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THE GOSPEL IN THE PACIFIC

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Editorial

North and North-East of New Zealand, in the region known as the South Pacific, are some of our closest neighbours. As the crow flies New Caledonia and Vanuatu would be the very closest, even closer than Australia. It is a region steeped in history, most of which goes unnoticed – unless you have a particular interest in Captain James Cook, Captain Bligh, Mr Christian and the infamous mutiny on the *Bounty*; or are familiar with the events that took place in the South Pacific during World War II.

What about the events of the 18th and 19th centuries, which brought missionaries to the Pacific islands, and left an indelible mark upon the people of that region? The preaching of the gospel was making disciples of the inhabitants, some of whom were a fierce, untamed people who practised cannibalism – they were in darkness and a long way from knowing their Creator and Redeemer.

Many missionaries armed with the sword of the Spirit, their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace and wearing the helmet of salvation, waged war against the spiritual forces of wickedness among the peoples of the Pacific islands – New Zealanders being one of them.

As neighbours, we have some knowledge about the Pacific peoples through those who have come here for a better life, who have brought their culture and faith, put down roots, and become part of New Zealand society. Among them are the Samoan Presbyterians, Tongan Methodists, and Niuean churches known as Ekalesia Niue Church, just to mention a few.

While we may be more or less familiar with these Christians, I would venture to say that we don't really know much about the efforts that were made to bring the gospel to the Pacific region and what impact they have had.

In our magazine this month our contributors from Australia, New Zealand and Niue give us an overview of how the gospel came, and the impact it has had in Vanuatu and Niue.

Mr Greg Fox, a past missionary in Vanuatu, provides a history of the gospel in Vanuatu.

Mr John Goris writes of his association with the Niuean Christians in Auckland.

Mr Mose Alano gives a 160 year history of Christianity in Niue.

Mrs Sally Davey investigates one-sided friendships.

Mrs Jenny Waldron looks at the problem of eating disorders.

Focus on home provides some of the latest information around the churches.

Mrs Tani Newton writes to the editor.

We are running a *Missions in focus for kids* with articles provided by Mrs Heidi Hendrikse.

Mrs Heidi Hendrikse provides a report on the Reformed Churches of Papua New Guinea Ladies Fellowship Conference (*meri-bung*).

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand unless they expound the Biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

NB: In line with common publishing practice *Faith in Focus* reserves the right to publish the names of all contributors with their articles, unless compelling reasons are given to the editor for not doing so. This applies to both print and online versions.

Aliens in an alien land

The history of the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Vanuatu (formerly New Hebrides).

Greg Fox

The history of the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Vanuatu really goes back to the 19th century, in the wake of the exploration of the South Pacific. Men such as Captain James Cook had a significance beyond their voyages, because they opened the way for the gospel of Christ to be spread throughout a vast section of the world.

Men such as Milne, Inglis, Geddie and the Paton family brought the truth of the gospel to people in great darkness in the second half of the 19th century. These men were Calvinists and gospel preachers. God blessed their ministries and whole villages turned from animistic paganism to worship the living God.

Sadly, with the advance of modernism and liberalism in the churches, we find that the gospel was sidelined and Presbyterian missionaries from Australia and New Zealand brought a social gospel, a gospel of works. A very strong emphasis on medical work and education came to the fore and translation of the Bible into the more than 100 languages of Vanuatu became less of a priority.

Where Bible translation was done it was often of a poor standard. The Rev Bill Camden, one of the few evangelicals of the late 20th Century, was an exception to the rule and did translation into the Tangoa language of S Santo. He also pioneered translation into the Bislama language in 1965. Bislama is a kind of pidgin English which is used as a language for people of different languages to communicate. It sounds crude and babyish, but is a real language. It is capable of conveying spiritual truth and for some people it is their mother tongue.

Here is a sample:

Yu yu fren blong mi. Mi mi laekem

yu tumas. (You are my friend. I like/love you very much).

The Bislama Bible was completed in 1998 and 20,000 copies were brought to Vanuatu for sale throughout the island group. Bill Camden did not live to see it dedicated and disseminated, but it was a kind of memorial of his fine work.

The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu has been praised as a church going “from strength to strength”, but by the time we arrived in 1969 in Brenwei, North Malakula, we saw little evidence of this. We saw almost weekly evidence of animism, immorality, inter-village hostility and ignorance of the truth. One catechist elder put it this way: “If my good deeds outnumber my bad deeds, I’ll go to heaven.” This seems to me, after 45 years of observation, to be a typical summary of how the average Vanuatu man sees his religion. Justification by faith, as a doctrine, is almost nowhere to be found. Very few people seemed to have a vital personal relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

As my friend Misel of Brenwei said, “Man we iskul i gud. Man we i no skul i nogud.” People who go to church are good. People who don’t go to Church are no good. Happily Misel heard the Gospel under our ministry, turned to Christ and is now in heaven.

From 1969 onward, we kept separate from the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu and spent most of our time living in a tribal situation, learning the language (Big Nambas Language of N. Malakula) and speaking to people about Christ. Our main informant for language and Bible translation was an elder called Sep’et (Japhet). We translated John’s Gospel and Genesis with him. During the process

“Recent disasters, for example Cyclone Pam, the most devastating hurricane in Pacific history, welded the PRCA and the RCNZ together as relief efforts were sent to Vanuatu in 2015. God uses all manner of means to accomplish his purposes.”

“Satan has opposed the work over many years and it has seemed as if the work was going to collapse. But God blesses his Word — we have seen mighty conversions of unusual people- May God bless His truth forever!”

of translating that Gospel he became a true Christian.

Things came to a head in 1974, when a leading PCV elder was found guilty of gross immorality. There was no repentance and the offence was swept under the carpet, so to speak. I exhorted Sep’et to secede from the PCV and promised that we would help him establish a true biblical church. He said that he would think about it and would let me know his decision in a week’s time.

Imagine our delight at our next translation session meeting when Sep’et said that he had consulted his wife and that he would leave the PCV and join our fledgling church.

He declared this openly and it was not long before the ferocity of the Evil One broke forth. The leaders of the local PCV convened a meeting and Sep’et and my colleague Rev Luke Zylstra were summoned to attend it. It was a very fierce meeting and the Presbyterians made all manner of threats. Subsequently, the pastor of the PCV went to the British District Agent and demanded that he revoke Luke and my residence permits, but Mr Wilkins said that he had

no responsibility to intervene in Church affairs and allowed things to continue as normal.

Within the next 18 months the pastor, his son and one of the most vociferous opponents of the PRC all died.

Sep’et continued as my language informant and among other treatises, we translated Mark’s Gospel, sundry tracts and the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Sep’et had a good reputation among the people of Tulwei and a number of people were converted through his witness – notably P’lten and his wife Narulin.

The word spread to the village of Brenwei, where we Foxes lived and one of the patriarchs of the village Albert Tusai came to us one night in June 1974 very agitated about what was going on. He was a ruling elder of the PCV, but like all the villagers was unconverted.

He was illiterate and so I couldn’t give him a tract to read, so I taught him the prayer of the penitent publican: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Luke 18:13. He was saved and his whole family came under the power of the gospel.

Another notable conversion was that of Killet, a sickly but resolute man. On



Champagne Beach, Vanuatu

one occasion I was called to visit him in hospital in Santo, an island to the north of the group. He had severe asthma and tuberculosis. I invited him to do some Bible translation with me – John’s gospel again. He agreed and I found that he was a very competent informant. He was encouraged. He said “The last time I touched the Bible I collapsed, but now I feel good”.

He soon realised that the local church was no use in a spiritual sense. Everyone was under the influence of white and black magic and were animists rather than Christian. In a meeting in the men’s house he declared that “another man is going to leave the PCV and join the Reformed”.

His friends told him that he would have to give up playing the guitar and would have to pay large sums of money as an offering. But these were just lies from ignorant people and I reassured him that we only followed the Scriptures.

Killet joined us and became a useful member and pastor. He was dynamic in his preaching and wasn’t afraid to deal with the issues of immorality and animistic belief. He was sent as a missionary to the south of the group and founded a church there.

