

faith in **focus**

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

VOLUME 35/3 APRIL 2008



**“The house of the righteous contains great treasure,
but the income of the wicked brings them trouble.”**

Proverbs 15:6

CONTENTS

The character of the second service <i>Its unique importance</i>	3
Twice on Sunday? <i>A letter to a young Presbyterian</i>	5
World in focus <i>News from around the world</i>	6
A feminine focus <i>The feminine virtue of generosity</i>	8
Coast to coast <i>A participant's description</i>	11
Books in focus <i>Review of "Depression – A Stubborn Darkness"</i>	15
Focus on home <i>Gleanings in focus</i> <i>Deacon's Conference</i>	16
Missions in focus <i>Rev Rogers in Uganda</i>	24

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<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

Copy Deadline:

Six weeks preceding the month of publication.
Church and family notices are free, subject to
sufficient space and editorial acceptance.

All correspondence regarding distribution and
payment of subscriptions to:

The Secretary:

Mrs Nicola Wharekawa
79 McLeod Street
Upper Hutt
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Subscription per volume:

\$40.00 (eleven issues)
Bulk Rate: \$35.00
Overseas: \$60.00
Electronically Mailed (overseas only): \$40

Production Staff:

Distribution: M. & D. van der Zwaag
Design & Layout: Matrix Typography
Printed by: Flying Colours

Editorial

There is a focus in this month's issue on the Lord's Day and its worship services. It is good to be reminded of this as history has shown us how this day becomes less and less important as the world has a greater and greater impact on the Church of the Lord Jesus. In an incidental way I was reminded of this when chatting with some visitors to a church service. I introduced myself as the minister to which the gentleman replied, "Oh, I knew that – you're the only one wearing a tie here!"

Now I know that wearing a tie is not the hallmark of respect for the worship service. You can be quite neatly dressed as a man without a tie. And it is true that a tie for a minister has almost become a new form of clerical collar. But it would be a pity if the general standard of dress for the worship service has become no different to any other day – and even resembles quite casual attire.

Dr Pipa challenges us on the biblical teaching regarding Sunday in his book, **The Lord's Day**. In his chapter entitled, 'The Market Day of the Soul,' he writes,

It is only as we trust in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and the grace to obey that we can keep the Sabbath holy. It is only as we approach the day out of love for God and communion with Him that we meet with God in the transactions of the day.

Further, we keep the day holy by devoting ourselves to the particular transactions that God has appointed. The most important of these is to meet with God in corporate worship. We supplement this with family and private devotions – reading, prayer and meditation. We take advantage of the day to spend it in fellowship with our Christian friends, as well as in works of ministry and mercy. By doing these things we make the best use of the day and get the most profit.

Photo Credits:

Cover – Walter Walraven (*A house in Woodville*)

Please note that the cover of the February issue did not show an Art Deco type house. It was a Spanish bungalow type house of the late 1940's. The house on this issue's cover shows more of an Art Deco influence (or did!).

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of NZ 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 NZ. 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.

The character of the afternoon service

The unique importance of the second service

A. J. de Visser

Reformed people usually go to church twice on a Sunday. This is a good custom, characteristic of the Reformed tradition, going back to the days of the Reformation.

The Bible does not prescribe that the congregation should be called together twice for worship. However, in the Reformed tradition we have always been convinced that it is edifying for the congregation to meet again in the afternoon for a so-called “teaching service” (in Dutch: *leerdienst*).

The character of the afternoon service is supposed to be distinct from the morning service. During the morning service the minister proclaims the gospel from a biblical passage. In the afternoon he has a more didactic sermon, proclaiming the doctrine of God’s Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism. In other words, in the morning the emphasis is on *proclaiming* the gospel, while in the afternoon the emphasis is on *teaching* the gospel (of course, these are no more than emphases – any good sermon will have elements of proclamation and teaching).

Over the years, however, the distinction between the morning service and the afternoon service has faded out more and more. The character of the afternoon service has become almost identical with the morning service. The liturgy is ninety percent the same. And as far as the preaching is concerned, I’m not sure that our Catechism preaching is always distinct from the “regular” preaching (I will come back to this point later on).

This is not a good development. If the afternoon service loses its distinct character, it loses its *raison d’être*. If our defence of the afternoon is no more than “going twice is better than going once,” I’m afraid that sooner or later people are going to say: I

don’t buy that argument anymore.

We have to give our people a better reason for attending the afternoon service, and we have a good reason: in the afternoon you get something different – the same gospel, but from a more didactic and confessional perspective.

Historical development

It will be helpful to go start with a bit of history. In the early days after the Reformation the character of the afternoon service was clearly different from the morning service. In the very beginning, the afternoon service had the character of a public Catechism lesson. The minister asked questions and the children of the congregation had to

service, the liturgy was beefed up to be more similar to the liturgy of the morning service. Third, the Catechism sermon of the minister developed from a public Catechism lesson into a fully-fledged sermon or (as our Church Order describes it): proclamation of the doctrine of God’s Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism.

The next step in the development was to be expected: sometimes, if the minister wanted to do an exchange with another minister, the congregation would get a Catechism sermon in the morning instead of the afternoon. More often, the congregation would not get a Catechism sermon at all, but two “free text sermons” instead.

The Canadian Reformed Churches have condoned this practice by changing the wording of the Church Order. Whereas the old version (the old Article 68) stipulated that Catechism preaching should take place “ordinarily in the afternoon service,” the current version (Article 52) says no more than that it should happen “as a rule, once every Sunday...” In my opinion, this change was not an improvement.

I have the impression that consistories do not mind whether there is Catechism preaching or not, as long as there is a

minister on the pulpit. Being an occasional preacher myself, I get phone calls from brother pulpit suppliers. I have never had one who tried to put pressure on me to preach a Catechism sermon during the afternoon service. As one brother told me: “Preach whatever you have, as long as we get you on the pulpit. We are beggars, so we can’t be choosers!”

I do believe that consistories can be choosers! They have the right to request Catechism preaching once on a Sunday. And I would encourage consistories to make a conscious effort to have Catechism preaching “ordinarily in the afternoon,” even



give answers, as found in the Heidelberg Catechism. When the minister explained the teaching as summarized in the Catechism, he did not focus on just one Scripture passage, but he dealt with the various Scripture passages that are mentioned in every Lord’s Day.

As church life in the Reformed tradition developed, the character of the afternoon service changed. First, the custom of having the children answer the questions disappeared (they were taught in Catechism class during the week). Second, in an effort to convince the congregation that the afternoon service was not a second-rate

if that phrase has been dropped from the Church Order.

Catechism preaching

A related issue, and maybe a more difficult one, is the character of Catechism preaching as such. The single most important factor that determines the character of the afternoon service is the sermon. So the question is: what is a Catechism sermon and how does it differ from a regular sermon?

The difference is not that "the text" for the sermon is taken from the Catechism. The Heidelberg Catechism does not have the same status as the Word of God, so in my opinion a minister should never say "our text is taken from Lord's Day so and so." If it is to be preaching at all, it has to be proclamation of the Word.

On the other hand, the text of the Catechism should not be ignored either. Sometimes you hear Catechism sermons where the minister is in fact preaching on some passage of the Scriptures. The text of the Catechism is hardly used, or not used at all. In my opinion this is not Catechism preaching, but regular preaching disguised as Catechism preaching. I do not deny that such preaching can be very good and uplifting. In fact, I have heard wonderful sermons that belong to this category. But it is not Catechism preaching.

So what is Catechism preaching really? If I may offer some suggestions, I believe that Catechism preaching should have the following characteristics.

In the first place, Catechism preaching

is preaching of the Word of God. Even if the preacher uses the text of Heidelberg Catechism as guideline, he is proclaiming the Word of God. He shows how the doctrine which is summarized in the respective Lord's Day is based on the Scriptures. Therefore he should use various Scripture passages. Even if he deals with one or two passages in more detail, it would still be prudent to refer to a variety of Scripture passages.

Second, the preacher uses the text of the Lord's Day – not as if it is "the text" for the sermon but in such a way that the rich content of the Catechism is used. The authors of the Catechism have done a remarkable job in formulating aspects of the Christian faith. It is hard to improve on their terminology. Why not use those well-crafted phrases to edify the congregation?

Third, Catechism preaching is pastoral in character. Once again, using the text of the Catechism will help the preacher to achieve this. The Catechism is very pastoral in character, very direct and personal. This characteristic needs to be carried through into Catechism preaching.

Fourth, the character of Catechism sermons should be a blend of historical-confessional and contemporary. Many of the doctrines which are summarized in the Catechism are as relevant today as they were during the time of the Reformation. But this relevance needs to be demonstrated. Therefore, the Catechism preacher needs to study the background of the struggles of the time of the Reforma-

tion. At the same time, he needs to know current theological trends and debates, as well as the general religious climate of our time. More than in a regular sermon, the preacher could spend time in working through some of these issues.

Fifth, it would be beneficial to apply some flexibility in following the division into fifty-two Lord's Days. Although the Catechism is amazingly contemporary, it is clear that some issues have become less important, while others are not mentioned in the Catechism simply because they only emerged later during history. In some instances, then, it would be beneficial to *condense* a few Lord's Days into one sermon. For example, I don't think that it is necessary to have an annual sermon on the issue of swearing oaths (LD 37). I would suggest that Lord's Days 36 and 37 can be dealt with in one sermon. On the other hand, we could *expand* the discussion of a Lord's Day into two or three sermons if the issues are important today. It might be beneficial to spend more than one sermon on the work of the Holy Spirit (LD 20), views of eschatology, pre/post-millennialism (LD 22), marriage issues (LD 41), evangelism and mission (LD 48), to mention a few examples.

