

# ELECTION and Assurance

– *comfort for the  
saints*



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# Editorial

Welcome to issue 44/1 of *Faith in Focus*, in the year of our Lord 2017.

You may have been noticing a few cosmetic changes to the magazine over the last few issues. Even though there have been a few subtle changes, to the appearance of the magazine, the one thing that has not changed is the desire to bring you biblical and edifying articles to, hopefully, challenge your faith.

This year's articles will deal with various themes, with one issue being dedicated to marking the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. One new item is a regular column from a book entitled "Letters from New Zealand" by the late D.G. Vanderpyl. This book is a collection of letters – essentially a biography of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand - which were originally written for *Trowel & Sword* and cover a period from 1976-1995. Lord willing, I will be including excerpts as well as full letters from the book over the next 11 issues and beyond. I do hope old and young alike will enjoy reading them.

By now you will be aware that we have a sister-church relationship with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA). As an introduction, we have an article to inform us who the FRCA are, their history and what church life is like in their federation. From our side of the watery divide, the Rev J Rogers wrote an introduction to the RCNZ for *Una Sancta*, the magazine of the FRCA.

Some members of their churches already receive *Faith in Focus*, so it would seem to me that, in the future, a possible exchange of articles between our magazines would be a welcome and valuable contribution to the faith of the saints on both sides of the Tasman Sea.

We welcome our brothers and sisters of the FRCA as fellow-readers of *Faith in Focus*.

Our contributors write about election and assurance and the possible misunderstandings and misapplications that at times confuse Christians regarding these beautiful doctrines.

Mr Daniel Wilson explains how assurance relates to election.

Mr Paul Archbald looks at both assurance and the essence of faith.

Mr Richard Pot (minister of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia) writes an introduction to our latest sister church.

Mr Dirk and Mrs Amanda Poppe share their experience of living and worshipping among us.

The first of many letters from NZ by the late D.G. Vanderpyl.

*Focus on home* provides some of the latest gleanings from around the churches and presbyteries.

*Missions in focus for kids* by Mrs Heidi Hendrikse gives an insight into an important daily issue – snakes!

The National Diaconate provide an update on their activities.

Ode to Odette – a wonderful silent supporter of our missionary in PNG.

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 Dort, 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.

# Finding Assurance in God's Sovereign Election



of God! What greater comfort could we have than to know that God loved and chose us before the foundation of the world? I think that as we study this topic, you will find that great assurance is found in the doctrine of election.

The plainest teaching of the doctrine of Election comes from Ephesians 1:4-5, where Paul is speaking of how God blessed us in Christ. There he says, “even as He (God the Father) chose us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ...” God chose who would be saved by faith in Christ before the foundation of the world! There it is quite plainly and clearly, and if that was not enough, Paul goes on in Ephesians 2 to explain that God ordained salvation this way and saved us by His power and gave us faith to make salvation clearly a gift, not from works, so that no man may boast. We are God’s workmanship.

Now, there are a few problems that often arise when people consider this doctrine. Some think that since God elects, then they don’t need to do anything to witness or even believe for themselves. They say things like, “If God wants to save them/me, then He will, and it will be obvious when it happens.” But that isn’t the biblical faith! That is presumption and an extreme form of Calvinism which rebels against the plain teaching of God’s Word. God chose, but then He uses means. He commands His people to witness and promises to save His people. That is a reassurance for action, not an excuse for laziness!

Another problem is that people will take their salvation for granted and presume that God has elected them, and if elected, then nothing can take away their salvation. It is true that nothing can

“There is no need to be anxious about your salvation if you have Christ and are seeking Christ!”

### Daniel Wilson

I really enjoy irony and ironic stories and jokes. I love how things are deliberately contrary to what is expected or normal ... such as when someone responds to criticism with the reply, “Don’t overdo it with so much praise!” But not all irony is sarcastic or fun. There is also a great deal of sad irony. One of the saddest ironies, in my mind, is how people often get offended by the very doctrines which God intended to comfort and reassure them.

This issue of *Faith in Focus* is about Election and Assurance, both of which have been hotly debated for hundreds of years. Many people are actually put out and disgusted with the concept that God elected (or chose) whom to save and whom to condemn. But that very doctrine is both true and very comforting. How ironic that they would be unsettled by something with the purpose and goal of helping them be settled in the perfect saving power and providence

“The gospel isn’t just for the non-Christian, it is for every day of the Christian life as well. We simply need to keep turning away from sin, which robs us of our joy/assurance, and we need to look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our salvation.”

take away your salvation once you are truly saved, but it is absolutely wrong to assume you are saved based on some non-biblical idea like your culture, upbringing or background. You see, no one can have assurance that they are saved apart from the assurance taught in God’s Word. Just because your parents were Christians doesn’t save you. Just because you go to church fairly regularly, doesn’t save you. No! You must have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. The confusing thing to some, is that God promises certain salvation to any and all who repent and believe that Jesus Christ lived and died for them.<sup>1</sup> But God also says that He chose who would repent and believe before creation as we saw in Ephesians 1. So, which is it? Yes. It is both! And that leads us to the main point of assurance, it comes from looking to Christ in faith (believing that He can save us) and putting sin to death in our lives that we might be like and glorify our Saviour. To be sure that God has elected you for salvation, you need to repent (turn away from your sin) and believe in Jesus Christ as your Saviour just as the Bible teaches. If you genuinely repent, believe and live for the Lord – then you should have every confidence that you have been elected unto salvation. That is why Paul could say in Philippians 2:12-13: “*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*” Believers who live like this can be assured that God has elected

them, not based on their birth or their race/culture – but for His good purpose and glory. And knowing that fact can powerfully encourage you in the rough times in the Christian life – for if God chose you before He made everything else, then what do you need to fear?

A third problem is that people sometimes take offense at God’s choice in election. They are angry that God chose some and not others, and they presume to know better than God. Many Christians respond by saying that God only elects who will be saved and doesn’t do anything toward the wicked. However, the Apostle Paul answers such challenges well in Romans 9. There Paul specifically speaks to those who might question God’s justice and morality. He explains how election to salvation works and how election to damnation works.

Paul explains how God chose Jacob but not Esau. He chose Moses and Israel but rejected and condemned Pharaoh. In vs.16-18, Paul gives the example of Pharaoh during the Exodus. God said through Moses that He raised up that particular Pharaoh so that God might show his power in him and that God’s name might be proclaimed in all the earth. He was created specifically to be hardened and destroyed for the freedom of God’s people and the glory of God’s name.<sup>2</sup> God is sovereign over the hearts of man! This chapter is one of the clearest descriptions of election. It is positive in showing mercy to some, and it is negative in hardening others to continue on their way to Hell. God can and did specifically choose to condemn Pharaoh and Esau to Hell. And we dare not think that God could only name and condemn those two specific individuals. *Rather, these verses prove that God’s merciful election and His JUST reprobation are both specific and comprehensive.* Every human ever conceived was either elected unto Life, or reprobated unto God’s justice in Hell. And they were chosen either way, by name. We revel and rejoice that every person ever saved was chosen by name before the foundations of the World – Ephesians 1...but we shudder and feel queasy to think that God specifically chose who would be reprobated and damned for all eternity.

Paul understood this reaction and answers our questions before we ask by saying in Romans 9:18-20: “*So then, He (God) has mercy on whomever He wills and He hardens whomever He wills. You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still*

*find fault? For who can resist His will?’ But who are you O Man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’”* There is the answer to these objections. We have no right to question God’s choice for we are the pottery and He is the potter! He created us and He has every right to do whatever he will with us according to His purpose. Furthermore, Paul goes on in vs.21-24 to explain that God’s choice of who would and wouldn’t be saved was all a part of His plan to make the riches of His glory known to His people. WE don’t have the time to delve into that any deeper, but suffice it to say, that God’s election was intended so that we might know the true wealth of God’s character and glory. How awesome is that? If that is so, then we simply need to rest in His power, choice and provision of a Saviour – for His choices and provision are perfect.