He returned to Malakula, but sadly his body wasn’t strong enough and he passed away in his early thirties. He was a wonderful example for subsequent elders and pastors.

A key factor in our evangelism of the Big Nambas people was translation of the Scriptures into the local language. The reason for the failure of the PCV was that the religious teachers that it sent out throughout the many villages of the group were not themselves converted and spread their message of justification by works in English or Bislama.

A typical example of preparing someone for membership was as follows: “Sam, how were you prepared for membership of the Church?”

The pastor prepared the water in a bowl. Then he made the sign of the cross on my forehead. He said that when I died St Peter would recognise the sign and admit me to heaven.”

Needless to say, I pointed out that this was not the way of salvation, but a kind of Roman Catholic distortion of the truth.

Another example:

A Brenwei woman M. became pregnant out of wedlock and nearly died of post-partum haemorrhage. I visited her



Greg and Helen Fox in early days in Brenwei.

in Santo hospital and explained that God had preserved her life and that if she had died she would have gone to hell. She said, “No, because I paid the elder 20c. Haven’t you seen the box at the entrance to the church? I confessed my sin and he forgave me.”

Some of the practices of the PCV are more like Roman confessional practice than the teaching of the Bible. I am not the only one to say this. A moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Australia said as much.

Progress in Bible translation

The Fox family, Greg and Helen found the going tough in the early 70s, and the Missions Committee of the PRCA wisely realised that we needed reinforcements. The Zylstras, Luke, Marie, Tim, Linda and Ken, arrived in 1972 and immediately set about learning the language. Until we arrived the language had not been reduced to writing and so there was a lot of work to do. The Zylstras were linguists trained by Wycliffe Bible Translators, and made good progress, catching up to the Foxes. We had regular workshops and I subsequently wrote a book describing the Big Nambas grammar. It was published by Pacific Linguistics, an agency of the Australian National University. One of the Research Fellows of the Australian National University, the late Darrell Tryon, encouraged us greatly in this important task.

There is no point in publishing an

ungrammatical Bible, and Tryon helped us even with such small issues as determining the alphabet. The language has linguo-labial sounds which are not found elsewhere in the world. But on the other hand it has guttural consonants which parallel the sounds in Modern Dutch *goochelaar* juggler.

The translation of the New Testament into Big Nambas was greatly facilitated by the coming of Bruce and Anne Cooper to teach the three Zylstra children for a few years from 1975. Bruce served the Lord for a number of years in Malakula and Vila and is at present a ruling elder in the RCNZ.

When Bruce was in Malakula a call came from the people of Ifira, an island in the harbour of Vila, the capital of Vanuatu, to come and translate the New Testament into their language. This is a completely different language from Big Nambas. Big Nambas is Austronesian. Ifira is Polynesian, like Maori and Samoan.

George Kalsakau, one of the prominent members of the Vanuatu Police Force, was our supporter. He expected the New Testament to be translated in a number of months! We pointed out that a very speedy translator would take 10 years. We in fact took 17 years for each New Testament. The Big Nambas took from 1969 to 1986 and the Ifira Testament took from 1976 to 1993.

The translators of the Ifira New Testament were the Tuthills and the Foxes.

Bill and Margaret Tuthill lived in a house constructed by Bruce Cooper in 1977, while Greg and Helen Fox lived in a vacant house on the island of Iririki. The Foxes lived in the Iririki house rent-free, which was a wonderful blessing. At the moment the island is occupied by a multi-million dollar resort and the people of Ifira are much benefited as a result. There are no state pensions in Vanuatu and so it is a blessing for the locals.

The spiritual state of the people of Ifira left much to be desired. However, we were much encouraged by three Presbyterian elders, Daniel Kalorib, Kalsei Kaltapanga and Kalua Lauru. These three men and their wives have died, but they were a great asset in the arduous task of producing the Ifira New Testament. The chief of Ifira, Graham Kalsakau, never failed in his desire to see the New Testament in his mother tongue.

The Fox family left Vila in 1983 after 14 years on the field. It was a painful time leaving but a necessary one, particularly for the welfare of the children.



There are few opportunities for teenagers in South Pacific capitals.

After the departure of the Tuthills came Jack and Enid Wyllie to live in Vila, the capital of Vanuatu. Because our congregation was multi-lingual, it was decided to convey the message of the gospel in Bislama. Jack and Enid were excellent speakers of Bislama. In the 50s a number of people were converted as a result of sermons that he preached. While they were in Vila they were assisted by a Malakulan elder, Isul Lunap'ak and his wife Lim'ei. For Isul the time with the Wyllies was very much like being at a Bible College, as Jack had had huge experience of Vanuatu life over many years. Many booklets were translated and printed during the Wyllies' time there, among them Berkhof's *Summary of Christian Doctrine*. Elder P'lten and his wife Narulin from our Church in Malakula spent some time there, assisting the Wyllies.

Resurgence of the work in Vila

Bruce and Anne Cooper replaced the Wyllies and continued ministering in Vila, Malakula and Tanna, in a kind of district missionary role.

The work in Vila continued in the 90s and it looked like it was going to close.

But all was not lost. The good news is that the work in Tanna, an island in the South of Vanuatu, began to prosper. A boxer called Tom Kaut was converted under the ministry of Elder Killet.

His conversion was very dramatic. The men of Tanna were very athletic and put on a boxing exhibition. It was very vigorous and a lot of blood was spilt. Killet, as a spectator, was horrified and preached on the next day on a text from Isaiah 1.15- Your hands are full of blood. This was not a reference to boxing but the Lord used the Scripture to save a man.

Tom became a dynamic leader in Tanna and stood firm for Christ over many years. He had more than 8 children by his wife Yelo. He spent many hours in translating the New Testament into the Lenakel (Tanna) language. Some of his relatives lived in Vila.

Vila, being the capital of Vanuatu, became a kind of magnet for young people to seek employment; and some of Tom's relatives identified with the resurgent church. Some of the Big Nambas church members and adherents took up residence in Vila as well. So we had a core of sympathisers.

The church in Australia was enthused with what was going on and was prepared to contribute large amounts of money to build a local pastor's house, a missionary's house and a building for worship. Ken and Jeneen Zylstra from Australia spent four years encouraging the local church.

There are at present two elders – the Rev Andrew Fox, my son and Josiah, a Malakulan elder who has also served in Tanna, and a deacon, Dakles.

Recent disasters, for example Cyclone Pam, the most devastating hurricane in Pacific history, welded the PRCA and the RCNZ together as relief efforts were sent to Vanuatu in 2015. God uses all manner of means to accomplish his purposes.

The PRC Vanuatu is a young church, and a zealous church. We hope for much blessing. A lot of things have happened since Helen and I stepped ashore in 1969 – 47 years ago.

Satan has opposed the work over many years and it has seemed as if the work was going to collapse. But God blesses his Word – we have seen mighty conversions of unusual people – May God bless His truth forever!

Mr Greg Fox was a missionary in Vanuatu on behalf of the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Australia.

The author has been involved in South Pacific evangelism since 1961, when a young Baptist Christian challenged him with what he was going to do for God with his language studies. The Fox family, Greg, Helen, Catriona and Andrew went to Malakula, North Vanuatu in 1969 and stayed there until 1983, when they returned to Australia to serve the Lord in pastorates of the PRC in Brisbane and Sydney. In retirement Dr Fox is continuing with translation of the Big Nambas Old Testament.

The Gospel in the Pacific Islands (2)

Niue – Missions in the South Pacific

John Goris

She was a tall lady, and she stood up tall in the middle of the sermon!

It was in the Avondale Reformed Church, in October 1976. I was preaching a series of sermons on the Christian's call to be prepared for the battle against the powers of darkness. The apostle Paul calls us to put on "the whole armour of God" (Eph 6). In the end he says, "Stand up, therefore" "Stand up for Jesus!" I said. And so she stood up. Others followed suit.

Who was she? She was a visitor.

When after a few days I visited her home, not far from the church, I learned that she was from the island of Niue, and her name was Sulia.

The following Sunday two more ladies from Niue came to the church. A week or so later their husbands also came. More followed. There was a sudden death of a young child some months later.