Sixth, since Catechism preaching is supposed to have a stronger emphasis on teaching and instruction, I feel that this emphasis should also be reflected in the style of preaching. For example, the preacher could analyze the structure of a Catechism answer with the congrega-

Pragmatism or Principle?

'Today it is true almost everywhere, that we are more concerned about the results of the gospel than we are about the purity of it! We are more concerned in the blessing of man than we are about the glory of Christ! Is not that true? Is it not true that the first great question asked everywhere today is, What are the 'results'? What is the fruitage? How many people have been saved in your church the last year? I am not saying that the question has no importance, but I do say that, if that is the first question that is asked, it only shows what a low level we are living on! The first question we ought to ask is, How scripturally is the gospel being preached in your church? Is the preacher magnifying Christ? Is the preacher emphasising the absolute sufficiency of his finished work? Does the preacher make it plain that God does not ask the sinner to do anything, that Christ has done it all for him? Ah, my friends, when the preachers are tested by that, there are mighty few of them that will survive the test. How many there are today who tell the poor sinner that he has got to give his heart to God! Well, you say, isn't that right? Isn't that true? Must not the sinner give his heart to the Lord if he is going to be saved? Oh, the tragedy that such a question has to be asked! We talk about progress and advancing; why we need indoctrinating in the ABC of Christianity, and the ABC of Christianity is the gospel! No, my friends, no sinner was ever saved by giving his heart to God. We are not saved by our giving, we are saved by God's giving. Well, but doesn't it say in Scripture, 'Son, give me thine heart?' Yes, it does, but that is not addressed to an unconverted sinner, that is addressed to a son! After God has saved you by grace alone, then your first duty is to dedicate yourself to his service, to give your heart to him, to be used by him as he wills and where he wills and when he wills, and to realise that you are no longer your own but the purchased property of another.'

A. W. Pink in the 1920's

tion, ask people to underline important words, etc. He could hand out an outline of his sermon which would allow people to make notes. On that same outline he could include a few important quotes from contemporary sources which he wants to discuss during his sermon. He could ask a probing question and ask the listeners to think about it for a minute. He could even use technologically advanced methods (overheads, power point, etc.), if that helps

him to get his message across (just make sure that these tools do not distract more than they facilitate...).

In conclusion, it is great that our Reformed fathers instituted the afternoon service so that the congregation might be taught and instructed more thoroughly. Let us keep the original intention in mind and let our afternoon services have a distinct *teaching* quality.

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This article first appeared in 'The Clarion,' the denominational magazine of the Canadian Reformed Churches, with whom we have a reciprocal arrangement.

Twice on Sunday?

Letter to a young Presbyterian

Dear James,

You were probably expecting this letter. Your mother seemed upset Sunday when she told me that you are not going to evening worship. I remember having my share of excuses as a college student, too. I am also aware that many campus ministries provide Bible studies, dormitory fellowship, and the like on Sundays. These are designed with noble intentions. But when it comes to public worship, you should accept no substitutes.

Since you are familiar with the case for evening worship, I needn't go into detail. You know that the fourth commandment instructs us to set the whole day apart for rest and worship. You know that Christ did not abrogate the fourth commandment, but transformed it into the Lord's Day or Christian Sabbath. And you well know that it is still a *day*, not merely a couple of hours on Sunday morning.

Most American Protestants understood that until the end of the last century, when this practice fell on hard times. Now it is the minority report, even within some conservative Presbyterian denominations that are close to the OPC. I agree with you that we shouldn't do something just because we've always done it. Like your Mom, I too pine for simpler times. Like her, I have warm memories of you (when you were "Jimmy") and Ben chasing fireflies and playing tag on the church lawn with other kids in the congregation while adults enjoyed fellowship on the front steps after evening worship.

Of course, times have changed, but that does not mean the evening service is passé. To claim as much is to say that

tradition has no importance in the life of the church. But that is a subject best left for another letter.

Instead, let me encourage you to consider how evening worship helps Reformed Protestants to bring faith and practice into proper alignment. Worldliness has been a problem for Christians of all ages. To be "in the world but not of the world" is the constant dilemma. But faithful discipleship in modern culture often demands that we fight this perennial battle on new and unfamiliar fronts. When novelty, originality, and sincerity are assumed to be always good, as our age presumes, we confront unique forms of idolatry and often more subtle

temptations to compromise our obedience to Christ. In response, it is not enough for the church to be "countercultural" in teaching only. The church must reinforce its beliefs with practices that give its doctrine plausibility. This helps Christians resist those voices that constantly whisper that "the old way of doing things is no longer important."

This is what Sabbath keeping does. The Sabbath is akin to what sociologists call a "plausibility structure." It is one of our religious duties that embody the Christian hope. This hope stems from the resurrection of Christ on that first day of the week and looks forward to the hope



of the resurrection of all the redeemed. Evening worship is crucial in sustaining our Sabbath hope. Morning and evening worship together frame the day with worship. In gathering again at the close of the Sabbath, we bring the day of rest to a fitting conclusion.

I remember when I was young and looked for ways to engage in political protests on campus. It was, and still is in many places, what American college students do. Now get this: a simple act of worship can become a brazenly political act. If going to church on Sunday morning enables you to resist the conformity of American consumer culture by not using the day either for shopping, brunch, or sports, returning to church on Sunday evening allows you to challenge the conventions of your evangelical friends. Going to church on Sunday morning is a testimony to the world; going in the evening is a witness to worldly Christians.

The point is not to look different simply for the sake of looking odd. Instead, the point is that forms of devotion once considered normal for Presbyterians now appear to be bizarre. If we want to hold on to our Reformed heritage, we will increasingly need to wrestle with how strange our biblical faith and practices are. Unfortunately, for too many Presbyterians, being "Reformed" is a label without consequences. We need to seize and be seized by these truths of our faith. My spiritual journey over the past two decades has impressed upon me the importance of reinforcing religious conviction with godly habits. What once seemed like a burden—having to go to the evening service—has become part of the day I look forward to each week.

I am not trying to browbeat you with a sense of guilt for missing evening worship. I would much prefer that instead of attending to keep your uncle happy, you go to the

evening service with a sense that worship is the best possible aid for nurturing the hope within you because God himself has promised to be present with his people and to bless them. But I can't say that I'd rather you not go if your heart isn't in it. Sometimes by "going through the motions" we actually come to enjoy what at first seems difficult, sort of like learning to eat and enjoy oysters on the half shell (yes, I noticed your intake last summer at the Labor Day picnic). It could very well be that God is using this life to cultivate in us a taste for the life to come.

Blessings,
"Uncle" Glen

This first appeared in New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, with whom we have a reciprocal arrangement.

World in focus

Death of Archbishop Christodoulos

Archbishop Christodoulos, who during his almost 10 years as head of the (Orthodox) Church of Greece received Pope John Paul II for an historic visit and sparked controversy with several of his remarks, died 28 January at the age of 69.

In 2001, Christodoulos met Pope John Paul II when the pontiff became the first

head of the Roman Catholic Church to visit Greece in 1300 years. The archbishop later paid a reciprocal visit to Rome, meeting John Paul's successor, Pope Benedict XVI.

The archbishop was involved in a number of controversies. In 2000, he opposed Greek government compliance with a European Commission directive to remove the stating of religion on official identity documents. In 2001, he said of the 9/11 attacks on the United States that the attackers had acted "out of despair caused by the injustices of the Great Powers," sparking ire among those who saw the remarks as offering a justification for the terrorists. Christodoulos was reported to have retracted the remarks five years later. In 2003, he said that Turkey should not be admitted to the European Union because Turks were "barbarians."

+ Jerry Van Marter, *Presbyterian News Service*,
100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202,
(888) 728-7228 x5493

Elderly convert from Islam dies from burns

A 70-year-old woman convert from Islam died on 1 February from burns she suffered when unknown assailants in a Muslim-majority area of Bangladesh about 150 miles

northwest of the capital set her home on fire last month.

Rahima Beoa of Cinatuly village suffered burns over 70 to 80 percent of her body after the bamboo and wood home she shared with her daughter and son-in-law, also converts, was set ablaze on 7 January, said Khaled Mintu, Rangpur regional supervisor of the *Isha-e-Jamat* (Jesus' Church) Bangladesh denomination.

Family members did not file charges with police over Beoa's death because they could not trace anyone to the arson, Mintu said, adding that filing charges would also hamper evangelistic efforts.

Area *Isha-e-Jamat* pastor Abdul Mabud Chowdhury said villagers were not only upset over Beoa's planned 13 February baptism but angry with her daughter and son-in-law, 40-year-old Ashraful Islam, for converting to Christianity and for his evangelistic efforts.

Beoa received burns on her hands, legs, waist, and other areas, Mintu told Compass Direct. Mintu added that she was given a Christian burial attended by about 100 people, including some Muslims.

In 2006, Mintu said, more than 7,000 Muslims vandalized houses of area Christians. There are 50 Christian families of mostly Muslim upbringing within two miles,

Family Camp 2009

Family Camp is on again this year!

The camp will be held at Finlay Park from Saturday 27th December 2008 – Saturday 3 January 2009.

Lord willing, Rev Kloosterman will lead the morning studies, and Rev Michael Flinn the evening devotions.

Please note there will be an increase in camp fees this year. Watch this space for more details!

he said, including 18 families in the immediate area of Beoa's home.

+ *Compass Direct News*, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799, (949) 862-0304, info@compass-direct.org

Auburn Avenue departs

On 27 January 2008 the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church voted without dissent to withdraw from the Presbyterian Church in America in order to become a mission church of the Confederation of Reformed Evangelical Churches under the oversight of the Grace Covenant Church of Nacogdoches, Texas.

Pastor Steve Wilkins has been a key figure in the dispute over what Presbyterians term the Federal Vision. Commonly churches in the CREC practice Paedocommunion.