And that wraps all these different strands together. For God has the right to determine how He will work or save or do anything in our world. And that means that we must simply look to Him in humility and faith for what He says. Therefore, repent and believe and you will be saved. To be assured that you are one of the elect, seek Christ! As Paul says in Galatians 5, Keep in step with the Spirit. Or in Ephesians 4: Put off the old man, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires and put on the new man created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.<sup>3</sup> We are saved by God’s perfect choice and power, but we feel the assurance and comfort of that salvation when we seek what God seeks – His Glory!

There is no need to be anxious about your salvation if you have Christ and are seeking Christ. And yet, sin struggles can rob you of that assurance if you are not careful. Temptation, if indulged, will shake your confidence in God’s saving work – but read Ephesians 1-2, Romans 9 and any number of other passages in the NT and you will be reminded that God saves, NOT YOU! Assurance is often connected to our obedience, but your salvation isn’t. When you are guilty of sin, or struggling with temptation, repent and believe. The gospel isn’t just for the non-Christian, it is for every day of the Christian life as well. We simply need to keep turning away from sin, which robs us of our joy/assurance, and we need to look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our salvation.<sup>4</sup> You see, we should be

just as assured of our salvation when we realize we sin, as when we have just given generously to a missionary cause. For in both situations, Christ is our only hope of salvation. Therefore, when you find yourself weak and doubting in the faith, look to Jesus. Trust that He alone can save you, and then continue to

work out your salvation with fear and trembling – repenting and believing that God is the one at work in you to save you according to His power and choice!

#### Notes

- 1 See Mark 16:16, Acts 16:31, Romans 10:9.
- 2 Re-read the account of the exodus from Egypt,

and you will see that God repeatedly is said to have “hardened” Pharaoh’s heart! (Exodus 4, & 9:7,12)

3 See Ephesians 4:17-24

4 See Hebrews 12:1-3

*Mr Daniel Wilson is the minister in the Reformed Church of Nelson.*

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## Election and Assurance – comfort for the saints (2)

# “Assurance and the Essence of Faith”

### P. N. Archbald

One of the debates that has often come up in church history concerns the place of assurance of salvation: Does assurance belong to the *essence* of faith, or is it a desired, but optional extra? Answers to this question have varied considerably. Roman Catholicism reserved assurance for the most godly, who then received their certainty by special revelation. The rest had to be satisfied with an uncertain hope that they would be saved. Roman Catholicism could hardly come to any other conclusion, given that they had made man’s works part of the ground of justification. How could a believer then be sure of his salvation, when it depended in part upon his future behaviour? Arminianism was also compromised at this point, since man’s free will played such an important part. If you come to God by your own free will, how can you be sure you will not leave Him by your own free will?

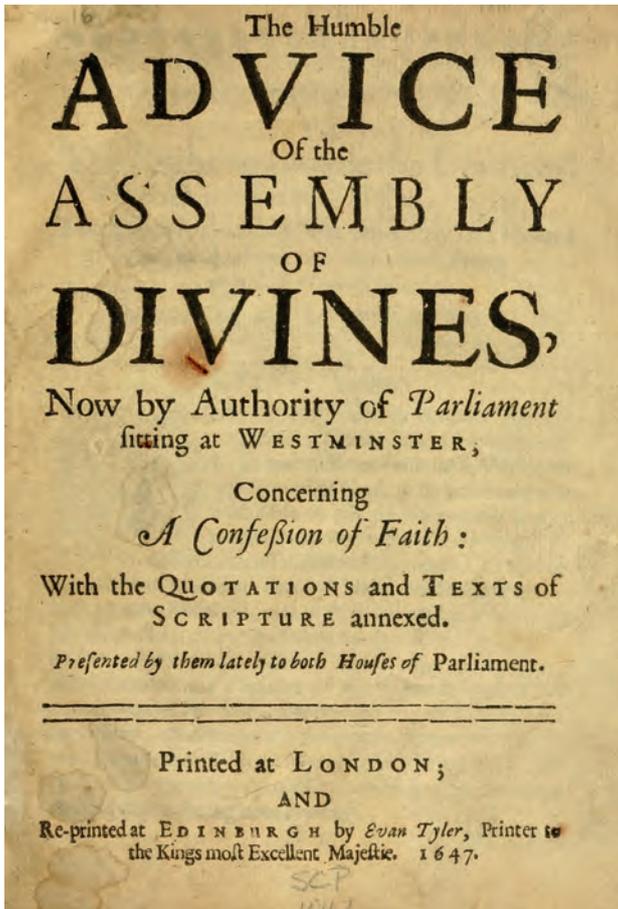
The Reformers took a very different view. They believed that the sole ground of our justification is Jesus Christ, His merits and His righteousness. They also believed that God gives grace to ensure that the believer perseveres in the faith. They believed that God enables the believer to have certainty about his salvation, by the work of God’s Word and Spirit within him.

Within the Reformed camp, however,

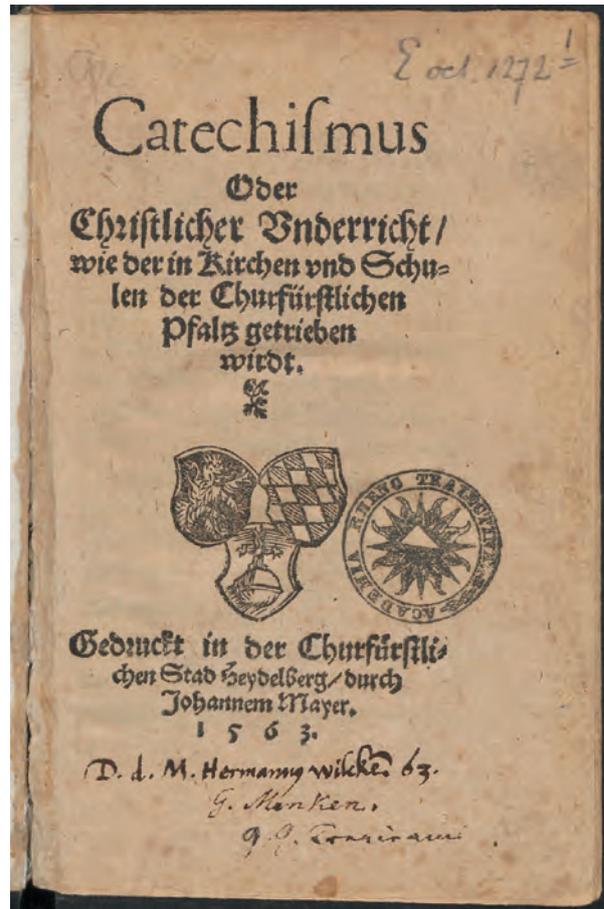
there were differences of opinion over the relationship between faith and assurance. Are there different aspects of assurance? Which aspects are essential to faith, and which are not? These differences also come out in the way the different Reformed confessions are interpreted. Some would say, there is real disagreement between the confessions. Today’s reader might be inclined to look at this and think, “Who cares? This is just another abstract theological debate.” But if you are struggling with doubts about your own salvation, it suddenly becomes a vital issue: Do my doubts mean that I cannot be a Christian? Or is it possible to be a true believer and yet struggle with doubts?