Can you lead the burial service? Having come to know the various families, and their obvious commitment to the Lord and His church, I agreed. Over 200 people packed the church for the funeral service. How should I handle a funeral service for a Pacific Island community?

Their leaders said, "You are the pastor, we follow you ..."

The numbers grew, and a request was made for an extra service on Sunday (at 2pm) in the Niuean language, which I had begun to learn.

It was an amazing development from the attendance of one visitor, into the attendance of many families, and the start of regular Niuean services in Avondale. Now, after forty years, the Niuean presence in the Avondale Reformed Church is still a wonderful reality. How wonder-



fully the Lord has led these folk to be part of our church community.

When some ten years later I was a pastor in the Mangere Church, in the 1980s, a Niuean family joined the church, while there were also Samoan and Rarotongan families attending in worship. The Niuean brother, Mose, took a real interest in the study of the Scriptures. After having moved to Nelson, and then to Wellington, at a later time, I was in touch with him again. Mose had gone on to prepare for gospel ministry, and is now pastoring a Niuean Church in South Auckland.

This brother and colleague willingly prepared a historical background of the gospel developments in the Island of Niue. Small as it is, compared with other Pacific Island groups, it has retained a vital interest in the gospel. Many of its population have migrated to New Zealand, where they continue to have a Christian input.

"We do not just adapt to the culture, but we adapt to Christ who forms His church from all cultural backgrounds."

The Lord has blessed the missionary efforts of His Church in the South Pacific. The work of LMS missionaries brought a sound gospel message to this region, along with the backbone of the Westminster Confession as accepted in the Congregational Churches.

I recall the Niuean input in the morning services in Avondale, with a Bible song in their language, sung without musical accompaniment, with great enthusiasm. "They almost lifted the roof!" In the Niuean services in the early afternoon, we went through the Letter to the Ephesians, in simple English and referring to the Niuean translation. Ephesians gives us such a wonderful grasp of the doctrine of the Church, of salvation by grace, and of the practical issues in the Christian life, the new "mahani".

We also had week night Bible studies on the "Covenant".

What a wonderful thing it has always been that whenever I returned to Avondale I kept seeing Niuean families still worshipping there.

When I first visited the home of Sulia, we talked about the Gospel coming to the island of Niue. That very same October month they were commemorating the arrival of the gospel with "White Sunday", it reminds them of the coming of the *Light of the World* (John 8:12, a passage which I read in that home, which was so appropriate for that celebration month: and I was not initially aware of that!).

Pastor Mose Alano did a great job in providing the background details to the development and growth of the gospel in Niue. You will also notice that after a while many sectarian groups started their particular brand churches. Yet "the Lord is building His church, and the gates of

hell shall not overpower it."

It is always a good rule in cross-cultural contacts to let the Scriptures speak. And the more we love Christ the more we love His Church from whatever cultural background it comes. We do not just adapt to the culture, but we adapt to Christ who forms His church from all cultural backgrounds.

It has been an amazing privilege for me to *begin* to see aspects of the Church world-wide, from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev 5:9)

And they shall sing "Worthy art Thou ..."

Mr John Goris is a member of the Reformed Church in Wellington and a minister emeritus who has served in several congregations in New Zealand and Australia.

The Gospel in the Pacific Islands (3)

History of Christianity in Niue 1840-2000

Mose Alano

The London Missionary Society (LMS hereafter), founded in 1795, was the driving force that sent 29 missionaries from England by the ship *Duff* to the Society Islands (Tahiti) to commence introducing Christianity to the people of the Pacific Islands. From Tahiti, the challenging work of the early missionaries began to extend to the other Pacific Islands like the Cook Islands, Samoa, Niue, Tonga etc. The gospel was introduced to Samoa in 1830; and Malua in Samoa was the Mission School that started training the first Niuean pastors. In 1830, the Rev. John Williams took

Nukai and Fakafitienua to Samoa for Christian education. In 1842, the Missionary Aaron Buzacot returned the two Niuean men, Nukai Peniamina and Fakafitienua, to Niue after a few years' training at the Samoa Mission School. Their purpose was to Christianise the natives of Niue, who were living in darkness. Their attempt to land on Niue was unsuccessful, so they returned to Samoa.

On October 26, 1846, the Reverends Nisbett and Gill were successful in landing the Christian teachers, Peniamina, Fakafitienua/Toimata/Fakafitifonua, in Mutalau Ululautā Matahefonua. This village on the North Eastern side of Niue accepted Peniamina and the gospel of

salvation and peace that he preached. The first LMS church was established. Peniamina was the first Niuean to introduce Christianity to Niue. The historical date of 26th October was remembered and celebrated annually in Niue as a public holiday. All thirteen LMS churches, now called Ekalesia Niue, from the thirteen villages of Niue gathered in Alofi, the main village, for celebrations of worship, thanksgiving sermons, singing, donations, feasting and entertainment. They call this day "Aho He Maama" (Day of Light) or Aho a Peniamina (Day of Peniamina). This Aho He Maama day is celebrated by the many Niuean Churches in New Zealand and Australia with connections



Some Niuean members of the Avondale Reformed Church, singing at the farewell of Mr Peter Moelker (April 2016) in Avondale church
Picture by Sam Goris

to the Ekalesia Niue churches on Niue. This Aho He Maama Day strengthens and maintains the strong spiritual connections between the churches in Niue and overseas.

Peniamina was the one who pioneered the conversion of the natives of Mutalau from fierce warriors of darkness and fighting to people of light and peace, despite the many challenges and difficulties. He started to teach people to live in peace, to read and even to write.

In 1847, the Rev. A.W. Murray from Samoa went to Niue to check the progress of Peniamina's missionary work.

In 1849 the first Samoan missionary, Paulo, was sent to Niue to continue the expansion of Peniamina's missionary work. He settled with his wife at Mutalau Mission station while Peniamina moved to Tama Ha Tava, a village northwest of Niue.

People from other villages of Niue travelled to Mutalau to learn about this wonderful gospel of peace and salvation. After about months and years of learning they returned to their own villages to spread the gospel of light and salvation. More people accepted the gospel and started to live in peace instead of war, and this was the blessing of accepting Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

The missionary Paulo introduced rules

like keeping Sunday holy for worship, free from work, and punishment for stealing. Transgressors had to be locked up in caves in Mutalau and Tuapa for 30 days with a small amount of food.

Paulo taught Niueans to build houses and churches by using local materials of lathe and plaster. Paulo's work as a Samoan pastor was successful, and more Samoan pastors like Samuela settled in Avatele and Hakupu in 1854, Sakaio in Tuapa in 1857. The missionary work of these early pastors opened the way for European missionaries to develop further missionary work in Niue. In 1859 Dr George Turner visited Niue and distributed four thousand copies of Niuean Hymn books and Scriptures to the local churches. More people were baptised and accepted into the village churches.

In 1861 Dr George Lawes from the LMS settled in Niue. In 1868 Dr. Lawes' brother Frank Lawes went to Niue with the printing press and started translating and printing different books of the Niuean Bible. George and Frank Lawes, together with the local village pastors and people, started to erect church buildings for worship in the big villages of Niue with many church members like Mutalau, Alofi, Tuapa, Avatele and Hakupu.

Christianity expanded to other villages of Niue and from 1846, villages under

“The Spirit of the Lord in the churches of Niue is still moving in the hearts of the people. They continue to serve God with love in terms of Sunday worship, singing, prayers, teaching and the preaching of the gospel . . . ”

the LMS established their own mission school, teaching church members about the Christian faith and how to read and write.

The early European missionaries like Rev Gill, Dr Turner, Dr George and Frank Lawes and Rev Nisbett had great influence in the translation, printing and distribution of the different books of the Bible to Niueans. In return for the Christian materials, the Niuean people gave huge amounts of arrowroot, yams, coconut fibre and picked cotton to help with the LMS funds. Trading these local products for money helped to support the progress of the LMS missionary work in Niue.

The population increased to over four thousand and church membership also increased. Church structure and governance were formulated in village churches with lay preachers and church elders. Sunday Schools started and boys' and girls' schools, now called the Boys' and the Girls' Brigade.

