

REPORT OF DEPUTY TO THE CHESLEY CONGREGATION

By Rev. A.W. MacColl

Synod Reports 2023

IN the kindness of the Most High, I was enabled to visit the Chesley congregation once again after having preached there for a few weeks during the summer of 2008. My wife and children were able to accompany me and it was a privilege for us to be among the people of the congregation for the period of five weeks from 28th March until 2nd May. During that time, we were shown many expressions of generosity for which we are most grateful. The period was occupied with a full schedule of ministerial duties including visiting the congregation in their own homes. The numbers in attendance from the Chesley congregation were generally in the region of 36. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was observed on Sabbath 9th April and the full services of the communion season were held in connection with it. It was very gratifying to see the attendances augmented with considerably more than twenty visitors from various parts of North America gathering for the solemnities, including friends from the group who meet in Calgary, Alberta, and also from Wisconsin and Washington State in the USA. The Santa Fe congregation in Texas was well represented also, with a number of visitors including two of the Texas elders, Mr Joseph Smith and Mr Jeshurun Hembd, accompanied by most of their family members. Mr Randy Winkels, an elder in the Grafton congregation but originally from Chesley, was also present with his wife and family. It is an encouragement to the Chesley people to have others gather with them at these times once again. On subsequent Sabbaths a number of additional visitors appeared, one from Calgary and, during our last week, the family of Mr Mark Smith, a deacon in the Santa Fe congregation. That so many went to such efforts of time and expenditure to be present in Chesley when a minister was preaching the gospel shows the commendable diligence of our North American friends in attending the means of grace with their young families, notwithstanding the vast distances involved. It would be salutary for us in Scotland to follow this good example by endeavouring as much as possible to attend communion seasons in the more remote congregations. On Friday 14th April, I conducted the marriage service of Miss Rachel Winkels, who grew up in the congregation, to Mr John Huide, who comes from a Mennonite background. We wish the newly-married

couple the Lord's blessing. It was interesting to meet Mennonite folk at the wedding but more than one of our own people commented on what seemed to be a general disinterest manifested by some of the Mennonites during the actual marriage service. How sad to see an outwardly religious group, apparently separating from the world in an external manner, yet manifesting little reverence for the worship of God in a Reformed Church! Two elders have been elected to office in the congregation since last year's Synod. These are Mr Hector Ross, who was previously an elder in the London congregation, and Mr Aashik Rao. On the first Saturday after we arrived in Chesley, a daughter was born to Mr and Mrs Rao. Thereafter, on Sabbath 30th April, the child, named Emilia Abigail, was solemnly admitted to the visible Church by the sacrament of baptism. May she and her siblings be wrought upon by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost and prove to be children of the covenant indeed. I was enabled to give two lectures on Church Principles during my time as Deputy. The first lecture was on "Purity of Worship" and the second on "Biblical Church Government". There is a clear need for teaching the Biblical principles of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland to all of our people at home and abroad and there seems to be an intelligent appreciation of both Biblical constitutional principles and experimental spirituality among our people in Ontario. So much so that here we could see no evidence of the aversion which we have occasionally met with when lecturing on Church principles. The Apostle Paul was found both teaching and preaching in the course of his apostolic labours and, in these declining times, it would be good for us all to be well grounded in the Scriptural principles the Free Presbyterian Church was founded to preserve.

The congregation is very isolated geographically and is vulnerable in a number of ways. Some of these ways have been previously identified in the Report of the deputy to last year's Synod. The power that the adversary has to sow discord among brethren is a sad reality. Moreover, the prolonged period of thirty-six years without a pastor has been an additional and ongoing difficulty for our people in Chesley. We can only commend the congregation to the grace of the Head of the Church and the prayers of the Lord's people. Another point that the Synod should be aware of, is that the settled consensus of opinion among our people in North America is that live streaming of Divine worship is neither necessary nor expedient. This position is noteworthy because, perhaps of all parts

of our Church, it is the brethren in Canada and the USA who are most separated from access to ministers and, living at great distances from the home Church and from one another, might generally be expected to be in support of live links. It was a solemn privilege to preach law and gospel to our North American friends during my five weeks among them. Their hunger for the Word preached is an encouragement and it should stir us up to pray that the Lord would raise up a true servant of Christ to labour in His vineyard in this part of Canada. We departed from Chesley on the morning of Tuesday 2nd May and arrived back safely in Dingwall on the afternoon of the following day, having many reasons to be thankful to the Lord for His goodness throughout our period of absence from home.