+ *Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church*, 224 Auburn Avenue, Monroe, Louisiana 71201 (318) 323-3061

Secret police pressure Kazakhstan Presbyterians

The government says, "People are not persecuted on religious grounds in Kazakhstan." After a 17-hour raid on Grace Presbyterian Church in Almaty ranging over the night of 25 and 26 January, local Presbyterians are not convinced.

The denomination of more than 300 congregations began to experience serious problems when the Financial Police raided the denominational headquarters in Karaganda for 15-hour August 2007.

The Almaty congregation occupies a building on one of the city's main streets and numbers about 5,000 members.

According to published reports, Kazakh authorities suspect the denomination's founder Yoseph Yu is a spy. An American citizen of South Korean origin, Yu now lives in Seoul and oversees the international Grace Presbyterian movement which he initiated in 1991. Yu was deported from Russia in August 2002 and banned from entering Kazakhstan in May 2005.

Other key figures in the spread of Korean Presbyterianism across formerly closed regions of Asia have also experienced interference from state authorities.

+ *Forum18*, Postboks 6603, Rodeløkka, N-0502 Oslo, Norway

Islamic Jihadist coup in Chad poses major threat

While rebels attacked the Chadian capital N'Djamena on 2 February their clean-shaven, suit-wearing spokesman was telling Aljazeera TV that this was a domestic uprising against dictatorship and corruption.

However the truth is this rebellion is being sponsored by Sudan and Saudi Arabia to effect regime change in Chad and install a pro-Arab, Wahhabi regime loyal to Khartoum (Sudan). The coup has forced the postponement of sending a 3700-strong UN-sponsored, EU humanitarian force to Chad and Central African Republic to protect Darfuri refugees. Chad is 55 percent Muslim and 28 percent Christian. If this plot succeeds it will be a major coup for Sudan, Wahhabi Islam and Arabism and it would doubtless herald an era of unprecedented persecution for the Church in Chad.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | No. 464 | Wed 06 Feb 2008

Orthodox Prelate says 'Liberal Christianity' threatens church unity

A senior Russian Orthodox Church bishop has criticized suggestions by the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams that some aspects of Islamic law should be recognized in the British legal system, as representing a "politically correct" Christianity. "It is not our task to defend Sharia law, or to commend alternative lifestyles or to promote secular values. Our holy mission is to preach what Christ preached," said Bishop Hilarion of Vienna and Austria, the representative of the Russian Orthodox Church to the European institutions.

+ *Ecumenical News International*, PO Box 2100, CH - 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland

Erskine expands Kenya connection

David Githii, moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, has been visiting the Erskine Seminary of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. The 4.3 million member African denomination recently took an interest in the small American denomination when it discovered the ministerial development program maintained by the traditionalist Presbyterians.

The Due West, South Carolina, seminary has five students enrolled from Kenya. Moderator Githii has been negotiating a program under which East Africans could begin their studies in South Carolina and finish them back in Africa. Once a quiet refuge for psalm-singing traditional Presbyterians on the edge of what Carolinians called the Old English section, the school now has major programs in Columbia, Augusta, Charleston, and Greenville as well.

Githii's denomination is one of the fastest growing denominations in the world. A second body, The Reformed Church of East Africa, has also shown massive growth in

the face of Islamic assaults in the same region.

+ *Erskine Theological Seminary* PO Box 668 Due West, South Carolina 29639

+ *Presbyterian Church of East Africa*, PO Box 27573-00506 Myayo Stadium, Nairobi GPO, Kenya

+ *Reformed Church of East Africa*, Kisumu Road, PO Box 99, Eldoret Kenya

Algeria: The crackdown begins

In March 2006 the Algerian parliament passed a law specifically aimed at stopping Christian missionary activity and conversions from Islam to Christianity. The government has recently come under great pressure to implement this law and counter the missionary 'threat' and the 'problem' of conversions. It appears a crackdown has begun. On 5 February three Protestant leaders were told they will soon be imprisoned and fined for 'attacking religion and the person of the Prophet'. On 10 February Father Pierre Wallez was sentenced

Interested in teaching English as a Second Language?

Expressions of interest are wanted from people interested in teaching English in China or North Korea.

This is a new project and is in the early stages of development. People with a missions outlook are sought.

You must be 18 or over.

You must have a university degree.

You should have an ESOL qualification.

You should have ESOL teaching experience.

You must have good pronunciation.

You must be a member in good standing of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

Please email

Paul Goodenough (North Shore)
paul.g@callplus.net.nz

to one year in prison (later commuted to parole) for praying with believers in a private home, a violation of the new law. At the same time, a young Muslim doctor was sentenced to two years without parole for using medicines 'paid for by Caritas (a Catholic mission)'. Please pray for the Church in Algeria.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | No. 466 | Wed 20 Feb 2008

Freed Christian describes kidnapping ordeal in Pakistan

A Christian doctor described receiving various death threats while kidnapped recently

by Islamic extremists in an area of Pakistan reeling from extremist violence.

Militants in parts of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan have forced Christians and moderate Muslims to don Islamist garb, have bombed CD shops for perceived decadence and, in the case of Dr. Reginald Zahiruddin, have attempted forced conversion to Islam.

The extremists released Dr. Zahiruddin on 2 January, after kidnapping the Christian 25 days prior and demanding he renounce his faith at gunpoint.

Five armed men cut off Dr. Zahiruddin and his driver as they were travelling south

from the city of Bannu on 8 December, the doctor said in a written account of his kidnapping. The medical superintendent of Pennell Memorial Christian Hospital in Bannu was on a weekly visit to the city of Dera Ismail Khan, 100 kilometers south (62 miles), to treat 50 poor patients.

The kidnappers told Dr. Zahiruddin that the main reason for his abduction was to force him to convert to Islam. "I was bold enough to refuse, and I even told them that God has the authority of taking my life as he has given it to me," the doctor said.

+ *Compass Direct News*, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, California 92799-7250

Feminine focus

The feminine virtue of generosity

Sally Davey

'It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known.' Thus spoke Sydney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens's story of the French Revolution. Carton was preparing to go to die at the guillotine in place of his friend. It was a most generous act of self-sacrifice by a man who had faults, to be sure; but the action ennobled him. These words are some of the most famous in English literature, and the reason is the greatness of Carton's action, so simply stated. In Dickens's day self-sacrifice and generosity were intensely admired; they were the virtues of many a leading character in the literature of the day. They inspired heroic deaths in time of war; they motivated the efforts of Florence Nightingale in the Crimea; and they were the reason ordinary young women gave up the prospect of marriage for the sake of elderly parents needing their care.

The broadness of generosity

Of course, generosity also inspires less dramatic and less costly giving. Most often we think of generous actions as involving the giving of material help – gifts of money,

food, or physical items that we share with others in need. This sort of generosity was recognised and admired in all phases of western history, when there were obvious gaps between those who had much and those who had little – and when governments did not enforce 'sharing' through taxation and redistribution. Personal generosity, where the giver and the receiver knew each other face-to-face, had the potential for good, where responsibility and gratitude were involved. There is an accountability that draws giver and receiver together, and provides a sense of belonging to one another that is missing from state-provided 'generosity.' (I think particularly of England in the early-mid nineteenth century, with which culture I am reasonably familiar). The common sight of a family in need would inspire many a lady to practical acts of generosity. It was a common thing for better-off ladies to visit poorer families out of compassion and a sense of duty; providing food, medicine and spiritual encouragement to the poor and sick. Of course there were some who were selfish and hardhearted, and who turned their backs on the needy around them; but for those who attended church and heard the scriptures read and preached (and most did), there was plenty of motivation to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and teach the illiterate to read and write.

The Biblical basis to generosity

There is one, central truth in the Bible that shows why, above all other reasons, we should be generous. This is that God

has been most infinitely generous to us. He 'gave his only Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not die, but have everlasting life.' (John 3:16). How can we possibly grasp this? We are given a glimpse in Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac. We have its implications explained by Paul, in his letter to Titus: 'we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Christ Jesus our Saviour...' (Titus 3:3-6). Because God has been generous with us, we should be generous in our treatment of others.

Perhaps it is in the story of Ruth, way back in the time of the judges of Israel, that we see the theme of generosity most clearly illustrated. First of all there is Ruth's generous commitment to Naomi's welfare, binding herself to this old Jewish widow when she could have returned to her own Moabite people. She works hard gleaning wheat to support Naomi as well as herself, and she looks after her mother in law. Most of all, we see generosity in Boaz. He took steps to make sure Ruth was protected while gleaning (2:8-10), and ordered his men to make special provision to allow her special gleaning privileges; and to leave grain unharvested for her to



gather (2:15-16). When she visited him by night on the threshing floor, he thoughtfully sent her home with six measures of barley (3:17). Boaz, of course, redeemed Ruth and married her; and his story is generally understood to be a picture of God's loving redemption of us sinners. But there is also a human level on which Ruth responds in generosity (at least, this is what Boaz tells her). She has left her own people and in kindness to her mother-in-law she has come to a people she did not know before. All this Boaz has heard (2:11). She also, it seems, has a heart desire to choose the good and spiritual before the outwardly desirable. First, she has chosen Israel (the unfamiliar, and poor life) before Moab (the familiar, and comfortable life). Secondly, she has sought Boaz, her kinsman-redeemer, rather than going after 'younger men, whether poor or rich.' (3:10). Boaz commends her for these two proofs of kindness. Reflecting on this story, we could ask ourselves: do we fully appreciate God's kindness in the way he has selflessly redeemed us? Are we responding to God in a whole-hearted, grateful way; making spiritual and self-sacrificing rather than self-pleasing choices? Are we serving him by generosity to others, as Ruth did Naomi?

