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PRAYER LETTER NO. 35

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you all in our Saviour's precious Name. He is the one who unites us in Him and it is our privilege to serve Him together. Our Lord has promised to build His church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16v18). He has also said that He has kept all those whom the Father gave Him i.e. all of God's elect people (John 17v12). May these and many other promises made by the Lord encourage us and give us greater assurance in the certainty of His victory! All glory to His Name!

A long silence

As you can see above, this is 'PRAYER LETTER NO. 35'. We number our prayer letters so that you can see at once if you have missed one. Prayer letter number 34 dates back to March 2018, so it's been a long time since we wrote (too long!) and it's high time to put that right.

A word of thanks

First of all, we would like to thank all churches and individuals who responded generously to our appeal for temporary financial help last year. Nowadays, there are so many scams and fraudulent appeals for financial help that it is appropriate for us to explain the background to that appeal. As most of you know, Michael, apart from being pastor of De Panne Evangelical Church, also works as a freelance translator to cover our costs. That translation work accounts for about 35 to 40 hours of Michael's working week and provides about 70% of our income. When Michael had a heart attack in February 2018, it was not possible for him to work his full hours at full speed during the months of March and April of last year. He could not afford to 'sign off' from translation work officially and rely on 'sickness benefit' because we would have had to wait several weeks before receiving any benefit at all. Furthermore, apart from that temporary severe dip in our income, we also faced the medical bills (hospital treatment and operations, ambulance transport, and recovery and rehabilitation sessions). Our medical and hospitalisation insurance did cover about two thirds of those costs, but we still had to pay the rest ourselves. This also coincided with higher than expected general tax and social security bills at the same time. All that put us in an awkward financial position for a while. And so, we are most grateful to all of you who helped us out so generously in that particular time of need. As regards Michael's health, his recovery has been steady and consistent and he is now able to do all the things which he could before he had a heart attack. We are grateful to the Lord and to all who have prayed for a complete recovery. As regards Ariëtte's health, she struggles on graciously with the Lord's help. Given her various ailments (muscular infections, chronic fatigue, back trouble, and a dietary disorder), her output is commendable. Do please pray that the Lord will continue to sustain us both physically and spiritually.

De Panne Evangelical Church

The ministry of the church continues with some encouragements and some concerns. We now officially have about 40 members. One young couple, Benjamin and Fien, were baptised in the summer of 2018 (at their request we baptised them in the sea). We pray that Benjamin and Fien will grow in the Lord and will be able to take on more responsibility in the church over time. Benjamin already helps with the music, youth work, and leading services, whilst Fien helps with the children's work. Another young man of whom we have high hopes is

eighteen-year-old Lucas. He was baptised recently on 8 December and we hope that the Lord may use him particularly to reach other young people. We are very much an ageing fellowship (two thirds of our members are above the age of fifty), so it is encouraging to see young people converted and wanting to serve the Lord. This does, however, raise another issue, namely that of training. In the future, we will need to provide more training for young people to help them in the responsibilities which they take on. We as a church do not have the resources to provide all that training ourselves and we are not sure if institutions/organisations which provide such training in Belgium are entirely suitable. And so, please pray that the Lord would grant us His heavenly wisdom in this matter.

Over the last twelve months or so, we have also witnessed the conversion and baptism of an elderly man called Willy. Willy was born and bred in Antwerp, Belgium's second biggest city, but has lived in De Panne for about seven years now. Willy has settled well into our fellowship and is proving to be a dependable church member. We thank the Lord for him.

Regular activities

We do organise 'special activities' from time to time (e.g. church open days, praise evenings, or literature stalls on local street markets), but we look mainly to our regular church activities to reach people with the gospel. Apart from weekly Sunday services and prayer meetings and Bible studies each Tuesday evening, we also hold a monthly children's club on the second Saturday afternoon of the month, a monthly coffee morning on the third Thursday of the month, Ariëtte does a monthly ladies meeting and a separate monthly ladies prayer meeting, and we distribute literature on a fairly regular basis. We take a break from door-to-door evangelism in the winter months, but this will resume, Lord willing, around March of next year. Michael is also in the process of rewriting and designing a new church web site. Please pray for the Lord's blessing on all these activities, that He may use them to build up our fellowship and reach outsiders with His Word.

The spiritual struggle

Like all Christians anywhere in the world, we are involved in a spiritual battle. Whilst we have good relations at a personal level with just about all our church members, we are grieved at the general lack of spiritual maturity within the fellowship. This manifests itself, for instance, in the lack of vision amongst church members to support the gospel financially. Even when Michael suffered his heart attack last year, no one in the church suggested trying to provide more financial support for their pastor to help him reduce the number of hours which he has to devote to translation work. The only suggestion made by church members was to invite more guest preachers to reduce the pastor's work load. That suggestion was probably well meant, but we are not convinced it would have helped the church to grow. And so, we're resigned in many ways to the fact that we just have to struggle along as best we can. Michael can only devote a maximum of about 20 to 25 hours per week to the work of the gospel and that amount is hardly a recipe for gospel progress. This is a common problem in evangelical circles in Belgium where very few pastors are full time. How do we tackle this issue? Please pray that the Lord would grant us wisdom in these matters.

We're moving to 'the Desert Street' soon (D.V.)!

Some of you know that we've been looking for a new rented house for some time now. We love our present home in Fazantenlaan and it has been great to have the space to hold some church activities in our home, but the annual increase in the rent has more or less forced us to look elsewhere for accommodation. And so, as of 1 March 2020, Lord willing, our new address will be as follows:

**Woestijnstraat 1,
8660 Adinkerke-De Panne,
Belgium.**

The new house is in the village of Adinkerke, but still within the local authority of De Panne. The name 'Woestijnstraat' translates literally as 'Desert Street' (hence the reference above). Please note the new address as of March next year. Our e-mail address and telephone number will stay the same. We hope to complete the move as smoothly as possible so that our ministry is not too severely disrupted. Do please pray that we will settle quickly in our new surrounds and that we can establish good links with our neighbours.

Summary of prayer points:

1. We praise the Lord for Who He is and for all His works.
2. We thank the Lord for the lives and testimonies of those baptised over the last twelve months or so (Benjamin, Fien, Willy, and Lucas).
3. We thank the Lord for Michael's excellent recovery after his heart attack last year and for the Lord's sustaining grace for us both.
4. We are grateful to the Lord and His people for the financial assistance last year when we were in some difficulty.
5. We pray for wisdom as we try to tackle the generally low level of spiritual maturity within the fellowship.
6. We look to the Lord for help as we try to provide training for some of our young people.
7. We pray for the Lord to anoint all the regular activities so that believers may be built up and that we can reach unbelievers with the gospel of God's free and sovereign grace.

In closing, we send you our season's greetings and wish you the Lord's richest blessing for 2020. May His grace and peace be with you all.

Yours warmly in Him,

Michael and Ariëtte Robinson

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