The two main protagonists in this debate appear, at first sight, to be the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Heidelberg, Lord’s Day 7, Q.21, states, “true faith is ... knowledge and conviction ... also a deep-rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel that, out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ, not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God, and have been granted salvation.” That is the mighty comfort of which Christ assures us (LD 1, Q.1). You can see in this the refutation of the Roman Catholic view: this assurance is based entirely on Christ; it is by Word and Spirit not some new revela-

*If you are struggling with doubts, or loss of assurance, do not despair. This is a common part of Christian experience. For we never live perfectly out of what God has given us.”*



(top left) Westminster Confession of Faith title page. Created: 1 January 1647. [commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)



(top right) Heidelberger Katechismus 1563. Created: 1 January 1563. <http://heidelblog.files.wordpress.com/2009/01/catechismus1563.jpg>

tion; and it is for every believer. Because the Heidelberg states that true faith *is*, in part, this assurance, it implies that assurance is of the *essence* or *definition* of faith. That implies that one cannot be a true believer without assurance.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, on the other hand, states in chapter 18, article 3, that “This infallible assurance does not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be partaker of it ...” Article 4 adds that true believers may have their assurance “shaken, diminished, and intermitted” in various ways. The causes of such variations include: neglect of the means God has given to preserve assurance; and sin and temptation. These statements have been understood by many to mean that assurance is not of the essence or definition of faith. Those defending this understanding argue that struggle with doubt and loss of assurance is true to the Bible’s description of the believer’s experience (Ps. 21:22, 51:12; Mk. 9:24); true to the believer’s experience today; and explains why the Scripture urges us to *attain* to assurance

(Heb. 6:11, 2 Pet. 1:10).

Looking carefully at the language of WCF 18:3, though, we note that the article states, “This infallible assurance does not so belong to the essence of faith ...” That is not the same as saying that assurance does not belong to the essence of faith at all. The word “so” implies that infallible assurance *does* belong to the essence of faith, but not in such a way that it cannot vary in degree. Article 4 confirms this interpretation by adding, “True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken ...” You cannot have shaken what you do not already possess. The article goes on to say that true believers are never utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, by which assurance may be revived. They are supported in the meantime from utter despair. The concern of the Westminster is, then, the variation in our experience of the assurance God gives the believer – what theologians have sometimes called “subjective assurance.” Assurance never utterly disappears, but we live out of it to varying degrees. The “infallible” or full measure of that subjective experience is

not of the essence of faith.

The Heidelberg is speaking, instead, of what some have called “objective assurance.” Objective assurance clings to the fact that Christ is who He says He is and does all that He promises (L. Berkhof, “Systematic Theology,” p. 507). The true believer always clings to this certainty at some level of his being. He does so in a “deep-rooted” way. But his conscious, subjective enjoyment of God’s promises may vary. The subjective assurance is a sense of security and safety that the individual believer gains from applying the Word to himself as an individual. It includes the examination of his own life in light of the Bible’s description of the believer. Since our behaviour varies, and the experience of faith varies in degree, the subjective assurance varies in degree. Actually, the terminology of “objective/subjective” should not be pressed too far: for looking at Christ and His promises involves the whole person, subjectively; and looking at our own lives is carried out in view of what the Bible objectively says the Christian should be. Nevertheless, the distinction is helpful. It helps explain why a true believer always perseveres in faith, and that faith always has at a deep level, the work of the Holy Spirit enabling us to be convinced that the promises of God are for me (Rom. 8:15-17): “You have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out,

‘Abba! Father!’” The Greek uses a tense that implies this is a once-off reception. The Spirit testifies with our spirit at that “deep-rooted” level – the Heidelberg emphasis. How we live out of that varies – the Westminster emphasis.

It is interesting to note that some of commentators on the WCF make this same distinction. G.I. Williamson notes that the “root of assurance” cannot be destroyed, while the “fruit” can vary. A.A. Hodge comments that assurance, in one degree or another, is of the essence of faith; while infallible assurance varies in proportion to the degree of faith – the assurance that accompanies true faith is not always full assurance. Robert Shaw states quite bluntly that assurance is of the essence of faith. He cites WCF 14:3, which points out that saving faith accepts, receives and rests upon Christ alone. You cannot rest in Christ, he argues, if you are not convinced that you will be saved by Him. There is no faith without this “objective assurance,” according to Shaw. Nevertheless, there is subjective variation in the degree of this faith. We should therefore never say that a true believer cannot suffer from doubt. Neither should we say, argues Shaw, that there is no assurance in what he calls the “direct act of faith.”

It is also interesting to note that the Continental Reformation acknowledged the subjective variation of assurance.

This is seen in the Canons of Dort, 5:9-11. Article 9 states, “true believers themselves may and do obtain assurance according to the measure of their faith . . . .” It springs from God’s promises, the work of the Holy Spirit, and from a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience and perform good works (Art. 10). Believers have to struggle with carnal doubts in this life (Art. 11). Under grievous temptations they do not always *feel* this “full assurance” (cf., the WCF’s “infallible assurance”) of faith. But God enables us to endure and revives assurance. In the Canons of Dort, both the objective and subjective aspects of assurance are brought together, the root (Christ’s work, God’s Word and Spirit) and the fruit (our Christian living) which are connected to assurance, without contradiction.

If we think about how our confessions have summed up the biblical teaching on assurance, we can gain much practical help. We can see the importance of assurance for every believer. It is not an option. It is given by God, to every believer, with the gift of faith. You *have* received the Spirit of adoption, and He will keep teaching you that you are indeed a child of God. However, if you are struggling with doubts, or loss of assurance, do not despair. This is a common part of

*continued on p8*

**AUCKLAND WOMEN’S RETREAT** (PRESBYTERY)  
A DAY OF TEACHING AND FELLOWSHIP FOR WOMEN, YOUNG AND OLD

**25 March 2017**  
Avondale Reformed Church

**Walk with the Wise**

GROWING TOGETHER IN BIBLICAL WISDOM  
PROVERBS 13:20



**SAVE  
THE  
DATE**

The Silverstream Reformed Church Ladies are hosting the next Women’s Presbyterial.

**Saturday, 25th March 2017.**

**“Back to Basics”**

is the theme based on Titus 2:3-5.

Christian experience. For we never live perfectly out of what God has given us. Sin always gets in the way. The devil is constantly seeking to undermine our assurance. Particular sins, especially when we do not repent of them and turn from them, neglect of the means of grace – such things will quickly cause us to lose sight of what God has put deep within, in

our hearts. If we cling to the Lord Jesus Christ however, God will preserve us. He will revive the assurance that at present we may feel has been lost forever. He will do so using means – so the sooner we seek out the means of grace, focusing on Christ and the promises we have in Him, the better. Let us seek His help to overcome the besetting sins that have

undermined us, and strive again to live the holy life to which He has called us. Our prayer: “I do believe; help my unbelief.” Then, by God’s grace, the objective root of assurance will again bear the fruit of subjective assurance.

*Mr P.N. Archbald is the minister in the Reformed Church of Silverstream.*

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# Introducing the Free Reformed Churches of Australia

## **A new sister church**

It is with great joy and thankfulness that at the most recent Synod of the Free Reformed Churches (FRCA) held in Baldivis, Western Australia, the decision was made to accept the offer of a sister-church relationship that the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ) have for some time already extended to the FRCA. Your two delegates to the FRCA Synod, the Rev. P. Archbald and the Rev. L. DeVos, were witnesses of the positive discussion and overwhelming support given to moving forward in establishing this sister-church relationship.