On the Church's history

Through many, many centuries of church history, women have been at the forefront of Christian generosity. They have 'reached out their hands' to the poor and needy

(Proverbs 31:20), they have visited the sick, comforted the grieving, shown hospitality to strangers and sat by the bedsides of the dying. In countless situations when men have been busy with their necessary work in the world women have been the arms and legs and loving mouthpieces of their churches. We have all, I am sure, benefited ourselves from these ministries of mercy; and doubtless share in extending them too. What a blessing they are. The early church was remarkable for its generosity to believers far from home in Acts 2; and I often wonder if there is a strong connection between the practical ministry of the deacons as first instituted in Acts 6:1-6 and Luke's comment in v. 7 that 'the word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.'

Women have always been the ones to provide warmth, comfort and cheer in home and community life. Think of the many times women's war efforts have been praised. Think of the ways women have provided all the little gestures of kindness that have made community life possible: welcome to strangers, meals for sick or hungry families, homes for orphaned children, a listening ear for troubled souls. Western culture, so influenced by the Christian gospel, so permeated by the teaching of the Scriptures, has encouraged women to be generous and hospitable. Women have been the keepers of heart, and home and community.

Generosity today

How about today? I'm not so sure. Looking around, it seems to me that we no longer live in such a generous world. Women no longer give their lives to keeping the home fires burning; and neither are they available to do all those kind, thoughtful, generous things that make places communities. It seems that women, as much as men, are caught up in the rat-race of getting, spending, and becoming successful. Their education, their careers and their incomes are needed if the big, luxurious house is to be acquired, if the nice holidays are to be enjoyed, if the children's amusements and education are to be funded; and if the successful, glossy-magazine dream is to be realised. But if we've gained these things, it seems to me, it's at the expense of our souls – or all that's really important in life. We have gained a lot of material goals, but we've lost a lot of what truly counts. We have become more selfish, more narrow, more focused – and more mean. Are our lives, and those of our husbands, children and communities the better for it? Sometimes the sheer relentless pace and consumerism of our lives puts intolerable stress on families. It seems to me that there are few things more selfish, and that involve more personal cruelty, than the breakup of marriage and home life. And if it is generosity and self-sacrifice that keep marriage and family together, then the short-sightedness (and stress) of getting and spending is a very foolish trade to make for what is so much more valuable. We have no future if we lose family and community, merely to gain things.

It would be fair to say that the decline of the generous community spirit among women is not merely the result of a sudden upsurge of selfishness in individual women's hearts. It is the spirit of the age in which we live. Men, women and children are all caught up in it. But nevertheless, the feminism which arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and which has flourished since the 1970s, has without question fostered the desire of women to please themselves and have what they want, when they want it. The idea of staying at home to tend husbands, raise children and feed numerous strangers has definitely been painted as domestic slavery by the feminist movement. Women generally have opted for getting out of the home and 'getting a life.' Of course it has meant that longer education and building a career has meant later marriage, a later start to having a family, fewer children,

and more money; but usually less time for homemaking. Working all day also means you come home tired, and are less inclined to invite people for meals. Certainly, it is not as common as it used to be to have anyone other than family or close friends for meals. Many people I know seldom have overnight guests. I know that these things are costly in terms of time and personal energy: they were costly for women who were always at home in former ages, too. One only has to think of Sarah Edwards, wife of Jonathan (the faithful 18th century American preacher and theologian). Sarah had a large family and household to manage; yet also, as a minister's wife, had church obligations and the special responsibility of hospitality to the many young ministers who came to learn as apprentices with her husband. These young men lived in her house for up to a year on end. In addition, there were the many traveling ministers and other guests who arrived, often without warning, and needed to be accommodated. (And I'm sure not all of them were polite, well-mannered and considerate guests!). Sarah Edwards was a generous and servant-like hostess, but the evidence is that it wasn't always easy for her. She didn't always feel like welcoming all these people. All of us who serve Christ in serving others need daily grace to do it. God gave it to Sarah, and used her generosity greatly in advancing the work of the gospel in 18th century America. Maybe she didn't see all of these good outcomes in her own lifetime; but in heaven we all will. Be encouraged!

What attitude do you have?

Having reflected on the biblical ground for generosity, and the ways it has greatly evaporated from our society, how could we – and should we – set about being generous ourselves, here and now? Well, it seems to me it has always simply involved giving of oneself whenever and wherever

Advertise your
Happenings and
Church events in



one sees a need. That may be giving of one's possessions, or one's talents, or time or energy. Selfishness holds onto all these; generosity gives them up. Think of the prayer in 'Take my life' – this hymn summarises the basic idea. Let's think through some specific ways this can be worked out...

Generosity really begins at home, and with the use we make of our homes, doesn't it? First and foremost is generosity to those in our immediate family. Our husbands are the closest of all, the nearest and dearest God has given us in this life. Through thick and thin, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health and for better or worse, whatever the circumstances, we love each other. (As I write it is Valentine's day, but how different from the world's picture of red roses, pink hearts and romantic dinners is true Christian married love – at its very best, and also in its most testing moments!) A generous wife – what does she do? I think she puts her mind to thoughtful ways of helping her husband. She is available when he needs her, and willing to put his urgencies ahead of her own. This applies in spontaneous affection as well as in practical everyday matters such as taking the children to sports matches if he is busy, or running errands for his business. A generous wife will also be uncomplaining, and will do her best to put the best construction on words, actions and motives. Love 'believes all things, bears all things' (1 Corinthians 13) and refuses to jump to the worst conclusions as to why things are done – or not done! Love has a generous assessment of motives.

Generosity at home

I am not a mother, but I have the suspicion mothers have an instinct for generosity towards their children. Is this true? Does it come naturally to do things for your child, to sacrifice your own pleasure so that he can have something instead? I think this is so. There are, of course, times when to give your child what he wants may be bad for him. It may be in the interest of his growth in maturity to thwart his little will and say no. It may be better to withhold praise, or lay blame at his door, so that he will learn humility, or discover the consequences of wrongdoing.

More costly generosity is that we owe to strangers; particularly to needy strangers God puts in our path. Most of us have shown hospitality to visitors from out of town; someone who needs a bed for a night or a meal after church on a

Sunday. But there are also those who need much more – our ongoing help, for weeks, months or years. It might be the struggling immigrant who needs your help to find a job or wend her way through numerous immigration applications. Perhaps it's a rebellious teenager who's left home and needs help, but doesn't really want to respond to it. Or it could be a mother new to your neighbourhood who has family difficulties, and who needs to talk and talk and talk... These kinds of situations are demanding – of time, of energy, and frequently of our material resources. Generosity will mean that we give all of these, as in serving these people we are serving Christ. Any time we feel that such people don't really have a call on our help, we could ask ourselves: did I have any call on Christ's help?

It's time for someone else

There are many ideas that tempt us to give up when the demands press hard upon us. I am often tempted, when the numbers of people wanting to talk, eat or just be around start to grow. But that's usually selfish. One phrase often used these days is 'time for yourself.' People use it when they've been busy a lot with others, or they're tired, and just want to be on their own. I can identify with the feelings of pressure that intensify the desire for quiet; time to retreat and think and recharge one's batteries. But it always strikes me that calling it 'time for myself' is a very selfish way to start thinking. It seems to me that all of our time belongs to God, and we shouldn't be trying to indulge ourselves – even with time apart. To be sure, we may need a rest – but why not call it that? The aim of a rest is to equip us for further useful service. You might think it's only a matter of terminology, but often the words we use start to shape the way we think. And that's not always helpful.

How can we be generous? With all of our hearts; and with everything we have:

*Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee,
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.*

(Frances Ridley Havergal, 1874; *Psalter Hymnal*, No. 462)

Dr Sally Davey is part of the Reformed Church of Dovedale, in south-western Christchurch. Sally is also a writer and part-time lecturer in church history.

'Coast to Coast'

The idea of a race across the South Island using foot, pedal and paddle power was initially promoted just over 25 years ago as the ultimate endurance challenge. A 243 km race from the West Coast (Kumara Junction) to the East Coast (Sumner, Christchurch's east-coast suburb) sounded 'over the top' in more ways than one. It would involve a 60 km bike ride, followed by a 33 km run up a snow fed river to aptly named Goat's Pass (1,100m), that followed another 18kms cycling; the first day. The second consists of a 69km journey down the Waimakariri River (including its 25km gorge) topped off with a 74km bike ride from the Gorge to Sumner.

About five years ago, three young dreamers, John Steenhof, Richard van Garderen and Sean Fietje, aided and abetted by family members, decided to try this feat over a four-day period. The weather was atrocious, the rivers ran high, the level of foolhardiness was close to 10 on the Richter scale. But, a bruised, battered and waterlogged trio eventually staggered onto the beach at Sumner. They had made it!

Human nature being what it is, the adventure was sanitised, romanticised, told and retold. Others expressed inter-

est. Plans were made. The adventure was repeated, and, on the basis of lessons learned, rules and limitations were put in place. The 'Coast to Coast' has become an annual 3-day event involving competitors, their support crews and whole families. The emphasis is on completion rather than competition; on sharing in and enabling one another to complete a hard and demanding task; on providing a very different kind of setting in which to express and experience being one in Christ.

* * *

I've wanted to experience this challenge ever since my son Richard described it to me in lyrical terms. Stated naïvely, it sounded like a great test of endurance and, dare I say it, *fun!* At any rate, training for the event would be physically beneficial and, as Richard assured me over and over again, '*Come on, dad! You can do it.*' I tried in 2006, but the event was aborted due to torrential rainfall and a record flood.

Back again for this year (2007). The Christchurch Show weekend provides an ideal time slot because of the Friday holiday. As a matter of principle, the Lord's Day must remain just that.