In 1873 the Rev. Frank Lawes maintained the mission station in Niue while his brother, the Rev. George Lawes, travelled to work as a missionary in Papua New Guinea. The door was opened for many Niuean Pastors to travel and work in PNG from 1874 until 1953, a period of 79 years. In 1875 the population of Niue increased to over 5000 people with more church membership and funds to support the church. The Rev Frank Lawes also wrote the laws for the Niuean people.

All the churches on Niue were controlled by the LMS in England with their Director, who lived on Niue, to manage all the church affairs. He was replaced every few years by a new missionary from England.

In 1859 the people of Niue approached Dr Turner to ask for Niue to come under the protection of England. In 1887 King Fataaiki and the Chiefs of Niue wrote to Queen Victoria of England requesting that Niue come under the British Protectorate and asked for a flag for Niue. In 1899 Niue again applied for protection and finally Governor Lord Ranfurly of New Zealand visited Niue and annexed the island under the Protection of New Zealand in 1900. In 1901 the first New Zealand resident Commissioner Percy Smith resided in Niue. In 1906 the Centennial Bible College opened in Niue to train pastors. The school was closed in 1966.

In 1913 the Seventh Day Adventist's established themselves on Niue with a

lot of opposition from the LMS churches. This was followed by the Church of the Latter Day Saints in 1953 and the Roman Catholics in 1954, later still the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Christian Fellowship arrived. More and more members from the LMS churches were drawn away, and joined the new denominations, greatly reducing the members within the LMS churches.

In 1967 the churches associated with the LMS in Niue became independent from England. They appointed their first President. All their church affairs of church governance and management were under local control. They called themselves the Ekalesia Niue. They trained their pastors in Samoa, New Zealand, Fiji and Australia, to care for the village churches.

In 1974 Niue was granted self government, controlling most of its own affairs, but in free association with New Zealand. The airport of Niue was opened in 1971, and that also opened the door for more and more Niueans to leave Niue for New Zealand. The churches on Niue faced a huge decline in membership. With a current population of about 1500 people, the Ekalesia Niue churches and other denominations still survive strongly because of faithful support by those who wanted to remain behind to make Niue their home.

The Spirit of the Lord in the churches of Niue is still moving in the hearts of the people. They continue to serve God with love in terms of Sunday worship, singing, prayers, teaching and the preaching of the gospel, administering the sacraments, donations, baptisms and the acceptance of new members, further also birthday and wedding celebrations. There are services for the women, Sunday Schools, and youth as well as combined services with other villages. They have also annual combined church services and celebrations for the women, thanksgiving services for the first week in January, White Sunday (Peniamina Aho He Maama), and an end of the year thanksgiving or Fakaau Tau.

Church groups and families returning from New Zealand and Australia for holiday donate funds to help the village churches. This is one way of maintaining a strong link between the churches in Niue and overseas.

Responding to the migration of Pacific Islanders to NZ in the 1940s, the Congregational Church of NZ took the initiative to accommodate the migrants who came from the LMS churches in the Islands.

The Congregational Union in 1947 appointed the Rev. R. L. Challis to take responsibility for the Samoan, Cook Islander and Niuean speaking church groups. In 1948 the first Pacific Islanders' church was established in Newton, Auckland, for these church groups. It was a meeting place for worship, spiritual growth, identity, family and community requirements, planning and development and helping new migrants. Many members from places like Otara, Mangere, Onehunga, Avondale and other parts of Auckland travelled to the PIC in Newton for worship on Sundays. The growth of the Newton Church and the arrival of more migrants caused greater expansion and new (separate) congregations were established in Otara, Mangere, Onehunga, Avondale etc.

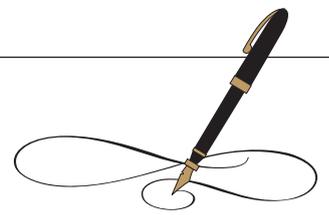
In 1969 most Congregational Union churches came under the umbrella of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, including all PIC churches. More members of these churches joined charismatic churches like the Pentecostal, and Assembly of God churches. Others joined with the Latter Day Saints, Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Seventh Day Adventists. The majority of these folk are New Zealand born Niueans. Many members still remain in the original churches to retain the language and culture of their parents and grandparents.

In December 1998, the first fully "Niuean" Ekalesia Niue Church in New Zealand was opened in Robertson Road, Mangere, Auckland. All church governance and administration is controlled by this local church, including church buildings.

Mr Mose Alano is the minister of the first Ekalesia Niue Church in New Zealand. The congregation is in Mangere, Auckland.

"There is nothing more noble, or more to be desired, that to wrest a soul from eternal death.... we must not neglect such splendid work."

John Calvin



One-sided friendships



Friendship is something we all enjoy, and the reasons are many. There's the assurance we're loved; the pleasant sense that there is always someone who will share our trials and joys, no matter what. There's the comfortable certainty of companionship when it's needed. There's the knowledge that someone else shares your opinions about many things – agreeable conversation is always possible.

But what happens when it's not like that; when you seem to be the one doing all the reaching out, helping, listening and understanding? When the person (or persons) you were trying to build a friendship with doesn't respond? We all know what a cold shoulder looks like;

and sometimes our best-meant phone calls, visits, cards, gifts, go unreciprocated. Sometimes people are just plain hard to please. You've probably heard people mutter darkly when they've been through some difficult time or other: "Well, I certainly found out who my friends are." (That sort of comment leaves you mentally reviewing whether you have done enough, offered enough, or said enough of the right things ...)

What's going on here? Is the world just populated by disappointed, unloved people, or are we expecting too much? Are we let down or simply feeling unduly entitled? What is right to expect from friends, or friendship?

Some of these questions were asked and answered in a piece by a pastor's wife I recently read. She noted that "It's so disheartening when we make ongoing efforts to extend friendship to other women and then find them met with what appears to be apathy or, worse, disinterest. Sometimes it's not even that we feel hurt by one-sided friendships but rather we've just grown weary of it – the work and the feeling of responsibility in our relationships."¹

Christine Hoover, the writer of this blog, acknowledges that we are called to one-sided love, which is part and parcel of being a Christian: "The narrative arc of the New Testament is that the believer is an initiator who is constantly moving toward others to meet needs. This, of course, is done in imitation and in honor of Christ, who *really* knows what 'one-sided' looks like." And it is looking to him that can keep us "putting ourselves out there for a lifetime."

However, Christine feels that while this one-sidedness can characterise all the relationships we have – with anyone – what can properly be called friendship is always marked by reciprocity. It is mutual. There is a genuine return of interest.

That's not to say, of course, that there won't be one-sided moments in friend-

ship – or even many moments, or long periods. Friends are sinners, and frequently needy. Christine admits that we might need to lower our expectations of friends, or forgive them, or to repent of demanding from my friends what I can only rightly expect from my Saviour, the Lord Jesus. Most often, we need to cultivate the spirit of thankfulness and be grateful that I have someone who does extend me love when frequently I do not deserve it.

All of which leads to an important type of one-sided friendship, which I call friendship even though Christine (as per above) would call simply a "relationship". This is the friendship we make with those who do not yet believe in the Lord Jesus; friendship with the purpose of showing him to them. Of course it is one-sided: this person cannot appreciate (yet) what it is to love with Christian grace. She cannot (yet) love without expectation of reciprocation. But we can, because Jesus showed us how.

Jesus was often criticised by the religious leaders of his day for being a "friend of tax collectors and sinners". He talked with these sinners, visited them in their homes, and ate with them. He was also willing to associate with the marginal, the poor and destitute – and the shameful. He told his followers to

do the same. "When you give a dinner or a banquet," he taught, "do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours ... invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you." (Luke 14:12-14) Such acts of non-requitable friendship may be the gateway into friendship with the real Friend of sinners.

To be sure, Jesus frequently emphasized that his disciples were his friends; and that his friends were those who heard his word and obeyed it. But it is the fact that he first befriended us, and changed our hearts through giving us faith in him, that gave us that friendship status, and that ability to obey him. When we make friends with those who can't respond, we're pointing them to Jesus, the perfect friend they could have. Surely there are ways we can love the lonely, visit the sick, share a festive occasion with a widow, or invite a single mum for coffee? It is not difficult to befriend a sinner when we remember how Jesus first befriended me – a sinner, too.