The RCNZ and FRCA have had contact for many years, and throughout this period we both have sought to serve the Lord faithfully in developing this ecumenical tie, which for the FRCA has meant a considerable period of thought and deliberation, and for the RCNZ has meant much patience. In God’s good providence, a sister church relationship is now a reality, and we give thanks to God for allowing this step to be taken. We rejoice in the opportunity and blessing of being able to function as sister churches in this part of the world, and express the desire that He would bless

*The building of the Free Reformed Church of Southern River, which is in the Perth metropolitan area.*



© photo by Martin Pot, used with permission.



us richly in our mutual service of Him. It is our prayer that the LORD would now strengthen this relationship and allow us to grow closer together. What a blessing to be united together in the one true faith and in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Part of the Baldivis Synod's decision included a desire to promote increased familiarisation between the memberships of the RCNZ and FRCA by way of the exchange of speakers and articles – hence this article, which is intended to introduce ourselves with some general information to your membership. The undersigned is a deputy appointed by the FRCA Synod, functioning in a role similar to your own Interchurch Relations Committee.

### History

The FRCA federation has its historical roots in the 1950s, following World War II, when many migrants left the Netherlands in the quest for a new life in the post-war era, settling in many places around the globe, including Australia. The first church to be instituted was the FRC of Armadale, Western Australia, on 24 June 1951. Migrants also settled in Albany, WA, where a church was instituted in 1952, and in Launceston, Tasmania, where a church was instituted in 1953. Theologically, the roots of these churches lie in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated), which in 1944 had seceded from the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Synodical) over doctrinal and church political con-

cerns, especially in relation to the covenant, baptism, and hierarchy.

### Local churches

Following the institution of these three churches more than sixty years ago, the Lord blessed the fledgling church federation with much growth. Currently there is a total of sixteen churches, two being in Tasmania (Launceston and Legana), while the remaining fourteen are located in Western Australia. There are two churches in the Albany area (Albany and West Albany), which is near the southwest tip of Western Australia, while the majority of the churches are in the metropolitan area surrounding the city of Perth (Armadale, Baldivis, Byford, Darling Downs, Kelmscott, Melville, Mundijong, Mt Nasura, Rockingham, Southern River), as well as two churches located on the coast 1-2 hours drive south of the city (Bunbury, Busselton). A church plant is also in progress in Cairns, Queensland. The size of these individual congregations varies from 120-420 members, with an average size of around 300 members, comprising a total membership of around 4700. While there has been some growth from outside, much of this growth is the result of the blessing of covenant children, as well as ongoing immigration from the Netherlands and South Africa.

### Theological education and worship

The FRCA's confessional basis is the Three Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of



*The building of the Free Reformed Church of West Albany, a town which is some 400km south of Perth.*

Dort), and the church order in use has its roots in the Church Order of Dort, and is very similar to the one used by the Canadian Reformed Churches. Given that the Canadian Reformed Churches share a similar immigrant background, ecclesiastical history, and language, there are close ties with these churches. These ties are particularly evident in the area of theological education, since the FRCA gives financial and prayerful support to the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Canada, and it is here where theological students are sent to train for the ministry. Many FRCA men trained here have gone on to serve as ministers in the Canadian Reformed Churches, and in turn many ministers currently serving in the FRCA originally come from Canada, although there are also some ministers with South African and Dutch roots.

The *Book of Praise* that is in current use, which includes liturgical forms, also originates with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Psalm singing uses the Genevan tunes, although a selection of 65 hymns also finds a place in worship

services, and is typically accompanied with organ playing. Local churches have two worship services each Sunday, with the afternoon service focusing on the exposition of the doctrine of God's Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism. Guests from sister churches are typically admitted to the sacraments upon presentation of a letter of recommendation from their elders. Most of the churches use the New King James Version in the worship services, although the English Standard Version has recently been approved for use in worship as well.

### Christian education

An important priority for the early immigrants was the establishment of Christian day schools with a distinctly Reformed and confessional character. As a result there is a very well-developed parentally-run school system that serves all our church communities, in most places from kindergarten all the way through secondary education. In an obvious nod to our theological heritage, despite the lack of originality in name, these schools all happen to be called John Calvin School. In addition, catechetical instruction

of youth plays an important role in the life of each local congregation, as well as Bible study clubs for young and old.

### Ecumenical relations

The FRCA has a number of other sister church relations, including the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, the Reformed Churches of Indonesia (GGRI), the Presbyterian Church of Korea (Kosin), and the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. Sadly, sister church relations with our 'mother' church in the Netherlands, the Reformed Church in the Netherlands (Liberated), needed to be suspended by our most recent Synod Baldivis 2015. This was a result of theological concerns in the area of hermeneutics, evident in areas of doctrine relating to creation, ethics, and especially a growing toleration of and move towards ordination of women.

### Mission

Efforts at local outreach have been going on in our churches for many years, and increasingly we see positive efforts being made to have more of an impact on our local communities. In addition, churches also cooperate together in a number of overseas mission works, with the main fields being in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, China, and more recently also Fiji. This mission work includes support for the work of the Reformed Bible College in Port Moresby, PNG, which is where the RCNZ's own Rev A. Douma serves.

### Welcome!

To find out more about the FRCA, you are warmly invited to check out the information online at our official federal website, [frca.org.au](http://frca.org.au), which includes links to the websites of our local churches, many of which include audio sermons. Information about our biweekly church periodical, *Una Sancta*, can also be found here. We would be delighted to extend hospitality to RCNZ visitors who visit Western Australia or Tasmania, and sincerely hope that our new sister church relationship will function in a positive way, and serve for mutual benefit as we seek to encourage each other in our commitment to the Reformed faith. Many of our members have enjoyed visiting your churches and your beautiful country over the years, and we expect this trans-Tasman traffic to increase now that there is a sister church relationship. Please also come and visit us! The undersigned are happy to entertain any in-

*Una Sancta*  
family journal for the edification of the scriptural way of life

The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them,  
And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;  
**Isaiah 35:1**

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quiries or answer any questions about the FRCA, should we be able to be of any assistance to prospective visitors. While the spectacular beauty of New Zealand is hard to rival, Australia has its own natural beauty to discover and enjoy, and so we are confident that you will be impressed by God's creative handiwork in our part of the world, as well as experiencing the blessing of the bond of faith among us.

Having visited your synods, attended your worship services, and met with your Interchurch Relations Committee on several occasions, we are grateful for the love for the Lord and the desire to be faithful to His Word that is evident in the RCNZ. We look forward to the geographic proximity of the FRCA-RCNZ's trans-Tasman connection being matched by a spiritual unity that is of mutual benefit, and ultimately to God's glory.

To be able to express that wish within the context of a meaningful sister-church relationship is a rich blessing indeed, and we praise God for it.

*Richard Pot (on behalf of deputies for the Free Reformed Churches of Australia). Correspondence contact: Hendrik Alkema <halkema@frca.org.au>*

# A Visit to New Zealand

by Dirk and Amanda Poppe

Last year, Synod Baldvis of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia made the decision to enter into a sister church relationship with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. At a meeting earlier this year, the consistory of the FRC Southern River wondered if there was anything we could do to strengthen this relationship. We decided to make it more tangible by pursuing a pulpit exchange between the Free Reformed Church of Southern River and the Silverstream Reformed Church of New Zealand. At the end of September, for two Sundays the Rev. Paul Archbald and his wife came here and we were sent there (Canadians that we are) to help build ties between the Aussie and Kiwi churches.

So what was New Zealand like? The landscape was very beautiful and a testament to the glory of our God. When we arrived, the cherry trees, magnolias and rhododendrons were in full bloom. We landed in Wellington, the capital city, which crowds along the curve of the bay and clambers up the surrounding hills. The main road, born out of an earthquake, heads up the valley to Silverstream. Time slows down here. Seventy-year-old houses stand quietly behind ivy-covered walls or white picket fences.



