

Cardiff and Amersfoort East

God always leads and guides his church. History reveals his wisdom and care for us. Often we are left amazed as we see how events unfold. His 'providence' is mysterious.

Twenty years ago, in the summer of 1988, a family from "The Sheepfold" Church (De Schaapskooi) in Amersfoort East, the Netherlands – Jannes and Emma Munneke and two of their sons, Peter and Ernst – were camping in West Wittering, near Chichester. They intended to stay on the campsite only overnight but somehow their plans were altered and they were kept there for longer – long enough to meet a group of us from Cardiff. Furthermore, it was quite strange that we from Cardiff were heading for West Wittering. For two years before that, we had tried to camp in Mwnt on the Cardiganshire coast. If the weather had been reasonable, no doubt we would have kept going back to Mwnt. Why go to Sussex when we have Wales? But the weather had not been good. In fact, for two summers atrocious wind and rain had forced us to take down our tents and go home early. With hindsight, we can see how God was moving us in the opposite direction, to a meeting of brothers that would have an effect on our church lives. In that way a relationship began with the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated) and the congregation of Amersfoort East in particular.

Over the years since 1988, the two churches have often visited each other. Close friendships exist. We have exchanged pulpits and discussed various theological and practical subjects (e.g., covenant theology; millennialism; the Alpha course; worship; preaching). We have followed one another's lives and prayed for one another.

In Cardiff we have also received practical and financial help on several occasions.

When the churches in Cardiff wrote a confessional statement of covenant theology (1991), Professor J Kamphuis offered a critique. Though quite succinct, it raised five points of concern. Our discussions of this in 1996 contributed to our thinking and perhaps influenced the developments of 1999.

The EPCEW has a sister-church relationship with the Reformed Churches (Liberated). This is a way of working out the unity of the body of Christ between us.

This is why, this November, immediately following the European Conference of Reformed Churches, Paul and Pam and I, with Todd and Alan and Janis (from Bethel), visited the congregation of Amersfoort East once again. It was a delightful visit. On the Saturday our elders met the elders of Amersfoort and talked about '*Preaching*', while the ladies enjoyed some time out together. On Sunday morning, we worshipped there and I preached. Parts of the service were in English. In the evening, following the service, those who wanted to got together to sing hymns, some in Dutch and some in English.

We also talked about the future. What will happen to the relationship between the churches as time goes by? If things are to continue, the younger members will need to be involved on both sides.

It is hoped that some from Amersfoort will be able to visit us next year so that our whole congregation can participate in the blessings of the Christian fellowship between us.

Peter Naylor, 15 November 2008