Imagine if he had not.

Notes

- 1 Christine Hoover, "Why Does Friendship at Times Feel One-Sided?" October 12, 2016, <http://www.gracecoversme.com/2016/10/why-does-friendship-at-times-feel-one.html>

Feminine focus

Jenny Waldron

Eating disorders

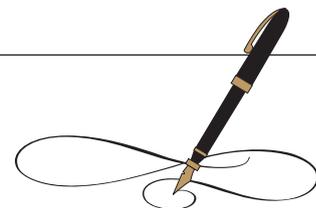
When does food no longer become just food? Food can become a comfort, an addiction, or it may even become a mechanism by which we can control at least one aspect of our life. It may become an enemy to be fought at all costs or seem like a passionate lover who will satisfy our deepest longings. Sin has distorted God's good gift of food to become an idol for many people. God said to Noah, "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you every-

thing."¹ God gave us food to sustain and nourish us and to also enjoy the pleasure of eating.

The society we live in is saturated with images of unrealistically skinny models who are supposedly the way we all want and need to look. Social media is constantly bombarding us with images and movie clips of sumptuous food brimming with cheese and bacon or healthy ways to prepare kale and broccoli or how to throw together a few superfoods in a blender for an ultra-healthy start to the

day. Social media encourages us to show off our 'all-together' and totally wonderful lives, creating unrealistic expectations which can make us often feel like failures (as we observe others' 'perfect bodies and lives'). This in turn can drive us to focus more and more on ourselves and how we look.

Many people struggle with food issues and eating disorders. Eating disorders are characterised by an obsession with food which affects the health and well-being of a person. Some people expe-





rience an emotional high when eating food, but then also feel tremendous guilt afterwards.

The main focus of this article is anorexia and bulimia, but also includes over-eating and binge-eating. Anorexia nervosa (an eating disorder whose main characteristic is extremely low weight and a fear of gaining weight), and bulimia (where a person binge-eats then purges the food through vomiting or the use of laxatives), are two eating disorders where a person has a distorted view of self, food and/or the calories it represents. Anorexia and Bulimia are recognised mental health disorders which can become life-threatening. It is important to seek medical advice for someone who becomes dangerously thin (often the first symptom we see that makes us realise there is a real problem). The sufferer probably won't seek it for themselves as they will most likely deny there is any issue.

In our churches we see women² (in particular, young women) suffering from eating disorders. Why is this so? Shouldn't the church be a place of acceptance and healing? Yes, it should be, but sometimes it is also a place of struggle, loneliness

and relationship difficulties. People with eating disorders need to see their desperate need of Christ in their lives and His ability to heal the brokenhearted, (as we all do).

There is victory through Jesus Christ! He is the Lord and Saviour who has loved us (His chosen people) from before the foundations of the earth. Jesus gives us a new identity in Him. He takes away all the punishment for all our sins; past, present and future. He gives us the strength to carry on through any and all of the difficulties we face in life. We are never promised an easy life, but one where Jesus will be with us and He always provides a way of escape so that we do not give in to the temptation to sin.³ We have also been promised eternal life, when we will be given new and perfect bodies.⁴

Many people with eating disorders begin their struggles with weight and food after a particularly stressful event. For example; sexual abuse/assault, a divorce, the death of someone close, bullying at school, a break in a close relationship, or moving cities may trigger a desire to eat less as a mechanism to control at least a small part of one's life.

"The chief goal is not to change the outward appearance but for there to be a change of heart. There needs to be a turning to Christ and living a life that is trusting and obeying the One who created us all."

“God created food for our well-being, enjoyment and nourishment, not for it to become more than just food, neither an idol nor something for us to be anxious about.”

For an anorexic girl, it isn't enough to say “you're getting awfully skinny, you need to eat more!” any more than it will help to say to someone who is overweight “you're getting awfully fat, you need to eat less!” There are often underlying issues that need to be resolved as well as treating the food issue. As someone begins to lose weight they are often complimented and they then feel loved and accepted. For the anorexic, their thinking can become warped into believing that “if I lose more weight I will be loved more!” “If I get this many nice comments when I lose a bit of weight, how many more would I get, and how much more beautiful/perfect I would be if I lost more ... and more!”

Jane⁵, a young Christian woman, from one of our churches, wrote about her struggles with anorexia nervosa.

Jane writes:

“I honestly can't think back to a time in high school that I didn't struggle with my weight, exercise and body, and I'd say that around Year 10, I definitely began using food and exercise as a way to satisfy my controlling, perfectionist, vain sins. The years from this time, up until the Lord began to get my attention, I can only describe as darkness. That's honestly all I feel they are, yes I lived and had relationships and [attended] school, but I was spiritually dead, and I was miserably trying to find control and satisfaction in my life.”

She writes of Christ's love for her. “Something that I find a great comfort in times of affliction is that my salvation is totally secure in Christ, and has no anchor in anything I have done or will do. He chose me because He loved me, and He loved me because He loved me, to give [Him] praise to the glory of His grace. I don't know if I will ever

really feel free from my eating disorder, I know that all I can do is seek the Lord, search for Him earnestly, seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.”

When we talk to a young woman like Jane, how often do we compliment her on the weight she has lost or for the clothes she is wearing or her new hairstyle? Are our conversations with others based on outward appearances? When we are speaking to another Christian woman, should we not compliment her on her godly character and the good work of the Holy Spirit in her life? Should we not direct her to be closer to her Heavenly Father, to give thanks for the gifts He has given her and to encourage her to use those gifts for His glory.

We need to look for ways to change the topics we speak to others about, from the outward to the inward. From self to God. From body size and dress to inner beauty and a godly heart, spurring one another to love and good works.⁶ Encourage one another in the faith! Be supportive of those who suffer from eating disorders and to their families and friends through this difficult time. Asking a simple question like “How can I pray for you this week?” can show Christian care and love, without being judgmental whilst showing genuine love and [sisterly] affection.⁷

The chief goal is not to change the outward appearance but for there to be a change of heart. There needs to be a turning to Christ and living a life that is trusting and obeying the One who created us all.

So how can a person with an eating disorder pray?

1. Be thankful. Focus on God and His wondrous works. He is truly magnificent and worthy of praise. Be thankful He has wonderfully and fearfully made you in His image. Shift the focus from self to our Creator and Saviour.

2. Pray for the Holy Spirit to work change in your heart and mind from dark to light, from sin to freedom in Christ, from death to life. Do not be conformed to the world but pray for the transformation and renewal of your mind so that by testing (and an anorexic/bulimic will have many times of testing!) you will be able to discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable.⁸

3. Pray to be given the will and desire to vigorously study the Bible, God's Word. Not just to memorise a few helpful Scriptures but to dig deep into the Bible to learn God's big plan of salvation and redemption, and to learn

more and more about His character/attributes. Pray to become more and more like Jesus Christ.

4. Pray for the Holy Spirit's help to commit to a life of obedience to God's Law, regardless of feelings, thoughts and ideas.

5. Pray for diligence: So as to be found by Him without spot or blemish and at peace.⁹ Jesus says, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”¹⁰

6. Pray for God's peace¹¹ and joy. God is shaping each one of us into His image for His glory and our good.

7. If your eating disorder was triggered by an event pray to the Lord for acceptance, healing and a forgiving heart. Remember that vengeance is the Lord's even though we may not see justice here on earth. Ask for strength to ask for help and wisdom from strong, mature Christians. In turn, as you become stronger, you may be able to help others in similar circumstances through God's guidance and strength, bearing testimony to His goodness and healing power.

As a Christian community we, too, can pray for these things for those we care about. Seeking medical help is very important. So too, is seeking God, truly knowing Christ's saving power on the cross where He gained victory over death and sin for us who are called by His name.

God created food for our well-being, enjoyment and nourishment, not for it to become more than just food, neither an idol nor something for us to be anxious about.¹² He has made us, in His image, fearfully and wonderfully, so that we can glorify Him and enjoy Him forever.