*Dirk and Amanda Poppe*

Grey-green lichens hang from tree trunks and speckle the sidewalks. You can take six steps off the sidewalk in town and find yourself in a rainforest where ferns and palms grow under towering rimu and rata trees and covered with vines.

On Sunday we went to Silverstream church, located appropriately beside a fast-flowing brook. (Speaking of which, where is the river by our church?) We wondered how the children manage to come to church dry every afternoon; our boys would be in that creek in a hot second! Worshipping together was a joyful occasion and an expression of the unity we share through faith in Christ. Their liturgy is slightly different than ours, incorporating elements that the Reformed Church has practiced in past ages. Their liturgy and song book reminded us of the United Reformed Churches in North America. One difference is the silent prayer before worship. At the very beginning of the worship service the congregation is invited to pray silently,

preparing their hearts to come into the presence of our holy God. Another difference is that they have an additional prayer after the collection asking God to bless the money that had been given and use it for His glory. In the afternoon the congregation recite the Apostles' Creed in unison instead of having the minister do so on their behalf, and at the very end of the service, we sang a song of praise (doxology) after the benediction. These differences did not erase the familiar shape of Reformed liturgy. We loved the singing, often in two- or three-part harmony. When the service was over, everyone sat down and began to socialise. Slowly people started to leave, shaking the minister's or duty elder's hand on the way out. The warm friendliness continued in the church hall where coffee is served every Sunday.

We met many faithful, godly people in Silverstream and Masterton. The bond of faith was so strong that we felt like we've known these people all our lives. They seek to serve God and hold on to the Scriptures in a country that legalises

homosexual "marriage" and criminalises spanking. They love the Reformed confessions and are zealous for the glory of God's name. Over the years they have had close contact with many faithful Presbyterians. They have also been blessed by a number of godly Presbyterian ministers who came from America and really taught the people to love the Reformed faith and hold the LORD in high regard. They live in humble dependence on the Lord. We think of the gentleman who received a serious health diagnosis. When we asked if he was worried, he replied "We live in hope, not in fear." Or the widow, having raised a large family mostly on her own, who told us, "You learn to live one day at a time. Every morning I had to ask God for strength and then at night I would thank him." We praise God for the work of His Holy Spirit in the lives of these people. He is busy gathering, defending and preserving His church in this place.

We had an information evening in both Silverstream and Masterton, telling about the history of the FRCA, our back-

ground, worship services, schools, and sister-church relationships. We were also able to pass on greetings from all of you. Despite the banter that naturally happens between two nationalities, we are more alike than different: sinners in need of grace, living in the joy of Christ's saving work.

We will not forget the Kiwi hospitality. They opened their hearts and homes to us and made us feel very welcome. They introduced us to the taste of feijoa, shared their venison, taught us how to say "Wainuiomata" and showed us the best places for tramping. In New Zealand, the jug is always hot for a cup of "gumboot" tea. Many thanks to those of you who are reading this!

As churches, may we have many opportunities to encourage one another in faithful service to God.

*Mr Dirk and Mrs Amanda Poppe are members of the Free Reformed Church of Southern River, where br Dirk is the minister.*

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## Letters from New Zealand

D. G. Vanderpyl

### March 1976

The holidays have come and gone and with that also the annual "Reformed Church Family Camp" where on average between 300 and 400 people of reformed persuasion come together for a whole week to enjoy fellowship with one another, to spend time each morning in the study of Gods Word, to listen to a series of evening lectures, to play volleyball and engage in other sports activities and to challenge each other on the concert evening in the talent quest.

A visitor from outside New Zealand aptly called it "The New Zealand Experience," and so it is. In Finlay Park, near Cambridge, approximately 100 miles south of Auckland, in parklike surroundings, right alongside the beautiful Waikato River deep in the countryside and nestled amongst the hills, this camp is situated. Families from the Auckland churches rejoice to meet their friends from the Wellington province and vice-versa, and members from the South Island churches are also wel-

comed into their midst.

This year we had a total of 109 adults, 110 teenagers and 108 children of Sunday school age. On the Sunday members of the nearby churches visit the Family Camp and swell the numbers to close to 500. Really, there must be something in this "New Zealand Experience" when for the last 15 years people have been willing to give one week of their annual holidays to trek to a meeting place for mutual Christian fellowship.

For the Mangere Church the Year of our Lord, 1976, is also the Year of the Youth (in China, 1976 is the Year of the Frog, I believe). Last year thirteen young people made their public profession of faith before the congregation. As you notice the number 13, we are not a superstitious lot here in Mangere. This year they, the youth, have "taken over" the running of the Sunday school and our covenant children are now being taught by young members of the church, full of zeal and enthusiasm. Some of them also share the Gospel in shopping malls on late shopping nights.

Twenty-six young people attended the first youth club meeting of the year. As they faithfully attend both services each Lords Day the congregation rejoices in the Lord for this and praises His Name for such blessings.

Last year the New Zealand Reformed Churches, together with many others in the world, helped the Presbyterian Church in Vietnam with funds in their efforts to aid the thousands of refugees in that country. In the last few weeks and days before the South surrendered to the communist onslaught, much anxiety was felt by us all for the lives of the Christian pastors and their flocks. It was therefore with much surprise that we received a Christmas card with best wishes for the new year from the Rev. Nguyen Kuan Bao, the moderator of the South Vietnam Presbyterian Church. Maybe we crossed them off our prayer list when it was all over and placed them under the heading of those behind the bamboo-curtain; a simple Christmas card reminded us again that we must keep remembering them before the Throne of Grace.

### Correction:

In the *Faith in Focus* of December 2016, on page 19, column 2, first line, was the word “clat”, instead of *éclat* (brilliant display or effect). The paragraph containing this word should have read: “Isn’t a real reason why we want to go to university, or want our children to, the social status and *éclat* that it confers?”

My apologies to Mrs Tani Newton for not picking this up. **Ed.**

## Discernment over Keller

Dear sir,

I was disappointed to find that the Rev. Ben McDonald’s otherwise helpful article on discernment was undermined by his comments about writer Tim Keller. There is, of course, a point to be made about learning from those who are not holding faithfully to the teachings of God’s Word. I have many books in my library by liberals, Roman Catholics, heretical philosophers, and the like. Sometimes they say some helpful things – even if their understanding of those things was warped. Calvin certainly read the Greek philosophers in that light. The quoting of 1 Thess. 5:20-22 is relevant to this matter, but it is not all that Scripture says. The NT also warns against close association with those who depart from the “traditions,” the body of apostolic teaching at that time (2 Thess. 3:6, 14), and the “teaching of Christ” (2 Jn.:9-11).

Mr McDonald does mention one area where Keller departs from a fundamental doctrine – his views on creation. I appreciate the fact that Mr McDonald does not accept Keller’s view, as the word “despite” implies. But he appears to take this error as relatively minor, compared to the good things we can learn from Keller. The assertion that Keller is a “preacher of the Gospel of God’s grace in Jesus Christ” seems to cover a multitude of sins.

The problem with this is that Keller’s views actually undermine the Gospel of

Jesus Christ. Some of Keller’s explanation of the nature of sin and of hell are, to say the least, questionable – steering away from the idea of sin as transgression of God’s law, and hell as the place where God visits His terrible wrath on sinners for that transgression. Keller’s view of creation also undermines the Gospel. He tries to reconcile the Bible and evolution, though he is vague about how this works out in the detail. He does allow that there is a literal Adam and a literal Fall, but there are a number of ways theologians make such claims while holding to a standard theistic evolution position. Keller’s position appears to be that life developed over a very long period of time, by God using some kind of evolutionary process. He takes Gen. 1 as a “poem,” rather than taking a literal view, on the argument that a literal view of chapter 1 would contradict chapter 2. He accepts the view that death occurred before the Fall.