On Thursday morning some 70 com-

petitors, support crews and others met in the Bishopdale car park at 8.00am. Final instructions were given and we sought God's protection and grace in prayer. Bikes, looking like weird antennae, sprouted from each vehicle. A couple of kayaks were in evidence too. Tents, supplies and countless other 'necessities' filled the vans and SUVs to overflowing. Everyone was packed and ready to set off for Kumara Junction.

The weather matched the breathtaking beauty of the alpine region. The only hitch, as was plain from the alps, was that a late spring snow storm had made the tops look like over-filled vanilla ice-creams now rapidly melting and sure to give the mountain streams extra bite.

At 1.00pm – after having dipped our hands into the sea at Kumara (and in my case having picked up a round pebble that I placed in my bicycle shorts) – the 'slower' group set off to Deception Corner 60 kms up the road. It's a steady, but gentle, climb. I even had a chance to do some birdwatching as I rode. (Counted no less than 8 wekas!). Support crews were stationed at 2 km intervals and yelled times, encouragement at us continually. I arrived at the finish line just over two and a half



The team at the finish line (Sumner Beach)

hours later – tired but triumphant!

The whole crew moved back across Arthur's Pass to the Hawdon Hut. By the time everyone was there a canvas village had sprouted. A great atmosphere. I sampled the offerings of various cooks. (Mrs Andrea Moot, who looked after four of us, deserves first prize for her efficiency, ingenuity and great tucker!) and got to know a whole new bunch of people. The evening was crowned with evening devotions, prayer, a doxology and thanksgiving. Since the two-day crew would be roused at 4.30am and the rest of us could 'sleep in' till 5.30, an early night in near-frost conditions beckoned. Thankfully, I slept well!

Friday was the big day. The fitter and younger folk were to go back to the beach and start at 6.00am. For them it would be a 60km bike ride, 33 km mountain traverse (jogging when they were scrambling!) plus another 18 km road trip on their bikes ending at the White River Bridge (Hawdon). For the rest of us only the latter two stages.

I started the walk (no running at my age!)

briskly and with enthusiasm. Great start, but as the trail became less and less of a trail and more a matter of criss-crossing the Deception River, energy flagged. A few severe bouts of cramp really made me wonder if I had let myself be talked into something I should never have attempted. But it was 'Never On Your Own'. The support, encouragement and (lack of) sympathy received from those who were in the tail-end group, was fellowship-in-action every step of the way! It's hard to describe how it felt to disappear into ice-cold water 'up to your midriff' to see an endless 'staircase' of slippery rocks that must be negotiated. The journey seemed endless – especially when the 'expert' in our group announced that it was only about 45 minutes to the hut. In fact, it turned out to be almost 3 hours for our crew. (Well spoken, Jim!) The down-hill journey promised to be a breeze – except that a place called 'Dudley's Knob' – downhill most of the way – seemed endless with jarring step after jarring step. One member

of our team lost his sole. Kiwi ingenuity solved this one by putting his sock *outside* of rather than *inside* his boot!

Arriving a Greyney's turned out to be an emotional moment for me. I was hard-pressed to hold back tears. I had *done* it – even if it took me almost 10 hours. Incredibly, the bike ride immediately after, in spite of being marred by some rain and headwinds, was an absolute joy. To be able to *sit* while moving provided an incredible sense of strength.

I must admit that when arriving back at the tent – around 7.30pm – I was almost too tired to eat. (I was continually told off by the medical staff for not eating and drinking enough – and rightly so!). Crawled into the pup tent, stiff and sore but determined to rub *Tiger Balm* on the most affected areas. That and sleep were a wonderful anaesthetic!

Another 5.30am start on Saturday. Perhaps the most amazing thing about getting up that morning was *not* being as stiff as a proverbial plank. The sleep, *Tiger Balm*



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4

and training beforehand paid off.

Rather than go down the Waimakariri River individually on kayaks, four 8-man rafts had been procured. A good thing too! Kayaking needs experience and knowledge of the river conditions. We started off just before 7.00am. The weather was, for the most part perfect for what turned out to be a long, long journey down the river. The 'captains' piloted us every effectively for most of the time. Occasional 'hairy' bits saw a few close shaves. 'Man-overboard' happened only twice – to the same paddler. Memorably done, Nick!

The Waimak gorge is breathtaking in its grandeur and beauty. God's handiwork never ceases to amaze. The last 25 kms were against a power nor-east wind that slowed us down considerably. Nevertheless, by 4.00pm all 35 of us arrived and

Continued over the page

- 1** Looking the part?
- 2** Starting line at Kumaru (West Coast)
- 3** Up the Deception River
- 4** Teamwork matters. A dunking would be a disaster!
- 5** Looks effortless, eh?
- 6** Almost half-way, the hut at Goat's Pass (1076m)
- 7** After the mountain traverse, just 18kms to the Hawdon.
- 8** Rafting down the Waimakariri. A tricky bit in the gorge.



6



7



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- 9 We're winning!
- 10 Last leg (Gorge to Sumner)
- 11 Done it! Sumner beach.



11

made preparations for the last leg – a 70km+ journey from the Waimak Bridge, through Christchurch and finishing at Sumner beach.

A brutal nor-easter provided an unrelenting headwind that sapped energy levels even further. All the advantages of downhill travel were lost. But we all did it. In my case I was helped by three-riders who, during the final 10 kms, remained just in front of me, thus saving me from having to battle against the wind on my own. Thanks a million Peter, Cindy and Richard!

Yes, we finished! I was able to *run* down the beach to the water, dip my hands in it and even find the energy to throw that stone I had picked up on the West Coast. An incredible feeling of elation and accomplishment carried me at that point.

Once everyone arrived, the whole team gathered together for prayer and thanksgiving. All of us who started made it. There were no injuries. Indeed, I preached twice on the next day and did so without physical discomfort. (Yes, I noted the way I was closely scrutinised by a lot of you younger competitors!)

* * *

Many have asked how I feel about this event. I felt my age – but also a real sense of ‘*I did it – with much help!*’ I am thankful to God for the ability to do it and, in retrospect, to be able to enjoy *all* of it! It was a great opportunity to get to know some of God’s people in a very special way. The time we spent together was great. It brings and binds those involved together in attempting to accomplish a common goal.

The ‘Coast-2-Coast’ is becoming an annual event and is well worthwhile for those who love this kind of thing. The sheer beauty of the area we crossed and the privilege of being able to do it as part of the family of Christ’s church, made it even more precious.

Next year? Well, with a few more stringent pre-conditions – weight and level of fitness mainly – I’m in!

What about you?
Dirk J van Garderen.

Books in focus

Depression – A Stubborn Darkness, by Edward Welch

Reviewed by Andrew Holtslag

Martin Luther suffered from what we would call depression. Luther explains that the content of his depression was always the same, the loss of faith that God is good and that He is good to me. He used a German word to describe these times and that word was *Anfechtung*. He once wrote, 'If I live longer I would like to write a book about *Anfechtungen*, for without them no man can understand scripture, faith, the fear or the love of God. He does not know the meaning of hope who has never been subject to temptations.' (R. Bainton, *Here I Stand*. p.283)

These words of Martin Luther have an echo in Edward Welch's fine work – *Depression: a Stubborn Darkness*. Like Luther, Welch wants us to reflect on how depression can be used by God to strengthen our faith in Him. He has written a book that aims to help those suffering in the midst of depression, and those who are seeking to help friends or family members that suffer from depression. The lasting benefit of what Welch has to say on the matter is seen in that what he says about the 'why' questions of depression. 'When the why questions appear, they will be religious — as all why questions are. They will be about God' (p. 14). In this, the character of Welch's book is clearly seen. Depression is a matter of religious affection. Its ultimate resolution is a matter of where one will cast his affections, and Welch directs those affections towards the sovereign Creator of the universe Who has revealed Himself in Scripture, and in the person and work of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The book is made up of 275 pages and is divided up into an introduction and four parts, with twenty-six chapters in total. It is written in a very personal and pastoral matter. The reader is constantly addressed by the author in a way that suggests the familiarity of the author with the darkness of depression. Chapters are often begun with a helpful illustration or insight that paves the way for the rest of the chapter's material.

The introduction begins with some of the typical questions that might be asked by a

sufferer of depression. After characterising the religious nature of 'why' questions, Welch proceeds to suggest an approach to this book for sufferers of depression and those wishing to help sufferers. Next, Welch moves on to look at some of the technical definitions of depression that have been put forward. This section reveals the difficulty that confronts sufferers of depression who will be faced with much counsel that rejects the spiritual component of the ailment. This is seen in that with all the pharmaceutical assistance that is used to combat depression today, we still do not know why various medicines are effective, and whether the chemical imbalances they seek to treat cause depression or result from it.

Part one of the book reminds us that depression is suffering. Welch points us to the Scriptures as the first source of reflection when considering the nature of depression. There we find that others, ourselves, our bodies, Satan, and God Himself are revealed as some of the causes of depression. Welch assembles this list partly through reflection on the story of Joseph and his suffering. In contrast to what Scripture reveals about Joseph, Welch accurately describes depression as a time when a believer most feels like an atheist.

A very practical suggestion made by Welch in this section has to do with worship: 'If you are depressed, you are going to have to learn to be a liturgical worshiper. If you wait until you feel motivated to worship, you might be waiting a long time' (p. 55). To back this type of statement up, Welch makes a persuasive case for meditating on the Psalms as the 'Christians guide to coping with suffering' par excellence.

Part two of the book offers some analysis of the factors that contribute to depression. Here, he focuses again on some of the causes of depression mentioned in the first part of the book, and develops them further. He offers a biblical expose on subjects like anger, fear, failure and shame, and guilt and legalism, and in so doing, managing to demonstrate the true condition of the human heart as the root

of depression.

