



July 2020

PRAYER LETTER NO. 36

Dear Friends,

Greetings in our Saviour's precious Name. Time seems to have flown since our last prayer letter early in the new year, yet our lives and times are in the Lord's hands (Psalm 31v15). He is the sovereign Lord and King of the universe and we trust Him for grace and strength each day. It is time to write again and we must say that a lot has happened in a short space of time.

At the start of the year, everything seemed to be 'ticking over' as normal. Of course, there were alarming reports of a deadly virus in parts of China, but that seemed a long way away at the time and even virologists doubted initially that the virus would reach Europe. Well, the rest is history and many of you will have witnessed a lockdown following the Covid 19 virus. Here in Belgium that lockdown took effect during the third week in March and did have far-reaching effects on our church in De Panne, as it did elsewhere. On a personal note we were thankful to the Lord that we were able to finish moving house by the end of February before the virus made its mark. We are well settled in our new rented home and thankful for its many blessings. The new house is about 14 years old and has several advantages as compared to our previous dwelling. It is a newer house, it is better insulated, it is more compact and therefore easier to clean and maintain, we have all the space we need, the monthly rent is 250 euros per month cheaper than what we were paying before. The new house is less central in terms of location, but, on the other hand, more of our new neighbours are young families with children, an age group which we are particularly keen to reach. We will return to that point shortly.

The church in De Panne during lockdown

We had mixed feelings about the lockdown. On a personal note it gave us some peace and quiet at home to sort out our belongings and get the new house in order after our recent move. On the other hand, it was 'regrettable' to lose some contact with our church fellowship. Most of our church members have an Internet connection, but not all of them have the discernment to select the best web sites for viewing and reading. Initially, Michael provided outlines of Sunday services and sermons online via e-mail, Bible studies also via e-mail on Tuesday evenings, and a daily Bible meditation for church members who wanted it. All this seemed to be appreciated and we hope it will bear fruit over time. As for contacts with outsiders, we cannot say that we met anyone who has given serious thought to spiritual matters following the health crisis. Such people do exist and we have heard of such encouragements in other churches. However, the Lord in His sovereignty has not so far sent anyone like that to us.

On 14th June we were able to hold services again on the Lord's Day. However, restrictions on indoor meetings were so strict that we felt obliged to hold open air services. We thank the Lord for that plot of ground opposite our main church building. It houses our Sunday School accommodation, but for the past four weeks we have also been meeting there on the grass. We are thankful to the Lord for the good weather on each Sunday so far and we plan to hold Sunday services in the open air for the foreseeable future. Not all of our church members jumped at the chance to meet again. Some of them felt it was too soon and chose to stay at home. We hope it will not be long before they return. In this connection, please pray for us as we try to 'hold the fellowship together'. The health crisis has seen tensions between those with different views on that subject. Some feel that government rules and restrictions are too strict, whilst others think that they don't go far enough. Please pray for us as we urge our people to be gracious and tolerant without pointing the finger at each other.

Happy news – wedding bells (well not quite!)

In our last letter we mentioned the baptism of Willy, a man in his seventies who comes originally from Antwerp, Belgium's second biggest city. Willy has been in membership with us for about two years now and has proved a dependable church member. In that time he has developed a close friendship with Marie-Madeleine, an eighty-two-year-old widow who has been a church member for about eight years. On 15th May, they were married at the town hall in De Panne and, at the time of writing, we are still waiting to arrange a date for a church service to ask the Lord's blessing on their union. In any case, we pray that they may enjoy some years together under the Lord's blessing and a fruitful partnership for the gospel.

Making new contacts

We mentioned above that more of our neighbours in our new surroundings comprise young families with children. We hope and pray for opportunities to get to know them and, over time, to talk about spiritual things with them. We know from experience that we cannot force these issues, but do please pray that the Lord would give us wisdom and boldness in these matters. We have noticed that one of our neighbouring families, a youngish couple called Niels and Louisa, have a wide circle of friends (they get quite a few visitors from time to time). We look forward to getting to know them better. There is also one immigrant family (we're not yet sure where they originate from) of fairly young people. Then there are Danny and Nancy, our immediate neighbours, who are a little older and quite friendly, but they do not show any real interest in spiritual matters. Please pray for us and them!

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 opportunity to hold services again on the Lord's Day and thank the Lord for the fine weather so far in the open air.
- 3) We thank the Lord for the marriage of Willy and Marie-Madeleine and pray for His blessing upon their union.
- 4) We thank the Lord that we were able to complete our move before the lockdown. Please pray that the Lord would grant us wisdom as we get to know our new neighbours.
- 5) Please pray that the Lord would give us wisdom as we try to tackle some of the tensions which have arisen in the fellowship.

In closing, we want to thank all of you who do pray regularly for us. May the Lord's grace and peace be with you.

Yours warmly in Christ,

Michael and Ariëtte Robinson

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