Notes

1 Gen 9:3

2 Men are also afflicted with eating disorders however, the largest proportion are women.

3 1 Cor 10:13

4 Phil 3:20-21

5 Not her real name

6 Heb 10:24-25

7 Romans 12:9-10

8 Rom 12:2

9 1 Peter 3:14,

10 John 8:31-32

11 Phil 4: 6-7

12 Matt 6:25

Official opening of the new Reformed Church of Christchurch building



“The steadfast love and faithfulness of our God was very much in the minds and hearts of those who gathered for the official opening ceremony as we sang Psalm 100 together.”

David Waldron

The rebuilt Reformed Church of Christchurch building was officially opened on Saturday 17th September 2016, five and a half years since the last worship service was held at the Cornwall Street site on 20th February 2011. The previous church building was rendered unusable in the magnitude 6.3 earthquake which struck Christchurch on 22nd February 2011. Across the city this event resulted in the loss of 185 lives, the injury and distress of many people, and the destruction of much property.

Over 2,500 years ago, the prophet Jeremiah looked at the devastation of Jerusalem after the Babylonians had laid the once magnificent city waste. In the midst of his deep despair and distress,

in the middle of the book of Lamentations, he declares *“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end”* {Lamentations 3.22}.

The steadfast love and faithfulness of our God was very much in the minds and hearts of those who gathered for the official opening ceremony as we sang Psalm 100 together. *“Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations”* {Psalm 100:4-5}

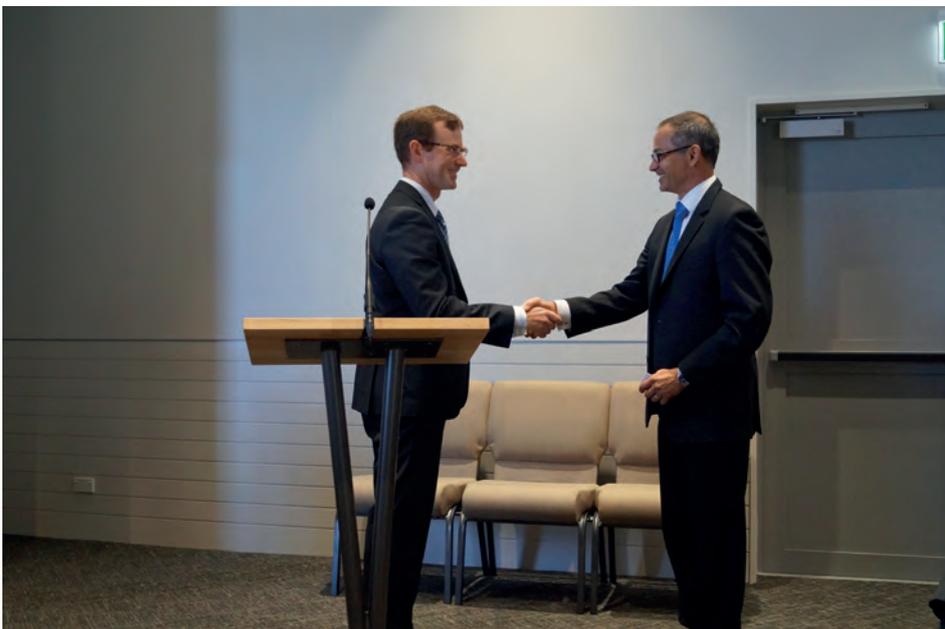
Having worshipped and praised our God together in song we then heard a presentation of the history of the Reformed Church of Christchurch from 1953 through to 2016. Many immigrants from the Netherlands found a spiritual



Mr Les Chapman the Master of Ceremonies.



MP Nicky Wagner, addressing those present.



Mr Titus Smith handing over of the keys of the building to Mr David Waldron.

“The congregation of the Reformed Church of Christchurch have been severely shaken over the past years, but we now look forward to what Christ is doing in our midst as He builds His church for His glory on the foundation of His completed work of salvation. To God be the glory, great things He has done (and is still doing)!”

home in the church, which first met as a group of 31 people gathered in March 1953 when the church was officially instituted. The Lord blessed this work and the membership grew to over 200 by 1959. When a property was purchased for this expanding congregation in 1963, the membership had risen to 367. It would reach a peak of 524 in 1978.

The first church building at 63 Cornwall Street was opened on 14th March 1964 and the ceremony was attended by Bert Walker, MP for St Albans. Over 52 years later, the second church building on the same site was officially opened with the MP for Christchurch Central, Nicky Wagner, present as a special guest and speaker.

Also in attendance were Reverend Tim Rott and his wife Georgette who had travelled from their home in the USA to be at this special event. Pastor Tim was never able to preach a sermon as the Minister of the Reformed Church of Christchurch in the Cornwall Street church building because his arrival in New Zealand to take up his call coincided with the events of the February 2011 earthquake. It was therefore a blessed providence of our Lord that Tim and Georgette were able to be with us for the official opening of the

new building and for Tim to speak as a special guest. He was also able to preach the first sermon in the officially opened new building the next morning. His sermon was appropriately entitled 'The Providence of God', from the text of Romans 8:18-30.

Many different people and organisations have been involved in the construction of the new church building. These many contributions were acknowledged at the opening ceremony. The Session and Congregation recognize the labour of so many in bringing the completed building to where it is today. Greetings were conveyed by letter from many churches within our federation and also from representatives who spoke in person at the ceremony.

There was also a symbolic handing over of the church keys from the Chairman of the Building Committee to the Chairman of Session. This gesture mirrored a similar transfer of church keys at the opening of the first building in 1964. The main difference in the 21st century handover being that there was a white credit card sized electronic key in addition to a more traditional metal one!

As we sang 'Great is Thy Faithfulness' together, we expressed our thankfulness to our Lord for his continued work in building his church. Pastor David Waldron then preached a message entitled 'The Church under Construction' from the text 1 Peter 2:4-5: "As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-- you also, like living stones, are

being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"

During the sermon, two invitations were presented.

The first invitation was to anyone present who had never come to Jesus Christ, the Living Stone. The encouragement was given to respond to His gracious invitation to "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." {Matthew 11.28-30}

The second invitation was to come and visit the church again to see what progress is being made by the Lord in constructing this local church.

Pastor David also noted that the earthquake and other events in our 63 year history have deeply disturbed us as a congregation. The Reformed Church of Christchurch is a spiritual body in need of repair, restoration, recovery and rebuilding. This spiritual re-construction work is a work-in-progress.

The last song we sang at the ceremony was 'In Christ Alone'. Only in our Lord and Saviour do we have lasting hope. He is our light and our strength. He is the cornerstone of the church. He is the solid ground. We need that security in earthquake prone parts of the planet, just as much as we do in every other region of this world.

The congregation of the Reformed

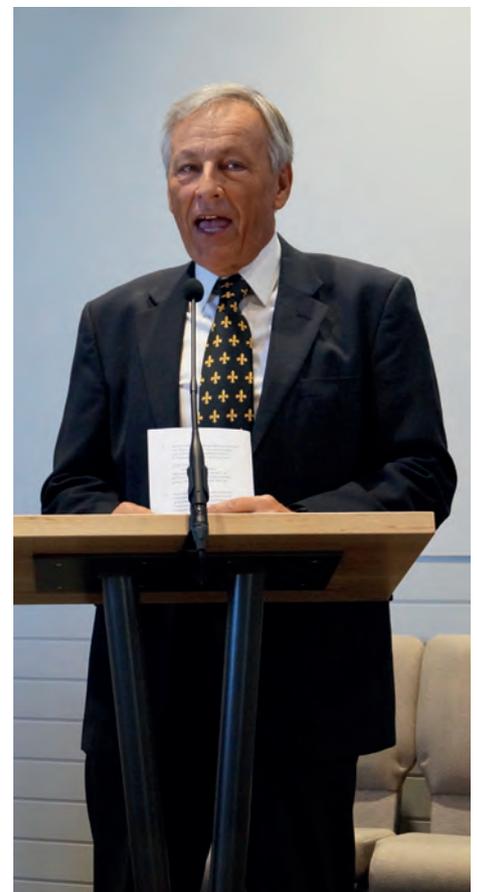
Church of Christchurch have been severely shaken over the past years, but we now look forward to what Christ is doing in our midst as He builds His church for His glory on the foundation of His completed work of salvation. To God be the glory, great things He has done (and is still doing)!