Recently, Dr. Martin Williams from the Reformed Theological College was involved in a debate against the theistic evolution view, as reported in the *RTC Monthly*, 31 August, 2016. Dr. Williams pointed out “how theistic evolution undermines the apostolic message of the cross by placing death and disease prior to the Fall, making them the result of God’s creative activity and not of sin.” Now *that* is a discerning observation!

It is one thing to remind us that a discerning Christian reader can learn something from a writer who promotes serious error. It is another thing to promote that errorist as well. Mr McDonald’s article appears to promote Tim Keller as a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, without any serious warning. Young people in our churches might read this and be encouraged to read and listen to Keller, without receiving any serious warning of the dangers. To promote such a man, without a “reader beware,” represents a direction contrary to previous articles in *Faith in Focus*, which have indeed warned against certain trends in “New Calvinism.” I hope that in the future, both our magazine and its contributors can be more clear on these matters.

**Rev. Paul Archbald**

## Liberal Arts — a response

Dear Sir,

I would like to respond to the letter to the editor in the December issue of *Faith in Focus* regarding the Liberal Arts issue. As a degree holder myself I feel that there are some misconceptions in this letter which I would like to address. I will summarise the main points made in the letter in *italics* and respond to each one.

1. *Pursuing a practical or academic path is a matter of indifference.* While it is true that there is no particular urging in Scripture to any type of study or work, there is a clear directive to use what talents we have to good purpose (Matthew 25:14-30). If your talents lie in the areas of language and literature then go and improve your skills in these areas in order to use them for the glory of God and His kingdom.

2. *Educational institutions are a substitute for motivation.* The unmotivated masses attending university do not get good grades, or good jobs, and often do not even get degrees! I have seen this firsthand, having met a few people of this type at university. What educational institutions **do** provide is direction: a course of study that you can tailor to your specific skills and interests and be encouraged, guided, lectured and taught in, while still motivating yourself to actually complete the assigned work. Working for the glory of God should always be our motivation and this can be accomplished just as well at university as without.

3. *Why not just read five books?* Reading is always valuable and I am an avid reader myself; however, how many of us really think deeply about the books we read without opportunity to discuss these things with others and the discipline of having to write about them? “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” (Proverbs 27:17) There are great benefits to be gained from lectures on historical, cultural and political context, authorial biography and bias, analysis of

themes and subtexts, in-depth discussion with students and tutors of differing opinions, and an assignment to write a few thousand words on the topic!

4. *We go to university for the social status it confers.* Given the number of school leavers now attending university (60% last year)<sup>1</sup> there is little social status associated with it. I do not believe this is a motivating factor in our current social climate.

5. *“A liberal arts degree will make a person able to understand philosophies and worldviews, think rationally, garner important information and present well reasoned arguments.”* That sums it up nicely and that is the aim of a liberal arts degree. It is possible, I am sure, to go through university and not gain these skills, however that may have more to do with the type of degree chosen, the level of motivation of the individual, and amount of effort expended than with prior ability. No lecturer I knew at university would have passed an essay that did not give evidence of the skills listed above.

6. *We ought to count the cost.* None of the articles in the Liberal Arts issue were advocating for all to immediately take up study in the arts no matter what your financial situation, skill set, or relationship status. Such a step must be seriously considered and taken for the right reasons (i.e. working for the glory of God and the use of your specific talents.)

7. *Having a degree puts pressure on*

*a person to use it in the workforce.* Naturally, most who have gained a degree want to put it to use. Such a degree can be put to use at home and in the church as well as in the workforce. Skills gained in a degree are lifelong skills, not limited to use in the workplace. We must also bear in mind that neither marriage nor parenthood are guarantees, and women as well as men need to be looking towards future self-supporting, if neither of these is part of God’s plan for their lives. We are not to be idle while we wait for God’s will to be revealed in our lives.

8. *Secular education is a trial to the faith.* That is true. However, so is a secular workplace, and a secular government, secular friends, acquaintances and family. Nowhere are we safe from the secular influence in our lives while we are living in this world. By the time Christian youth are old enough to attend university they are also old enough to drink alcohol, drive, vote, marry and have children. They are adults. As such, they must go out into the world to be shining lights, whether that be in trade, labouring, teaching, parenting, or studying at an educational institution. I can testify that if foundations in faith, life and doctrine are well laid then it is entirely possible to come through university with a faith stronger and deeper due to the testing it has endured.

9. *The state-funded universities serve the state’s political agenda.* As to what

the future holds in terms of state-funded education it is impossible to know. I do know that the further the state strays from biblical principles, the more the Christian stands out as a shining example. Should Christians stay away from politics because of the state’s secular agenda? Should we stay away from medicine because of abortion/euthanasia? Should we stay away from university because of evolution/gender neutrality/ homosexuality/modern psychology? Jesus did not ask his Father to take us out of the world, but to protect us from the evil one while we are in this world.<sup>2</sup> This can be done in any situation we are in, including a secular educational institution.

10. *“Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world.” 1Cor 1:20.* I believe these verses have been taken out of context. Paul was extremely well educated, not just as a Hebrew under Gamaliel, but having grown up in a Greek town he would also have had an excellent understanding of Greek language and culture. He even quotes Greek poetry in his discussion with the Athenians in the Areopagus! Paul does not say that he considers his education to be rubbish, but that he considers **“everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus”** (Phil3:8). Nothing in this life compares to the greatness of knowing Christ, but that does not mean that nothing in this life is worth knowing. Paul’s understanding of two cultures enabled him to be an excellent missionary to both Jew and Greek, to be “all things to all men” (1Cor 9:22). His education gave him the oratory skill to debate with the Athenians in the Areopagus and the Jews in the synagogue and to write excellent, logical, theological letters which we still read today.

I am not encouraging everyone considering study to rush into an Arts degree. God can use anyone mightily regardless of their educational background. However, the purpose of the September issue was to show that there is value in pursuing study of the Arts for those who are inclined that way, and I am convinced this is so, despite the misgivings many of us share about the University system in general.

Yours in Christ,

**Joanna Voschezang (BA Hons)**

1 [http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/indicators/main/education-and-learning-outcomes/school\\_leavers\\_entering\\_tertiary\\_education](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/indicators/main/education-and-learning-outcomes/school_leavers_entering_tertiary_education)

2 John 17:15



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## Auckland Presbytery Short Report

The Auckland Presbytery met on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> of November at the Reformed Church of Pukekohe. The Rev. Leo de Vos read from Mark 12:38-44 and, inspired by a devotional book written by Sinclair Ferguson, reflected on the passage. He then opened the meeting in prayer.

The Rev John Rogers took over as designated chairman to direct the meeting while the Rev Ryan Sparks was appointed vice moderator. Brother Pieter van der Wel resumed his duties as Stated Clerk.

The credentials were received by the Hukanui delegates and found to be in order. After the checking and receiving of the credentials, all delegates stood to signify agreement with the doctrinal standards of the denomination. The annual men's study day was briefly discussed and the proposal to have a church polity meeting was approved by common consent. The venue for this is yet to be confirmed but it will be held on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2017.

The Auckland churches have had their annual visitations over the last few months. The reports from these visits were received by common consent and then discussed. It was noted that many young married couples find it difficult to afford residential property in Auckland, and a number have been moving away from their 'home churches'. The delegates agreed that this was a problem that affected the whole Presbytery and that it warrants further discussion soon.

