and three of the key pastors (together with their families) who are, by God’s grace, building solid Reformed, confessional, experiential churches in Guadalajara and Mexico City, Mexico. These men are gifted, committed leaders with servant hearts for the Lord’s cause. It was great getting to know these brothers, and to have David with me. The conference organizers asked him to speak on the new Spanish Study Bible that we are producing and to preach a sermon as well

After the conference in Guadalajara, Mexico, David Woollin and I spent the rest of the afternoon and evening at the home of the pastor where we also stayed for the weekend. The pastor’s wife took a picture of me (unknown to me) sharing with their son some biblical, non-fictional, and fictional stories with spiritual and practical applications. The precious boy kept wanting one more story!

Thank you for praying me through this stretch of eleven Reformation conferences in five weeks. God graciously granted me to preach fifty times in various countries, and kept me safe through 50,000 miles of air travel. His mercies are new every morning.



*With Media Gratiae president Matthew Robinson, director Stephen McCaskell, writer Barry Cooper, and David Woollin*

### **Grand Rapids, Michigan (December 1 and 3)**

On December 1, I spent the day working on the script to an upcoming documentary that RHB is producing in partnership with Media Gratiae. Pictured with me here is Media Gratiae president Matthew Robinson, director Stephen McCaskell, writer Barry Cooper, and Sales and Marketing Manager at Reformation Heritage Books, David Woollin. The film will be titled “PURITAN: All of Life to the Glory of God,” and we anticipate a 2019 release. Please pray for us as we enter the production phase of the project with the goal of getting young and old people interested in reading the Puritans for themselves.

On Tuesday evening, November 28, our congregation had a farewell evening for our full-time pastor and his wife and family, Rev. David and Wendy VanBrugge, together

with their four children. Saturday evening we had the VanBrugges over for dinner together with our entire family. We had a good time but it is tough to see them go. Then, on Lord’s Day morning, December 3, Rev. VanBrugge preached his farewell sermon from Joshua 5. Dr. Barrett spoke some encouraging words to our departing pastor on behalf of the consistory and congregation, and I spoke some words on behalf of the pastors and denomination. In the evening, Rev. Maarten Kuivenhoven spoke some personal words prior to preaching on “Thy kingdom come.” Two days later the VanBrugges left for Ontario to serve the Brantford, Ontario Free Reformed Church. It all still seems like a bittersweet dream to us as he was only with us for a short time, but when the Lord speaks, we cannot hinder His will. It is sweet for Brantford, but difficult for us, as we are now left without a full-time pastor for 750 people. Pray that the Lord of the harvest will guide us to a man of His choosing to serve our flock.

### **Comstock Park, Michigan (December 6)**

On Wednesday, I spoke for The Expositors Seminary at Maranatha Bible Church in Comstock Park on “Embracing the Paradox of the Ministry” (2 Cor. 6:8–10). They have nine campuses around the country, with Todd Dykstra serving as a teacher and organizer for the Michigan campus in Comstock Park. All nine campuses are connected to the lecture site (9 sections on one screen), numbering 80+ students in all, and you can dialogue with any of them at any time. The lecturer can see every single student at each site at the same time. This way all the students get to hear the lectures being given for every class they are enrolled in, no matter where they live, and can freely dialogue with their instructor in any lecture. It works beautifully!

### **Medellin, Colombia (December 7–11—written by Mary)**

Perched on a beautiful ledge in the Andes Mountains forty minutes from Medellin, Colombia, stands a stately New England-style chapel. We first saw it at midnight on Thursday, bathed in floodlights, after traveling by air via Chicago and Panama City, over paved curvy roads, then miles on bumpy, winding, steep, dirt roads. Nueva Providencia (New Providence) Bible School (NP) opened four years ago. They offer a one-year program at a junior college level to train men to be mission workers, church assistants, and future pastors. Mr. Bryant Skinner is a businessman from Florida with a big heart for the Bible, the Puritans, and Colombia. His excitement was visible whenever we discussed bringing the gospel to the people. Dr. Adriaan Neele accompanied us (his wife Kornelia planned to come but their son needed knee surgery).