There has been a change in the morning worship service time in the Reformed Church of Christchurch from 11 a.m. to 10:30a.m., following the official opening ceremony. The evening worship service time at 5p.m. remains unchanged. We look forward to seeing you visit with us when you are next in Christchurch. We were encouraged by one speaker at the opening ceremony who exhorted us to 'wear the new church building out for the Lord'. If you are visiting this southern city in the future, please come and help us do just that!

Mr David Waldron is the minister in the Reformed Church of Christchurch.



Mr Waldron's first sermon in the new building.



Mr Tim Rott finally got to preach in the Reformed Church of Christchurch's building.

CHURCH POLITY CONFERENCES



Rev. Jan DeGelder
from the Canadian Reformed
Churches will speak on

The Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Polity

***with a focus on the nature of the authority of the local
Sessions, in relation to Presbytery and Synod.***

There will be three meetings, one in each presbytery, on the following dates:

Auckland Presbytery

Saturday 25th February 2017

Wellington Presbytery

Saturday 4th March 2017

South Island Presbytery

Saturday 11th February 2017

The conference should run from around 9.10 am till about 3.00 pm.

Rev. DeGelder will deliver two talks at each meeting; one in the morning and one in the afternoon and both will be followed with a period of question time. Venues and start and finish times will be confirmed in each presbytery through the church bulletins.

Rev. DeGelder has lectured on Church Polity at the CanRC seminary. While he is in New Zealand he will also preach in Silverstream and Masterton.

We encourage all who have an interest in the well-being of our churches to attend. These talks will be especially relevant to office bearers, serving and non-serving. Interested members are equally welcome to attend these meetings and learn more about the practical implications of our Church Order for the life and governance of our churches.

For our churches to be healthy and prosper they also need to be governed well and it is our prayer that these conferences will help us do so.

Please mark these dates in your diary.

Church Order Committee

Letter to the editor

Dear sir,

The September *Faith in Focus*, "The Liberal Arts Add Value", argues the case for studying the arts at university rather than rejecting the arts as useless and pointless. This is a pertinent subject at a time when there is increasing dissatisfaction with liberal arts degrees, and advisers are urging young people to take more 'practical' subjects such as business and commerce. In effect, universities are becoming trade schools rather than centres of intellectual enquiry. A call to re-invest in the liberal arts suggests a desire to reverse this trend.

Rev. Michael Flinn also points to some possible dangers and limitations of university study. I would like to add a few more thoughts for discussion:

- If the choice is between 'practical' subjects (i.e. the ones that make more money) and 'academic' ones (the traditional liberal arts), I see no particular urging in Scripture to follow either, suggesting to me that these are matters of some indifference in the Christian life.
- Educational institutions are means whereby people, who could learn things quite well by themselves, pay other people to force them to learn. In other words, they are a substitute for motivation. For the Christian, shouldn't the desire to know God and make him known be motivation enough?
- The content of the average university arts course is equivalent to the content of about five books. Why not just read the books?
- Isn't a real reason why we want to go to university, or want our children to, the social status and écart that it confers? (1 John 1:16,17)
- A liberal arts degree will make a person able to understand philosophies and worldviews, think rationally, garner important information and present well-reasoned arguments. Really? Isn't that something of a best-case scenario, strongly correlated to the individual's prior ability? It's common enough to meet people with degrees who can't formulate a grammatically correct sentence, let alone a cogent logical argument.

- Ought we not to count very seriously the cost of university study: the bad company, the morally degraded atmosphere, the humanistic and anti-Christian bias, and the heavy financial burden?
 - Having a degree entails a great deal of pressure to ‘use’ the degree in the workforce. This can drive even Christian married women to delay child-bearing or forsake the home in order to prove themselves, build a career, or repay debt. Can we even begin to count the cost of this?
 - Many Christian parents fear that their offspring will ‘lose their faith’ if they go to university, and statistics seem to bear this out. Of course, we ought to know that true faith can never be lost (John 10:28). But if our children have saving faith (hallelujah!) and stay in the church, but stay in the church with a largely humanistic worldview acquired from a secular education, isn’t that more of a danger to the church in the long run?
 - Let’s not forget that New Zealand universities are state-owned and state-funded, which means that, however genuinely or hypocritically they may strive for academic integrity, they will ultimately be bound to serve the state’s political agenda. Free enquiry and the free exchange of ideas will be tolerated on obscure points, but not on the state’s core dogmas. For instance, belief in anthropogenic global warming has been virtually obligatory in science departments for many years, and, if it isn’t already, I predict that it will soon become very difficult to get an arts degree without making some kind of public profession of support for the homosexual agenda.
 - I can’t find any example in the Bible of one person being considered more fit or well-prepared than another for Christian life and service on the basis of academic achievement, although the New Testament was written in a complex cosmopolitan society much like our own. Paul certainly didn’t consider himself to be a better qualified apostle than Peter. Indeed, he called himself “the least of the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:9) and his brilliant education “rubbish” (Acts 22:3, Phil. 3:8). That, when his training had been in the Pharisees’ understanding of the Scriptures, not in the thought and literature of the pagans!
 - If anyone was preeminent in the early church, it would appear to have been James, the Lord’s brother (Acts 12:17, 15 *passim*). Let’s not forget that the Lord’s brother would have been the same kind of man our Lord chose to be – a poor, non-academic¹, rustic carpenter. Why do we always think we can do the work of God *even better* than he would do it? (1 Cor. 1:25)
- Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? (1 Cor. 1:20)*
- But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. (1 Cor. 1:27-29)*
- The glory of the Gospel is departing from the Western world and all its institutions of pomp and pride, and is being given to the poor, the despised and the humble of Africa and Asia. Are they now the nations “bearing the fruits of it” (Matt. 21:43)?
- Apollos “greatly helped” those who believed (Acts 18:27), not because he had an arts degree or a business one, but because he was “mighty in the Scriptures” (v.24). That is something that anyone with a Bible can set out to be.

In Christ,
Mrs. Tani Newton (BMus)
Oamaru

(Endnotes)

¹ By *non-academic* I mean outside of the academic establishment.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to our contributors for providing edifying articles; our regular columnists, Mrs Sally Davey and Mrs Jenny Waldron, for their diligent and tireless work; Mrs Sally Davey as sub-editor – her talents are appreciated; to the members of the National Publications Committee, who ensure that the magazine continues to be viable; to Flying Laser Colours for their expert technical support and printing.

Many thanks to you the readers and those who encourage us on.

On behalf of the Faith in Focus team, we wish you all a blessed and safe holiday season.

The Reformed Churches Bible College in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea is looking for an experienced Teacher.

The RCBC was established in 2007 and has been blessed with many graduates, who are able to serve the Reformed Churches of PNG in many capacities including elders and most recently as ordained pastors.

The successful candidate must have a teaching background and have administrative skills as well as a strong desire to serve the Lord on the Mission field.

If you feel called to take up this position and wish to know more of what this exciting position and service for our Lord involves, please contact:

Carol Griffioen-Diemedi
9 Regis Drive
North York, Ontario
M2M 3J4
carolgriffioen@yahoo.ca

Pikinini Stori

A liklik samting blong Papua New Guinea



What did you think when you saw the photos? Lots of jandals, aye? We think New Zealand is “jandal capital”, but they must also be the standard fashion in Papua New Guinea (PNG). They are inexpensive, easy to take off and in the hot climate nice and cool. You can also wear them when you get wet.

Why does everybody in the photo take them off? Close your eyes for a moment and have a good think about it. These photos are taken on different occasions, at the church, at a classroom, at a hall. While we were listening to the minister talking, one little girl got up and walked out of church. She put on a pair of sandals that were way too big for her (any pair will do) and walked out. They weren't hers, but that didn't

matter, at least they matched. Plenty to choose from!

One lady also told a story; “I had never been on an aeroplane before. Checking in went well, but the closer we got to boarding, the more nervous I became. Just before we walked on the plane I stepped out of my jandals as usual and walked on board. The air hostess stopped me and said, ‘Ma’am, you better take your shoes with you, as we won't be coming back here for a while’”.