It was also noted that there were increasing numbers of Korean families attending the Auckland churches. It was suggested that this might make it necessary to seek the appointment of a Korean pastor at some point.

Next, Brother Don Petchell reported on behalf of the National Diaconate Committee and the Overseas Mission Board. He reported that the triennial deacons' and OMB field conferences have been great successes. He also reported that Brother Richard 'tHart

was keen to begin his work at the Bible College in PNG and that the OMB currently has a shortfall of NZ\$ 38,000 for the work there.

The Rev. Leo De Vos then reported on the final presbytery examinations of vicars Albert Couperus and Aaron Warner. He gave an encouraging report, noting the distinctiveness and obvious giftedness of both men.

Brother Josh Meinsma addressed the Presbytery with four questions about church planting and evangelism. His questions were thought-provoking and led to a very interesting discussion on the matter. The Presbytery was encouraged that men with a passion for church planting are training for this ministry and also that there is a growing focus within the RCNZ on church planting. They affirmed their own commitment to church planting but agreed that there was room to be more proactive and intentional with regards to this great work.

Presbytery was also heartened as Brother Pieter van der Wel offered to continue his work as Stated Clerk for next year. The meeting was, however, encouraged to continue the search for a suitable replacement.

It was agreed that the Reformed Church of Pukekohe will host the next meeting, to be held on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2017, Lord willing. The meeting was closed in prayer by Mr John Rogers and adjourned at 10:07pm.

**Braam Jansen van Rensburg**

## Wellington Presbytery Short Report

The Wellington Presbytery met on Friday and Saturday 4-5 November 2016 at the Reformed Church of Palmerston North. The moderator was the Rev Hans Vaatstra.

Here are four highlights from this meeting:

**Examination of Vicar Aaron Warner:** Presbytery unanimously (and with great joy) sustained all parts of Vicar Aaron Warner's examination. Within the ensuing two weeks, Aaron and Audra Warner and their four children were to relocate from Dovedale to Palmerston North.



*The Rev Peter Kloosterman (right) and minister candidate Mr Aaron Warner (left) during his final examination by the Wellington Presbytery.*

# 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



*Mr Aaron Warner signing the Form of  
Subscription after sustaining his examination  
by the Wellington Presbytery.*

From the **reports of the vacant churches**, the good news was that three emeritus ministers from the Canadian Reformed Churches were coming to serve for short-term periods in Masterton and Foxton: Masterton will have Rev Moesker from 18 Dec till 31 January, followed by Rev De Gelder from 1 February till the first week in March; Foxton will have Rev Klaas Jonker from 15 December until early April.

**The next Wellington-Presbytery meeting** was scheduled to again take place in Palmerston North. Seeing that Rev De Gelder is to hold a lecture on Church Polity at that time, it was decided that Presbytery would meet on the evening of Friday (3 March 2017) with Rev de Gelder speaking on Saturday (4th March 2017).

From the **Overseas Mission Board** came the news that: 1) for the first half of next year, Allan and Odette Douma will be on furlough in NZ – when they will also do their deputies duties and do a round of visits to all the RCNZ congregations; 2) the OMB is still looking for a minister to go do relief teaching for one month (April/May) at the Reformed Bible College PNG while the Doumas are on furlough; 3) Richard 't Hart has done well in his orientation course to become the compound manager, but there is still a financial need to set Richard 't Hart up in PNG.

**Pieter van Huyssteen**

# Ode to Odette

## Heidi Hendrikse

In the 12 days I was with Alan and Odette in Papua New Guinea, I came to understand that their calling is a real tough one, with many challenges. They do their work with commitment, love and perseverance, under very difficult circumstances and with lots of pressures.

Most ministers and wives will tell you about their 'glass house' existence. Their congregation will look in and comment on their lives, furniture and clothes, the way they raise their children, their car [it is the church van so we can use it to go skiing], and their stipend [well, I don't earn as much as he does, and it is a calling isn't it?].

Well, I have to confess I have, and if you can say you have never had any of these thoughts, you are a saint or a liar.

Imagine being a missionary, and having not only one congregation looking

in, but the whole denomination back home and then some! Think about the locals, the co-workers on the field, the students, the board, etc.

Are you like me? Do you wonder, when you read Proverbs 31 if such a woman actually exists? After all, doesn't the writer say, "A wife of noble character *who can find?*"

Well, let me tell you about one. Here is 'life at the Douma household', when I was there – which gives a good insight into their lives.

- Pastor Alan needs to drop somebody off in Port Moresby at 6:00 am, so they get up early and have breakfast together, Alan leaves and Odette does some of her nursing study – to keep her registration going.
- Rhoda and I wake up at 7:30 so Odette prepares another breakfast, sits down and has a coffee with us.
- The doorbell goes, a lady is at the

door with 'bek pen' (back pain) – does Odette please have Panadol? That happens two more times that day.

- An email comes in, a friend of a friend's mother needs to stay overnight in Port Moresby, but Mapang and the other guesthouse are full. Can Odette please put her up for a night? And pick her up from the airport as well as drop her off again??
- The door slams, Greta's son comes bouncing in, "Where is my mum? I am looking for my mum!" "She isn't here, but I did see her by the student kitchen just before" answers Odette. He fiddles around with some things then disappears without another word.
- Meanwhile, Odette has done three loads of washing, dealt with questions from students, locals and visitors, run up and down the stairs at least 20



times, sorted something in the office and got medicine from Rita because Alan was getting a chest infection.

- Oh, and did I tell you it wasn't even lunch time yet? And that the sweat has been running off our faces since 8:00 am in the morning? *And that this is on a Monday, which is supposed to be their day off?*
- When you go shopping, you buy what is available, and sometimes out of date; at other times you stock up because a shipment just came in and you never know when they will order again (they call it the "container syndrome"). By the way, it is said that Port Moresby is the most expensive city in the world to live in.
- Somebody is at the door [again...] This time it is a student, can Alan please come and look at the water pump, it is playing up.
- On the way to Port Moresby, where we go shopping and swimming, we stop twice to pick up some church or college members who are walking along the way, and offer them a ride on the back of the 4WD. The free Monday afternoon is Odette's swim time, she does 20 laps to keep fit, while Alan usually sits on the side and reads. On the way back we pick up people again and make a detour to drop them off.
- On Monday nights, we all go to devotions in one of the classrooms – this

takes about 1½ hours.

- A member from the Nine Mile Church has his wife and daughter visiting from Australia. Can Odette entertain them for an afternoon? Odette tries to get hold of them by phone and text, but never manages. Later she hears the man had the day off after all.
- Odette takes us to a nature park. She

rings Rita to ask if she wants to come as well, because she knows that Rita doesn't drive and thought she might like to come.

- She is in charge of the library, and at the moment is learning to use a computer program which will have all the books recorded on it.
- A text comes in: "Plis call mi." Many



people have cell phones, but little credit on them. With a plan you get a number of preset free texts, so you send a text with 'please call me' and the Pastor rings you back. By the way ... When your 20 'please call me' texts are finished, you carry on with option 2 message 'plis send 100 kina'- that will make people ring you back real fast!!