In this section, he also makes the interesting observation that 'the incidence rate of depression for those born after 1950 is as much as twenty times higher than the incidence rate for those born before 1910' (p. 113), before going on to examine some of the reasons for this, as suggested by Martin Seligman. In relation to this, the timeless relevance of Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 1 is spelled out by Welch as worthy of our continued reflection.

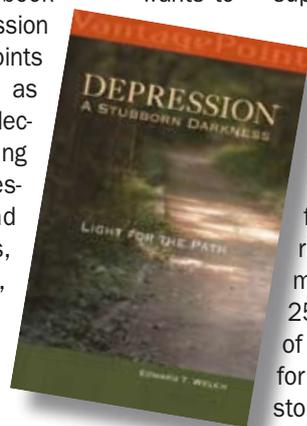
Part three of the book considers the range of suggested treatments for depression. Welch offers knowledgeable and useful advice on subjects as varied as naturopathic remedies and anti-depressants. He supplements this with testimonies from sufferers of depression concerning things that were helpful and things that were not.

Finally, part four of the book calls on the reader to look towards 'hope' and 'joy' as the calling that God has for our lives. 'While our culture elevates riches and health, hope is one of the most coveted spiritual possessions' (p. 251). Welch makes a clear presentation of the Gospel as the only true antidote for depression. He reminds us that God's story ends with the resurrection and victory of Jesus. If we are without hope, that is because we are substituting our own ending for the one supplied by God. Similarly, joy is not the opposite of suffering. Instead, we should appreciate that joy can be a companion to suffering.

In this book, Welch does not offer a miracle cure for depression. Frequently, the answer to depression is found in the ordinary. 'The truth is that faith often feels like the very ordinary proceeds of dragging one foot in front of the other because we are conscious of God' (p. 31). This may not be what we wish to hear in the midst of depression, but it is the teaching of Scripture, and, as Welch's book makes clear, it is what we most *need* to hear in the midst of our depression.

Depression – A Stubborn Darkness. Written by Edward T. Welch. Published by Punch Press.

Andre Holtslag is presently serving his vicariate in the Reformed Church of Pukekohe.



Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

Family prayer & praise items: We praise God with and for Jim Verbeek who, Lord willing, turns 80 this Wednesday. May God continue to bless and keep you in His care.

Bishopdale

Pastoral: Congratulations to Chris and Heather Bromley on the birth of Sean Christopher on Wednesday. We can give thanks that Heather and Sean are both doing well.

Pastoral. The funeral for Malcolm McDonald was held on Friday. Please continue to uphold the family in your prayers.

Halkett Tennis Open 2008. This is New Zealand's answer to the Wimbledon Grass Court Championship, where Bishopdale's finest will compete to find out who really is "King of the Grass". YES! You are invited to come along for a fun day of tennis at the home of Richard and Cindy van Garderen. This day caters for all levels of tennis ability, age and gender with family activities for families with young children including a pool, sand pit and a miniature tennis court. So pack yourself a lunch, find those old tennis rackets and shoes and make your way to Halkett. The competition will start at 10.00 am on Saturday the 29th of March and will finish with a BBQ dinner and awards presentation at the end of the day. For more information and to enter yourself in the Halkett Tennis Open, 2008 please contact Richard van Garderen.

Bucklands Beach

Thank-You. We would like to express our sincere thanks to all who have helped to make our 50th Wedding Anniversary such a memorable time. The many good wishes, cards, flowers, gifts, phone calls, visits, and morning teas have been most heart-warming. It is a great blessing to not only look back over all those years of God's favour, but also to experience the fellowship of His people here and now. Carl and Joyce Larsen.

Christchurch

Calling all men. Inviting all men young and old to a night of fun ten pin bowling this Thursday 21 February, 7.00 pm at Garden City Bowls (21 Iversen Terrace). Please let Eddy van Leeuwen know if you are coming by TOMORROW – Monday 18 February so lanes can be booked.

Dovedale

Church camp: With less than three months to go we are very excited about our church camp. Our speaker is excited and looking forward to meeting everyone. Camp is a great opportunity for everyone to join in fellowship and fun, away from everyday pressures, and to meet new people in a different setting, so please pray seriously about coming to camp and also for the speaker and planning. Registration forms will be handed out next Sunday. The dates are 18-20 April at Glenroy. From the Camp committee.

Pastoral notes. We rejoice with Mr and Mrs Cees van den Ende who celebrate their 55th wedding anniversary on the 14th of this month. We congratulate them on this wonderful milestone, and ask the Lord to continue with His blessings of faith, happiness and relatively good health. Mr and Mrs Roel Dijkstra share the same week for their anniversary, only their wedding date fell 20 years later – congratulations!

Terry van der Schaaf and Nynke Pijpker's wedding will, Lord willing, be celebrated here on Saturday (16th). We all wish you, Terry and Nynke, a wonderfully blessed day.

Christans in Government. The new party based on Christian values, now called simply "The Kiwi Party", may well be worthy of your support. Their constitution is squarely Christian and they aim at reverting the poor decisions that the government has made in recent years. With party leader Larry Baldock who has been in parliament, and Gordon Copeland who is still in parliament, they also have a good feel for how to put their foot in the political door. Leave your calendars open for their conference on Saturday, 1st March at La Vida, Upper Riccarton. – BH

Office Bearer training. It is envisaged that we will be able to organize some evenings of office bearer training while Martin Geluk is with us. Men of the congregation,

please anticipate this and watch for further information. RDM

Dunedin

Oamaru News. We give thanks to God with the news that Ron and Tani Newton were blessed with another son, Timothy Mathias, born in Timaru on Wednesday 13 February at 10:42 am. Baby weighs 5lb 15ozs and, along with his mother, is doing well.

Timaru Developments. Session, at its meeting of 8 February, made a number of important decisions regarding Timaru. The long-term goal of having an RCNZ church established in Timaru was officially endorsed, as was the short-term goal of the formation of a Timaru RCNZ church plant core group. Session encouraged the presently existing core group to begin catechetical instruction, midweek prayer meetings and the publication of a monthly newsletter. Session also encouraged them to begin preparing for regular worship services, evangelistic programmes and information meetings, to begin when the core group grows to 10 to 12 adult members. Now that the work in Timaru has been officially recognised and mandated let us continue to uphold in prayer the efforts that are being made there. Session heard of contacts that are being made through church groups, with evangelically minded folk connected with groups outside Timaru, and with those already attending the Bible study. Pray that these contacts may bear fruit. Pray for the core families of Jim & Julie Klazinga and of Andrew & Katrina Miller.

Pulpit Supply. So that we can be informed of our pulpit supply arrangements, here are our plans for the coming months. On 16 March we hope to have Vicar Andre Holtslag preach in Dunedin and Oamaru. This is subject to Andre's passing his presbytery examination on 29 February. We should make this a matter for prayer. During his visit we will have the opportunity to consider whether Andre might be a candidate for us to call as our next minister.

Church Search. Do you know all the 21 churches and preaching places of the RCNZ? If so, you will be able to find them embedded in this story very easily.

Tony and Dale Palmer lazed on the beach, at the base of a dune, dining on salad and barbecued pieces of ox tongue. High

above a lonely figure was hastening swiftly downwards to join them.

"It's Beavon, Dale," observed know-it-all schoolmaster Tony.

Dale had been admiring a pukeko. Her love of wildlife drew her to the narrow peninsula, especially the north shoreline. But, then again, there were so many things that were important to her—her favourite film (*Bridge on the River Kwai*), Nui, Oma, Tabitha her friend—she had so much to be thankful for. An astute woman, Gereformeerde by birth, Dale now regarded herself as pakeha. Miltonian verse and gardening were her great loves. She thought of her own garden in which she so liked to roam. Arum lilies and zinnias grew there in profusion. Lately though, she found herself increasingly distracted by pressures of work. As a busy immigration consultant, her clients were causing concern. Kowalchuk—a nuisance, Katzwang—a nuisance, they were all nuisances. She did manage to take Christ's church, but then he was as compliant as a dove.

Dale's reverie was broken by an apparently hallucinating Tony. "Look at that ibis hop, Dale!" he exclaimed, gesticulating wildly. Just then Beavon drew up.

"Do you know your face is swelling, Tony?" Beavon asked. He quickly popped a thermometer into Tony's mouth and, as the quicksilver streamed upwards, gasped, "The colonel's on fire! We've got to do something!"

"I know," responded Dale, "let's get him to where the rescue helicopter, the Roebuck, lands."

Beached on that spot, however, were three slumbering seals. Tony was an absolute dead weight and neither Dale Palmer's ton nor the seals could be moved.

Foxton

Husbands bible study: As indicated last year, we plan (DV) to run a Husbands Bible Study this year, based on the study book 'Loving your Wife - How to strengthen your marriage in a fallen world'. There are 12 lessons, and we hope to meet once a month. If you are newly married (or about to be married) consider joining us, so that you can be better equipped for a lifelong God-centred marriage. Or perhaps you've been married a while but would like to make your marriage even better. Or maybe you've been married a very long time - we could certainly use your knowledge and expertise to help us younger ones. If you

are interested in joining this group, please contact Roy Nugteren.

Session report - Monday 28th January 2008. The marriage of David van der Burg and Jody van Echten will take place on Saturday 23rd February 08 (DV) at 3 pm in the Salvation Army Hall, Durham Street, Levin. Rev Andrew Nugteren from the Reformed Church of Wellington will officiate.

Fellowship news and prayer items: It has been a roller-coaster week for Jens & Janneke de Vries. Yet, our brother & sister have found much strength in the Lord. After having heard the devastating news last Saturday that Jens has a cancerous growth in the spinal cord just below the brain stem, as well as two cancer spots in his brain, Jens & Janneke chose for the option of radiation instead of having an operation. The week finished with Jens having had radiation on every day of the week. Next week he will have radiation on the two spots in the brain only, the neck-radiation having now finished. Please remember Jens and Janneke in prayer as God gives them strength to the measure.