On Friday, Dr. Neele, my husband, and I participated in their five-hour board meeting along with representatives from other ministries, to brainstorm about the future direction of NP. They decided to transition to a two-year program with an emphasis on Biblical Studies the first year, as some students come with little knowledge, then focus on theology the second year. Currently their classes are all modular, but they hope to hire two full-time professors soon. There is potential for PRTS to partner with



*New Providence Bible School chapel*

them in various ways and also for RHB to partner with them in supplying Puritan literature in Spanish. A committee will be appointed consisting of two or three men from both schools to firm up ways that we can work together so as to advance the reach and influence of NP in Latin America. It is incredibly exciting to witness the growing interest and eagerness to learn the Reformed faith that is spreading all through Latin America! As the meeting ended, torrential rain and hail pounded the buildings and the land. Mr. Skinner said, "There goes my cabbage crop!"

The centerpiece of the campus is the chapel, which Mr. Skinner hopes will also attract tourists interested in its architecture. As they tour the place, he wants to show the Puritan Documentary that PRTS and RHB are working on together with Media Gratiae in order to evangelize them. He also plans to rent out the chapel as a wedding venue. These endeavors will generate revenue to support the educational program. Currently the students receive full support. Dorms, guest lecturer quarters, and a dining hall are under construction.



*With Eduardo Fergusson my excellent translator*



*At the family conference*

On Saturday morning, a family conference was held in the beautiful NP chapel, with Joel speaking on Cultivating True Friendship in Marriage, How Parents Should Lead Their Children, and How to Build Convictions in Your Children. Eduardo Fergusson interpreted. He is very able and he knows Joel from interpreting for him in the past. The Colombians are eager to learn how to apply Reformed principles to family life, and very appreciative for biblical instruction.

On Saturday afternoon, Joel gave the commencement address for the New Providence Bible School's fifteen graduates, speaking from 2 Corinthians 6:8-10 on "The Beautiful Paradox of Ministry." The graduates hail from various Latin American countries. Several of them plan to continue to work at NP. It's possible a couple of them might come to PRTS eventually. Dr. Neele and my husband also spoke with three other young men who hope to be applying to PRTS for additional study.



*With Bryant Skinner (builder and owner of NP Bible School), Julio Benitez (local Reformed Baptist pastor), and Dr. Adriaan Neele (PhD director at PRTS)*



*With NP graduates*

It was a sweet time! My husband felt it was a great privilege to spend his 65th birthday speaking four times at this beautiful school in Colombia. I am so thankful for my sweetheart, for his zeal for God that drives him to use every ounce of energy and every available minute to promote the gospel of Jesus Christ. I'm grateful he is a loving and patient husband



*A Reformed congregation in the heart of Medellin*



*These girls attended nearly every service*

and father. I pray that God continues to give him stamina. (If so, there will be no retirement on the horizon, though I am trying to get him to slow down a bit!)

On Sunday, Gustavo, our speedy but skilled driver, drove Joel's interpreter Eduardo and his wife, Edna, Norm Wakefield (pioneer of Elijah ministries), and my husband and me down the mountain into the heart of Medellin, where Joel preached on Christ as the prophet, priest, and king of His people in the largest conservative Reformed church in this city of six million people. The church is pastored by two able, godly men, Sergio Ruiz and Julio Benitez; it has grown so much that they recently had to add a balcony. The Lord was in our midst!

After the sermon, we met David Adams who is helping with publishing our Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible in Spanish. It is scheduled for an April 2018 release. We noticed a table in the back of the church laden with eggs and bags of groceries. We were told that members with extra means bring food for the poorer members of the congregation.

In the evening, back at the NP chapel, Joel preached for their Christmas service on "The Best Birth Announcement Ever," focusing on the shepherds receiving the news of Jesus's birth. I enjoyed two precious girls (see picture) who attended nearly all the services throughout the weekend, so I got to know them quite well. Meanwhile, Dr. Neele preached once in a Reformed Baptist church and twice in a Presbyterian Church in the city. He really felt helped as well and bonded with the people. It has been a wonderful time with these folks, despite the language challenges. We wish we could take all of you along with us to share these experiences, but our letters and a few pictures will have to suffice.

On Monday morning, we got up at 2:10 a.m. to catch the first flight out of Medellin, and arrived home by 4:00 p.m., tired but grateful for the gospel opportunities afforded us.

I pray every blessing to you and your family in Immanuel through this special season of commemorating the Incarnation. May God graciously go with us into the new year, and grant us grace to follow His will and know His benediction upon us.

With pastoral love,  
Rev. Joel R. Beeke