- A member of the Veifa's congregation wants to discuss something. Alan is Pastor there. Even though it is a 3 ½ hour drive away, they try to be involved in the lives of the people and go there about every 3 weeks; usually for a Sunday and Monday morning.
- Odette acts as secretary for Alan, writing reports and agendas and reminding him of things he needs to look at, emails or reports he needs to write and such other matters. Even the menu for the upcoming conference next week.
- One night the security guard wakes up the Doumas at 1:00 am. The people are still "story-ing". Should he do something about it????
- Odette is generous and jovial. For example: a lady comes to the door almost crying; there is a *Bung Kai* [shared meal] and the rations the Bible College provides don't stretch far enough. Can Sister Odette tell her what to do? Which is another way of asking, 'Can you give me something I can cook up?' Odette has 12 laying hens but doesn't sell her surplus eggs; she gives them away to people who need them. So she gives the lady a kilo of rice and a dozen eggs. When you see how small the dish is that the lady has cooked with, you wonder what happened to the rest of the eggs and rice. Never mind!
- The Doumas have a garden on the

compound, with banana trees, pineapple, and several vegetables, but somehow the nice fruit you have watched growing doesn't always make it to your table, someone else has beaten you to it!

- What else can I say? Did I tell you about her happy, easy-going spirit? The good cheer and happy word she seems to have for those around her? The extra mile she goes, time and time again? The lovely chatter you hear wherever she goes? The numerous cakes, meals and drinks she provides for others whenever there is a '*bung kai*' (shared meal), or when the students all come over for coffee? She whips up a cake in a matter of minutes and a meal with the apparent ease of her father who is a caterer. She teaches with grace, wisdom, and wit.

To finish off with that famous Proverb:

*She is worth far more than rubies.  
Her husband has full confidence  
in her and lacks nothing of value.  
She brings him good, not harm,  
all the days of her life. Honor her  
for all that her hands have done,  
and let her works bring her praise  
at the city gate.*



# National Diaconate Committee Special Appeal –

## Peniel College

Opportunities of sharing the gospel in our own lives in New Zealand are challenging. People are closed to Christianity and often react with suspicion or even anger. One reason is that in general people are well off or have more than their daily needs provided. It is not by accident that God warns his people again and again to not forget Him when they enter abundance.

This is not true everywhere in the world. There are many many people whose lives do more reflect the poverty we bring ourselves before God.

The National Diaconate Committee (NDC) looks for opportunities for our churches to be actively involved in diaconal causes where the gospel is brought with it. Typically this is internationally and also is focused on areas of spiritual and physical distress. The purpose of the NDC is to extend diaconal aid beyond what our individual churches can accomplish.

The primary focus is therefore to support long term relief projects that are community based and support Christian values and the hope of the gospel. Projects should meet the basic needs of people in low income situations.

### **Voice in the wilderness**

One recent project has been the support of Antony Simon in the Middle East. The last two end-of-year appeals was for the work of Antony Simon and those working with him bringing the gospel to those people being displaced by the turmoil. Bringing the gospel in written form along with basic aid such as blankets, water, sanitation etc has been the focus of the work among these people. You can see the regular updates on the webpage <http://voice-wilderness.com/> The persecution of peoples by ISIS has been shocking and terrible

and many people have been displaced by the war that is continuing in Iraq and Syria. Thank you for the continued support of this work. We ask that you keep the church in the Middle East before the Lord.

### **Peniel College**

One project we support in India is Peniel College. We support the college with CRCA's 'World Transform' (national diaconate committee). Peniel college is located near the slums of Bangalore. The aim is to train very poor and vulnerable young women who have endured hardships and suffering, sometimes at the hands of their own parents often because of hardships and ignorance. The girls tell of shocking stories of physical violence, neglect and rape. The project has qualified, experienced and professional Christian teachers in areas such as embroidery, sewing, computer skills, literacy and nursing.

This project is growing, currently the college can have 50 girls a year in the building. Additionally the current facilities are a rented industrial building that has had significant rental increases added to the cost of running the college.

The NDC are appealing to the churches to support a new project for Peniel College prayerfully. We will be appealing through the deacons to promote this cause and ask that the churches consider committing to this important work. The appeal is to give the opportunity to purchase a piece of land and to build a new facility to combat two issues of lack of space for growth of the college and the sharp increases in renting close to Bangalore. This project would be spread out over three years. There will be a newsletter promoted around the churches providing more detail about the project soon. The financial

goal we would need to commit to is 170K. The new facility will reduce the influence of rising rent costs, give opportunity to increase the number of girls taken in, to 100 per year and create better running efficiencies through scale. Spread over three years and among our churches the NDC believes this is a very realistic goal but we ask that the churches carefully consider what they could willingly commit to this project over the timeframe.

### **Other projects**

The compassionate catalogue has been running for several years and provides opportunities for diaconal aid in important areas such as the work in PNG in support of the OMB.

From time-to-time the NDC also calls for special collections for emergency disaster relief such as supporting the churches in the Philippines after the 2014 earthquake, or after the flooding in the Solomon Islands. Disaster relief needs to be carefully weighed, considering the local churches needs in the area, what other massive relief will occur from other agencies compared to what we can realistically help with, to giving a good account to what and where the donations were used for.

We ask that you keep these projects before the Lord in prayer and consider the needs we take for granted. Specifically for the ongoing work in India through the Peniel project but also with the work in PNG at the compound and the urgent needs in the Middle East.

In His Service

**National Diaconate Committee**

## Missions in focus for kids

Heidi Hendrikse

# Life in PNG – Snake alert!



(top) Village house on the way to Beregoro (kept clear against snakes).  
(bottom) How the ladies slept during the conference and discovered a snake.

Do you know why the grounds around the houses in the photos are kept clear of rubbish, grass and weeds? Stop reading and think about it for a second. Did you say fire safety? Could be? Did you say smell? Probably helps, too. Do you say tidiness? Well, okay, but the rest of the country isn't very tidy- so why there? . The best answer would be that it keeps snakes from hiding out in weeds, grass or rubbish, and this way you can see them come! Snakes sometimes manage to sneak into houses and can of course seriously harm or even kill people. Before country people in Papua New Guinea go to sleep, they need to check their room for snakes, rats and other vermin.

On our first day at the Ladies Conference, we were in our room getting organized. There was a lot of commotion from the ladies that were camping under an A-frame shelter and we said,

“Wow, there’s a party already!” Later on we heard that one of the women was going to put her baby down to sleep [on the grass floor covered with only a tarpaulin], when she noticed something looking like a branch of a tree under the tarp. She called one of the men over to investigate, but when he put his foot on the ‘branch’, it was soft and moved! Turned out that it was a strangler python the thickness of a lady’s wrist and about 1½ meter long! The man killed it with a machete knife and disposed of it. We white sisters never even got to see it! The PNG sisters were thankful that it was not a poisonous snake, but really

it can’t be that nice to be strangled to death either! We didn’t encounter any more snakes, but Mrs Odette Douma, our missionary in PNG, told a story that when they were staying in the village they heard a sound in the middle of the night: “rustle, rustle, rustle.” It was a rat in the corner of the room. Only a rat, not to worry. A little while later they heard it again, “rustle, rustle, rustle, THUMP!” On goes the torch again. This time it was a snake that was trying to swallow the rat! Pastor Alan just wanted to sleep so he grabbed a bucket with a lid, used the lid to slide the snake and rat into the bucket, went outside and

threw the snake and rat into the bush. They went to sleep again. In the morning their host papa asked, “what happened last night?” “Oh, it was just a rat and snake and we threw them back into the bush.” The host papa was very angry! In PNG you must always kill snakes!!!

Here in New Zealand we are blessed not to have snakes around. We also live in houses that usually don’t have a rat problem. If you want to see how a snake strangles then eats a rat, have a look at this YouTube clip. Ask your parents first!! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1odyc2CXzE>



(right) Bible College house kept clear of weeds and rubbish so snakes can be spotted.

## 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:

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