Hamilton

Pastoral: Around 4.30am on Wednesday, the Lord took Mrs Sminia home to himself just a couple of weeks before her 90th birthday. A memorial service for Mrs Sminia will be held at St Marks' Presbyterian church in Tokoroa at 2.30pm on Monday. The burial service will be held at 2pm on Tuesday in Cambridge. Church members are welcome to attend either or both services. We praise the Lord for his faithfulness to Mrs Sminia over many years and pray that he will comfort and strengthen her son, Klaas.

We rejoice with the den Hartighs that they could witness the baptism of Frank and Raquel's youngest daughter, Annabelle, last Sunday. We thank God for allowing the adoption to go through and pray for Frank and Raquel as they seek to raise Annabelle in God's ways.

Hastings

Welcome! A warm welcome to Laura Snoek (niece of John and Esther) who has just moved to Hastings from the USA to start a nursing degree at the EIT. She will be staying with the Verbokkem family for the next three years. Laura, we hope you settle in well here!

Farewell. We wish our sister Adele Ford safe travel and a good year as she leaves us to take up a year (or perhaps two) of

*It is with joy and thankfulness
to the Lord that we rejoice in the
celebration of the*

60th Wedding Anniversary

Of our parents and grandparents

Harry & Wies van Echten



*Married in Vlaardringen, Holland
(Gereformeerde Kerk)
8th April, 1948*

Psalm 121: 1,2

Congratulations and love from

Fred & Sylvia van Echten
*Matthew, Lisa, David, Mark, Michael,
Helena & Josh*

Liz & Gilbert Vos
*Raymond & Catherine & Rebecca,
Wendy & Vijay, Angela*

Rose & Allan Thomson
*Julie & Steve & Max, Rachel, Brendon,
Trudi*

Paul & Hilda van Echten
*Kim & Kris, Jesse & Melissa, Jody &
David, Henry*

Ben & Helen van Echten
Melissa, Jonathan, Kelly-Ann, Amy

Lex

study at the Reformed Theological College. It has been heart-warming to see Adele's growth in grace since she became a believer. Adele, we pray that the Lord may uphold you and keep you in His care and that your study of the Word of God may increase your love for Him and your ability to serve Him as He leads you in the future. May God be with you.

From the session. The Session spent most of last Saturday planning for the coming Church year. We have also focused on leadership training in its different forms. A workshop will be held early in May for the purpose of training our men for church office. This will commence on Friday night and take in most of the Saturday. There will again be a series of combined bible studies in June. In October a workshop is planned on the topic of Marriage / Parenting.

Hukanui

Pastoral Congratulations to Elizabeth Wolmarans, who celebrated her 90th birthday earlier this month.

Mangere

Sallies slam Govt policies. The Press 12 February 2008. The Government is spending billions of dollars more on

social policies to little or no effect, a damning new report says.In its first state-of-the-nation report, the Salvation Army found that despite increasing core social spending by \$16 billion to \$39b a year over the past 10 years, there had been little increase in social progress. MAIN FINDINGS: CYF referrals up 24% since 2005. Youth Court cases up 28% since 2001. 8300 women aged 15-19 pregnant compared to 7000 in 2001. Serious crime up 28% since 2002. Prison population up 36% since 2002. Prison running costs up from \$431m to \$862m. Wage growth 5.1% since 2002. Family First Comment: The Salvation Army report highlights a very important point. It's very easy to throw money at a problem but you also have to deal with the social concerns such as family breakdown, teen pregnancies, rising violent crime, child abuse etc. These are solved by tackling the far harder issues of family structure, values, respect, the role of parents, attitudes to drugs, and other non-financial measures. Family First

Nelson

Bitter spirited Christians?

Spurgeon, "Ripe Fruit" #945. Micah 7:1
As we grow in grace, we are sure to grow in charity, sympathy, and love. We shall, as we ripen in grace, have greater sweetness towards our fellow Christians. Bitter spirited Christians may know a great deal, but they are immature.

Those who are quick to censure may be very acute in judgment, but they are as yet very immature in heart.

He who grows in grace remembers that he is but dust, and he therefore does not expect his fellow Christians to be anything more.

He overlooks ten thousand of their faults, because he knows his God overlooks twenty thousand in his own case. He does not expect perfection in the creature, and, therefore, he is not disappointed when he does not find it.

When our virtues become more mature, we shall not be more tolerant of evil; but we shall be more tolerant of infirmity, more hopeful for the people of God, and certainly less arrogant in our criticisms.

Church notices. Session met with Coral Borger and Erika Bezuidenhout who have expressed their desire to profess their Faith and were encouraged by their response. Subsequently they will do their Profession of Faith in the Morning Service on Sunday 2nd March 2008.

Session discussed the need for a Counselor once Rev Adams leaves and the idea was discussed that we ask Rev John Goris from the Wellington Presbytery as long as the Presbyteries agree and Rev Goris is willing and available.

North Shore

News & Announcements. We rejoice with Frank & Rachel den Hartigh as they rejoice in the adoption of their new daughter, Annaliesa Belle (and sister for Allanah). Frank & Rachel, we pray that indeed, your children will be born (again) in Zion; as we ought all to pray for all our (the Church's children). Annaliesa will be baptised in the morning Service next Sunday, Lord willing.

Doctrine review class. Is it a long time since you have been to Catechism and you haven't studied any of the Confessions in recent years? I am planning to conduct a Doctrine Review Class again this year, based on the Belgic Confession of Faith. It is open to anybody. My idea is that probably we will have it early in the morning, say 6am, one morning per week, but if that doesn't suit, don't stop reading. As I have done it before, we begin with a cup of coffee and study for one hour. We try to be efficient. It will require about one hour's preparation at home. If anyone is interested, please let me know and then we will get together to decide on a time that is mutually agreeable.

News & Announcements. It is our privilege today to be able to welcome into membership Erik and Henriette van Roekel and their little daughter, Suus, who have been worshipping us for some months now. They come to us from the Protestant Church of the Netherlands, having formerly been members of the Netherlands Reformed Church. (Recently the Netherlands Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands and the Lutheran Church in the Netherlands merged into the Protestant Church of the Netherlands.) To Erik and Henriette, we trust that you will enjoy real Christian fellowship among us in the years ahead and that you may be blessed among us and we also by you.

Palmerston North

From the Pastor. This morning Josie Koolaard and Kaitlyn Smith will be receiving the sacrament of baptism. A warm welcome to all who have come to share this occasion with us. Please stay with us for a shared luncheon after the service.

Wedding. Peter Alexander de Deugd and

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Faith in Focus by visiting the
Reformed Churches Home Page
<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

Genevieve Elizabeth Smith have signified their desire to be united in marriage according to the ordinance of God. They desire to begin this holy state in the Name of the Lord and to complete it to His glory. If no lawful objection is brought forward, the ceremony will take place, Lord willing, at All Saints Church on the corner of Church Street and the Square in Palmerston North, New Zealand at 10:00am on 16 February 2008.

New Arrival. Lee Allan had baby boy on Tuesday night (12th Feb). Gideon Matthew and he weighed 3.75kg (8'4")

Why do we have coffee after church? Coffee after church? It's a great opportunity to catch up with family members I don't see during the week. Why do I stay for coffee? Well, after an hour and a bit of church it's great to have some refreshments. Coffee? They expect me to take my turn at serving so why shouldn't I have a cuppa on other Sundays? Me.? Coffee. Hey, it's free. The church pays for it! On our recent trip we worshipped in a church at the foothills of the Canadian Rockies. They had a nice new church building. The singing was great and the sermon was the one I best remember of our whole holiday. It was a church with lots of families- a church with a future. And as a bonus they had coffee after church. Great! We stayed for a cuppa, after all we were on holiday, it was Sunday and we had nothing else to do. At the kitchen counter I said "Hello!" to the folk serving and they smiled and said "Good Morning!" We stood aside to let others get their drink. As we stood drinking our coffee we observed that the people obviously enjoyed this time together- most of the congregation stayed for it. I left Ali for a moment to commend the elder who had taken their service for the challenging message he had brought (a "reading service") He thanked me and asked where we were from. I said. "Australia". He said that it was nice that we could be there. When I came back to Ali she was still standing by herself. We drank our coffee...casually...we weren't in a hurry, it was holidays and it was Sunday and we had nowhere in particular to go. After finishing our coffee we walked around their building, looking at some of its features, but since no one took much notice of us we eventually drifted out into the car park, stood by the car a while and eventually drove off to our motel. Later we asked ourselves the question: If we came as people from the community looking for a church to join, would we come back to

that church again? We decided we probably would, after all, judging a congregation by one worship service is hardly fair. Even in the most welcoming churches people get overlooked sometimes. In fact, I have a problem with "church shoppers" who come for just one service and base their decision on that one service. But we also decided that had we been people from the community that congregation would have missed a wonderful opportunity that morning. They had "greeters" at the door but all they did was smile and pass the bulletin. And during the coffee afterwards they missed a further opportunity to take up the challenge of Jesus, "I was a stranger and you took me in!" It's not my task to judge that congregation. I'm sure it was a lovely Christian community and that on other Sundays it would have been different. Why then am I writing this? Simply to ask you again why you stay for coffee after church. It's great to have refreshments, after an hour and a bit of concentrating on the worship of our Saviour. It's good that the church carries the can for the coffee and that you can have it "on the house". It's lovely to be able to catch up with other family members and friends over a cuppa. But why do we really have it? Its because when we came to this area and opened our new church we decided that we wanted to be a welcoming church where people from the community would feel at home. The writer to the Hebrews said: Don't forget to welcome strangers because some have entertained angels that way. That's a lovely thought isn't it? This morning why not look around for someone you don't know. And who knows, it might even be an angel in disguise! A gleaner from our bulletin in 1997. By Rev John Westendorp.

