

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

edited by Kris Moelker

On December 12, 1953, Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma was born in Lansing, Illinois. His parents are Wilbur and Dorthy Bruinsma. He grew up in his hometown of Lansing, although he lived for a few years in South Holland. He attended South Holland Protestant Reformed Church until he left to go to pre-seminary at the age of 19.

When he was young, Rev. Bruinsma worked and didn't have much time for hobbies, but he did enjoy sports. Softball was his favorite sport and he also enjoyed football. He even dabbled in wrestling a little bit! Now he does a little wood working; and since he owns his own house, he enjoys doing a little remodeling here and there.

Until our own Protestant Reformed School started, Rev. Bruinsma attended Lansing Christian School. When he entered the third grade, South Holland Protestant Reformed Christian School opened, and he continued his education through the ninth grade there. Then he attended Illiana Christian High School.

After he graduated from high school, Rev. Bruinsma attended Trinity College in Palos Heights, Illinois, for one year. Then he transferred to our own Protestant Reformed Pre-Seminary program in our seminary. During this time, he also took classes at Calvin College and Grand Valley State College.

As a teenager, the peer pressures Rev. Bruinsma confronted were very similar to those teenagers face today. He lived during the 60's when young people were rebelling against the authority of the government and their parents. This was the hippie era when free love was the order of the day. The civil rights movement was under way. Rev. Bruinsma was confronted with the pressures of listening to ungodly music and going to movies. Drunken parties were becoming a part of the scene even in a Christian school. The pressure of fornication was also a growing concern. These same pressures are around today in an even more advanced form. Having lived through, and experienced those pressures, helps Rev. Bruinsma as a pastor understand young people today and what they face.

Rev. Bruinsma did not decide to pursue the ministry until the second semester of his freshman year in college. He had not thought about it much before then. When a couple of his close and godly friends decided to go to the pre-seminary program in Grand Rapids, he decided to go with them. He was prepared for the ministry by living with these friends for six years and attending classes at our seminary. These experiences helped shape the rest of his life. He says, "Of course, one cannot forget the instruction, discipline, and nurture received by the hands of godly parents. I thank God every day for my parents.

When they heard of Rev. Bruinsma's desire to enter seminary, his parents were overjoyed; but they had a little doubt, especially on his dad's part. Rev. Bruinsma can remember him saying, "Yah, but you know, it's those languages that will make or break you." Then after he made the grade as far as the languages were concerned, his dad said, "Yah, but it's that practice preaching that will make or break you." As far as the reaction of his peers is concerned, two of his friends went with him to seminary. He doesn't know what the reactions of the rest of his friends in South Holland were. He thinks maybe he should ask them sometime.

With regards to his years in seminary, Rev. Bruinsma has many good memories. He lived with a bunch of good guys, several of whom became ministers in our churches. (Haak, Flikkema,

Koole, DeVries) He has some bad and some good memories of practice preaching. He appreciated studying under Professors Hoeksema, Hanko, and Decker.

On June 17, 1977, Rev. Bruinsma married Mary Zandstra who was also from our South Holland church. They were married in South Holland by Rev. Engelsma. How can Rev. Bruinsma begin to express the blessings that his wife has provided for him in his life? He could not live without her! He knows he must if God would take her from him, but she has made his life complete. She has been a source of constant encouragement to him. She has been his greatest critic, which he needs. She has been his best friend and companion. She has also walked with him, holding him up and guiding him when he is weak. She has been a tremendous blessing. They have also been blessed with five wonderful children whom he loves very much. He and his wife are surely blessed.

In 1978, Rev. Bruinsma was ordained and began his labors in Faith Church in Jenison, Michigan. He labored in Faith Church until 1984, when the Lord called him to the mission field in Jamaica. When his work in Jamaica was finished, the Lord called him to become pastor of our church in Holland, Michigan in 1989. He labored in Holland until 1996, when the Lord called him to his current charge in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Concerning teaching young children in catechism, Rev. Bruinsma has lots of memories. Once in Faith church he was teaching a beginners class in the middle of winter. He was telling the story about the walls of Jericho falling down. There was a little boy who seemed not to be paying attention to the story, but was playing with his gloves and standing them up leaning against each other. Very shortly after Rev. Bruinsma had spoken about the walls of Jericho falling down he let loose with a loud explosion noise and swatted his gloves halfway across the room. Rev. Bruinsma stopped the story and everyone looked at the boy who turned red and smiled. His imagination was working overtime. Rev. Bruinsma did not have the heart to scold him.

As a minister, one of the most rewarding things for Rev. Bruinsma to witness in the life of the church is the children growing from childhood through their teenage years and taking their places with their parents in the church. It makes Rev. Bruinsma's work worthwhile when a young man and woman make confession of faith after years of catechism instruction.

Regarding memories of controversies our churches have faced, Rev. Bruinsma has seen individual congregations struggle with their own internal controversies which have left them depressed and frustrated. He has seen classis struggle with many of these problems. He has even sat on a number of Synods that equally struggled with controversy. He has never had to go through a 1953, and prays our churches never will.

Rev. Bruinsma has lots of memories of laboring in Jamaica. Looking back at the years he and his family labored there, he concludes that they were the best years of his life.

To young men considering the ministry to be their calling, Rev. Bruinsma says that if you believe you are called then pursue it. He knows there are doubts and fears because he had plenty of them. He always believed that if the Lord did not want him in the gospel ministry, then He would show him in some objective way, such as not making the grade. His advice is: "Work at becoming a minister and leave the rest in the Lord's hands. He calls and confirms the call."

Having served in charges in the Grand Rapids area, in a charge outside of it presently, and having served on the mission field in Jamaica, Rev. Bruinsma would like to see two changes in the thinking, attitude, and behavior of the young people. First, there needs to be a renewed zeal for the truth that God has given to us as churches. He believes that parents and youth do not realize enough what great things God has done for us as a denomination of churches. We have

lost our first love and become rather complacent. Secondly, Rev. Bruinsma would love to see our youth become better witnesses to others of what God has given us. There is a need for a proper way of witnessing to others in life and confession.

Throughout the years of his ministry, Rev. Bruinsma has witnessed some very, very sad situations as far as some of the youth are concerned and this grieves him. He also sees young men and women taking their places in our churches who are sincere and who take seriously their calling as members. He also sees young men and women marrying in the Lord and establishing good covenant homes. He praises God for this!

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