

REPORT OF DEPUTY TO CHESLEY

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INTERNATIONAL travel, even when it is available, has become more difficult to arrange during the Covid crisis. But in the kindness of the Most High, my documents were accepted and my journey to Chesley Ontario began at 6.30am on the morning of 2nd November 2021. I arrived safely at the Free Presbyterian manse in Chesley on the evening of the same day. The consideration and kindness of those who prepared the manse was evident from the moment I arrived and continued until my departure. The practice in Chesley, by mutual consent, is that the deputy stays in the manse but has a meal each day in one of the homes until all of the homes are visited. This arrangement is a most agreeable one, and I feel that thereby the bond between our loyal people there and the home church is strengthened. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered while I was there. Mr Mark du Preez from Calgary met with the Session seeking to be received as a member in full communion. The local elders, Messrs David Kuiper and Hector Ross have been in contact with Mr du Preez for some time. They have also visited him in his home in Calgary on several occasions, taking services there. Mr du Preez was received as a member in full communion. Mr du Preez conducts services, sometimes in his own home but mostly in a hired hall in the city, with several other people joining with them. I have been in his home twice: once on a previous visit and again on this occasion. On this occasion, Mr Chang, one of those who meet with Mr du Preez for public worship, had his youngest child baptised. Our friends in Calgary hope that at some time in the future it will be possible to have a Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland congregation in Calgary again. They ask that until that is possible that we would send ministers and elders to conduct public worship amongst them. The elders and I arrived in Calgary on 16th November and returned to Chesley on the 18th. A letter was received from Mr Spratt (Vancouver), on his own and Mrs Spratt's behalf, who are members on the Chesley Session roll, stating ecclesiastical and theological grounds for terminating their connection with our church. Many attempts had been made to expound the position of the church more perfectly, with little success. As a result of this separation, there are presently no FP services in Vancouver. Mr and Mrs Spratt

laboured assiduously in Vancouver. This was especially noticeable at communion seasons when they generously entertained those who gathered. The Chesley Kirk Session had arranged monthly visits by the elders while that was possible. We feel that if the circumstances had been different, and if distances had been shorter, the outcome would have been better. It seems that during the pandemic a trend emerged simultaneously in many of the evangelical and reformed churches in North America. It manifests as a breakdown in trust of national institutions such as the government, medical institutions, and the media. My understanding is that the emergence and popularity of this trend has been accelerated by the belief that the 2020 US election was stolen by foreign actors electronically changing vote counts and the belief that Covid either is not real or that the virus was intentionally released – created by governments to increase the power of the state. It seems that a considerable portion of the evangelical churches in North America have been overtaken by a cult-like mentality, which is more defined by a political ideology than by a biblical creed. Those who have studied the emergence of this movement speak of people being self-radicalised. By this they mean that some North American evangelicals are heavily influenced by “Alternative Media” on the internet. These “Alternative Media” sources tend to be their primary interpreters of current affairs. If someone within a community dissents from these alternative theories, they may be viewed as “uneducated”, blindly following the liberal mainstream media and following the indoctrination of the “Deep State”. These alternative media sources are typically right-wing shows, hosted by people who openly embrace conspiracy theories. It became clear on arriving in Chesley that this or something similar to this has the potential to create a division among our dear people there. Throughout my stay, I received nothing but kindness and more kindness and my understanding is that the potential for division was in some degree repaired when we prepared together for the giving and receiving of bread and wine in the remembrance of the Lord and Saviour’s death in the administration of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. It cannot sufficiently be stressed that our Church must send a regular supply of deputies. “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). In the mercy of the good-doing God, I arrived back home on Tuesday 23rd November.