So, why do you think everybody takes their shoes off? If you said to keep the carpet clean, you are not wrong, just that most people in villages have a dirt floor or a tarpaulin like we had in church in the photos. Why is it important to keep





the floor clean-ish? Well you see, there are no tables and chairs, so we sit on the floor all day, even with our Sunday clothes on. Some ladies even wore a white dress! So it keeps your clothes cleaner, but there is more. At meal times, there is no table, so you also put your cup and plate on the floor and you don't want a layer of mud to put your plate on! It is just like camping, but then for much longer than a few days.

Activity: Why don't you draw a pair of feet or jandals, decorate one and on the other one write at least 6 things you can be thankful for when you see the photos and read the story.

Missions in focus

Meri Bung

Heidi Hendrikse

From 9-21 September, Rhoda Newton (Oamaru) and I (Heidi Hendrikse from Masterton) we were blessed to attend the Reformed Churches of Papua New Guinea Ladies' Fellowship Conference (*meri-bung*) at Beregoro, Sogeri, PNG. Here is a report about it.

The purpose for my 12 day visit was 2-fold; to attend the *meri-bung*, and to spend time with our New Zealand Missionaries in PNG: Alan and Odette Douma. I have written a separate article

about my observations at the Douma household, where we spent almost a week before the *Meri-Bung*.

On Thursday, we were to leave from Nine Mile Church at 10:00 am. Several ladies had come the night before from Lae and the other churches, and had slept in the church at Nine Mile. Lae is over the Owen Stanley Ranges and is a 45-minute drive to the airport, plus a 45-minute plane trip from Port Moresby. We were expecting 3 PMVs (a truck with a special deck to transport people) to take us to the mountain village of Beregoro.

Only one PMV arrived, at about 10:30 am. 11 o'clock came and went, still no vehicle. At quarter past one, (no coffee, no food since 9:00 am) one lady got up at said: "I think we should load up this PMV and get the first load to Beregoro; then it can always turn around and pick up the next load if the other PMV doesn't arrive." So we started loading and just then the other PMV turned up as well. Rhoda and I were the only white ladies and had to sit right at the front as a place of honour. A PMV is licensed to carry 2x12 persons with luggage, but nobody is counting, so we had 2x12 adults and 13 children as well as luggage, food, bedding, and a large chilly-bin.

The two hour drive to Beregoro went very well; the driver did a good job driving through the mountains, mostly on dirt roads, with ruts that are very deep and muddy. There were some hairpin corners and steep ascents. When we looked back at a broken concrete bridge we crossed, we were amazed the vehicle made it across.

People in Beregoro had done an amazing job of getting ready for the *Meri Bung*: they had built a kitchen, a long serving table, two toilets for the



PNG sisters to use, one 'bathroom' for the white sisters, two large A frame style shelters for the PNG ladies to sleep under (strewn with ferns and a tarpaulin on the floor), an extension to the church in the shape of an A frame tarpaulin. All this was built just for the *meri bung*. The whole village was involved in this, whether they belong to the *sios* (church) or not. The men had built all the structures, the ladies organized the *kaikai* (meals), kitchen stuff, etc.

The *Meri Bung* is run by the Women's League, a committee of about 8-10 ladies from the different churches as well as Greta Kleyn, the wife of Cor Kleyn who is a missionary from the Canadian Reformed Churches, and who serves as lecturer at the Reformed College and minster in the churches. The churches that attended were: Nile Mile, Wantun, Beretete, Veifa'a, East Boroko, Lae, and Beregoro.

Also attending were the village ladies, the five white sisters, as well children, youth and men. A total of 130-140. It was just like in the Old Testament times, people going in an out, invited or uninvited, young and old, noisy or quiet, joining in when you like and getting up when you like.

The ladies speak quite a bit of English because at school they used English textbooks. Tok Pisin has some English words mixed into it as well. These women must be very intelligent to be able to speak two, sometimes three languages when their village language is different. We were able to have good conversations with most of the ladies; as long as we both spoke simply and slowly we could understand each other well.

The topic for the Conference was "*Let the Light of Christ Shine*" – in your life, in times of trouble, and in me, so others can see it.

Pastor Henry Versteeg spoke on Matthew 5:15-16 (Let your light shine before men), Ephesians 5:21-24 (Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ) and Prov. 4:23 (Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.)

Pastor Nawai Renagi told us in his lecture that the Light needs to go through all our life- from start to finish. Ps 119:105 says "Your word is a lamp to my feet". The psalmist here is not talking about a big fluorescent light like we have these days, but a small handheld candle or wick lamp, which gives just enough light for the next step. Take each step with God, He will direct our path.



(top) The village water supply.

(bottom) Cooking for 130 in progress.

Pastor Joel Sine lectured about the necessity of light for fruit to grow. We need to be imitators of God, and abide in Him to grow and blossom and produce the fruits of the Spirit. Apart from Him we walk in darkness, wither and die.

There was a group discussion after each session. I was impressed with how the ladies shared and were open and willing to dig into the Word of God to learn from it.

Our discussion questions were the following scenarios:

- Tauga and Jenny have been married for five years, but don't have children yet. The family of Tauga wants him to divorce Jenny because she is barren. Tauga loves his wife and feels torn between them. How do you let the Light of Christ shine in this situation?
- Monica is a mother, struggling to survive on a small income. A few weeks ago, while she was at church with her children, the neighbour kids

stole two of her chickens from the pen. She knows who has done it, but hasn't confronted anyone. Then last night, the mother of the children who stole her chickens comes to her door asking for some sugar and flour. How can Monica let the light of Christ shine in this situation?

The program also included the singing of the PNG National Anthem, a roll call, *planti singsing*, a health talk by Sister Rita Versteeg, opening and closing *prae* and a variety evening, where each group had a song, a skit or a speech.

The ladies all like to say something, and there were plenty of times where somebody would have an impromptu speech, followed by enthusiastic clapping. On the Saturday there was a time for a Brief Report with a Thanksgiving offering from each Church group. The Beregoro sisters stood at the front and each group performed a song or a tribal dance in grass skirts over the top

of their provincial traditional dress and brought a monetary contribution. As a surprise the men did a tribal dance performance as well.

I must say that I was very impressed with the way the men all chipped in to help with the building, the cooking, the serving and this dance. It was fantastic to see them hang over the low walls to get a good look at what was going on.

This was a 3½ day conference and all meals were on site. They did a fantastic job in providing three cooked meals a day for approximately 130 people with very limited facilities. We ate boiled *kaukau* (kumara) at every meal – a staple which they grow in the hills. Twice a day we had rice with a stew, made with

locally grown vegetables (even ferns). Everything was cooked over an open fire.

There is no electricity, no running water, no lights, no bathroom, nothing as far as amenities go in the village, but the people made up for it in their generous hospitality. The people next to the church had vacated a room especially for us white sisters (Rhoda, Odette and I) to sleep in. We had brought our own mattresses, blankets and mosquito nets. The only water source was a water pipe, which brought water from a lovely, refreshing spring via an open drain to a watering and showering hole. It was enjoyed by all, sometimes up to three times a day. As for some of the ladies from other villages this constant

water supply was a luxury! The white sisters were privileged to be able to use the long drop complete with toilet seat, privately owned by the minister and his family. The other ladies had to use other avenues.

On the way back, our PMV held not 24, not 36, but 45 people, plus bedding, luggage bags, and locally grown food (as well as cuttings from wild orchids) which the ladies of Beregoro gave to take back home. Again, it was very hot, but that didn't stop the ladies from singing Christian songs all the way home. We even stayed on the vehicle to finish off the last song after we had already pulled into the college!

This *Meri Bung* has been a real boost for the whole village and a good witness for the church of how we all are one in Christ – white ladies included!

I think our whole visit was very well summed up, when on the last evening a dear sister thanked me for coming and said, "Now we know that we are one with you; you have sat on the floor with us, you have eaten our food, and slept where we sleep. You prayed with us and you came to the village with us. Now we know we are sisters in Christ". I was blessed and very thankful to be able to experience such fellowship.

Mrs Heidi Hendrikse, is a member of the Reformed Church of Masterton.



The house we slept in (the back room on the right, with the washing).



All the sisters that attended.



Image by W Wairaven ©

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil ...

Hebrews 6:19