Pukekohe

Congratulations to Roel and Ali Voschezang as you celebrate your 50th wedding anniversary this week. This is a major milestone and we rejoice with you and your wider family in the Lord's goodness and faithfulness to you.

We welcome Jan Kerkhoven as a professing member of the church, and his daughters Nikky and Patty as baptised members coming from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ashburton. We trust all of you will grow in faith and love for the Lord through your life and participation in the church, and that you will be able to use your gifts for the enrichment of the other members.

Silverstream

Marriage Banns. Jason de Vries and Malien van der Werff have signified their desire to be united in marriage at the Reformed Church of Silverstream on the 8th of March 2008, at 1.30pm. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place on that date, the Lord willing.

Wainuiomata

Russian outreach trip. Every summer, thousands of Russian children (both orphans and city kids) head off to summer camp hoping they will meet people like you and me who can give them love, and hope for their future. This coming June, Lord Willing, I (Klariske) am planning to go back to Russia to spend another three weeks at Camp Horizont, with some members from the Aussie team that I joined two years ago. It is our prayer that more workers are called to plant seeds for God's rich harvest in Russia. Have you thought about going on a trip like this? A trip like this isn't cheap – all up about \$5,000 (that's airfares, overnight accommodation in Helsinki, train fares, camp fees, and outreach

fees). Yes, it is a lot of money but it's definitely money well worth spent. If you think that you can't afford it but feel that God wants you to go, HE WILL PROVIDE!! If you want to know more, come and talk to me. I would love for you to come with me on this trip that will change your life! Klariske Feenstra

Wellington

We welcome family and friends of the

Nugteren's who are visiting with us today to witness Arden's baptism (Son of Andrew & Lydia)

You are invited! Lyn Cornegé and family would like to invite you to celebrate together D.V., Lyn's 90th birthday on Saturday 22nd of March. Time: 2:30pm – 4:00pm at the Elsdon Lodge, 100 Valley road, Pararamu No presents please.

Church family. We have the privilege of

witnessing Aaron Wallace's profession of faith and baptism this morning!

Tomorrow David, Angela and Lucy Holtslag fly out of New Zealand en route to Vietnam, where they are performing voluntary work in an orphanage for the next three months. Please remember the Holtslag family in your prayers, and pray that God would use their time in Vietnam to further his purposes in the world and in the lives of the people they will be in contact with.

Deacons Conference

5 & 6 October 2007

At the Reformed Church of Wainuiomata

This years Deacons conference was carried out a little differently from previous years in that we had the opportunity to run a Men's Seminar for the Wellington Presbytery concurrently. After some deliberation it was felt than running these two seminars together would be beneficial and would not detract from achieving the desired outcomes for each seminar.

Our Minister, Rev Leo De Vos, opened the evening on the Friday night and sent a message to the brothers that we need to do more reading and therefore be upskilled in our calling. We need to have a more "broader vision" there is more to it than what we see it as. As it is a calling we also need to be mindful of our young couples, for those congregations who have them,

and ensure they are given good budgeting advice (teaching of stewardship).

The National Diaconate Committee

After a very inspiring opening Rev Dirk van Garderen took the floor and thanked Leo for his words and challenged the deacons to take up training in their respective office. He outlined that the National Diaconate task was "Servants of the Deacons of the Church and Voice of the Deacons on the International Scene"

Dirk then outlined what had been happening in the CARE project. As this had been extensively reported in Faith in Focus he took the opportunity to remind the delegates that you cannot do a deed ministry without the Word. This was par-

ticularly evident in India where the culture almost picks which religion is providing the most handouts.

Dirk used the word sacred cows. You milk them where it suits.

As part of Dirk's visit he was interested in finding out whether our support for CARE was well used. His finding was that there was a Gospel that wholeheartly comes from a Reformed basis and that once again that we should not be doing a deed ministry without the Word. Under the CARE organisation there are 10,000 people who are AIDS sufferers and the message they get is "If there is no Christ, there is no hope."

The \$12,000 that we currently support care with is a worthwhile project.

Rev Carl Larsen NDC Chairperson /Convener outlined what his role was and some of the work they had been doing recently. Their role was to encourage and inspire local congregations to organise the collections for the various missions we support.



Richie Flinn, Deacon's Conference



Rev Andrew Nugteren



Jim van Rensburg

CARE last year \$12,000 The Murray Henry School of the Deaf \$15,000 was given for the 2006 appeal. \$1,000 is given to the Mission to Lepers which is a 130 year old institution. The distress call from Iraq \$13,600 was given. In the Wellington area the deacons worked together and put together a container of medical equipment which was sent to the Solomon Islands. Carl said that they pick upon a crisis and investigate, and if found worthy, promote it and “lift up arms of local church and give them the help” It is a mercy works showing the compassion of Christ.

He closed by saying that as a committee they ultimately work for the Lord Jesus and that they need our prayer as stewards for what they do with the money entrusted to them. He encouraged the office bearers present to pass on their skills, systems and knowledge.

Saturday morning

On the Saturday morning we has short devotion by Wellington Deacon David Holtslag who gave us an illustration of how the Good Samaritan parable had applied for which a neighbour needed a car for a weekend to visit a sick family member some 2 hours away. What should our response be especially on the Sunday when we will need it to go to Church?

Our first presenter on Saturday morning was Richie Flinn who is a Lawyer at DLA Phillips Fox who gave a talk on the Charities registration process which comes effective 1 July 2008. This talk was quite alarming as the implication for the Churches is “However, if your church chooses not to register, or if it does not register in time,



Even a time for singing



Geneva Books, CBI and Prison Fellowship books and material



John Holtslag promoting CBI



Opening of the Combined meeting on Saturday morning

all donations, as well as all bank account/ investment interest and other income will be taxed at a rate of 33%. This statement alone has meant that we need to get our Trust deeds updated and improved and then apply to the Charities Commission for registration. In looking at whether our Church is eligible to register the commission will look at the application form, Trust deed, and activities. In the Trust deed the purpose clause, winding up clause, amendment clause, and personal benefit clause will be closely examined.

Combined meeting

At 10:30 am the men from the Wellington Presbytery joined us and Rev Andrew Nugteren opened with a devotion on “Pornography - Christian Men Struggle”.

It is estimated that 2/3 of men struggle with this addiction and Andrew talked about the passage in Proverbs where it speaks about women luring you in. There is also the problem of computers in the home.

He raised the issue of “How can we

administer to those who are imprisoned.” The Faith in Focus article was a helpful decision to bring to the attention of our churches, the sexual temptation that exists and need to seek help and offer help. Break free from the chains of sin. Andrew suggested finding someone you can talk to a Minister, brother and suggested to the men present “Is there something you can do to seek and offer help.”

We had Mr Jim Van Rensburg present a topic “A Bridge to a New Life”. Reflections on the rehabilitation of child sex offenders.”

The agenda was to state the extent of the problem.

- Why adults sexually offend against children.
- Effect of abuse on children.
- Why strong public reaction.
- Rehabilitation of offenders.
- Success rate, and
- The challenges for society.

Jim was able to outline what was quite a sensitive topic to say the least and give

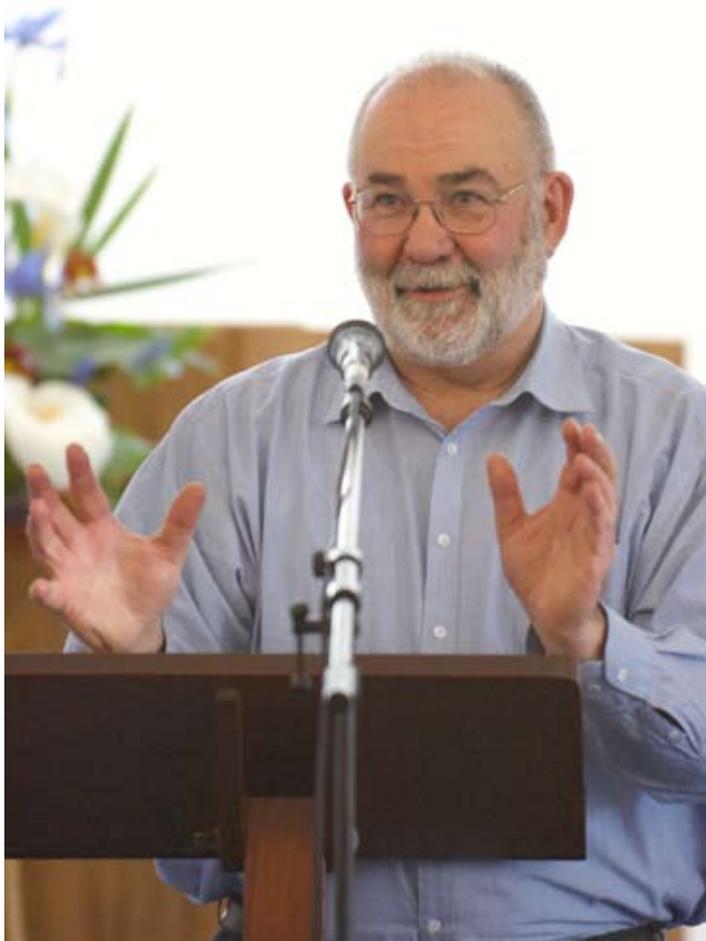
quite alarming statistics of sex offending in this country.

At the end of Jim’s talk, John Holtslag spoke about the Cross Road Bible Institute which is a correspondence course. He outlined the need for more instructors of which there are 40 at present, and 104 active students both men and women. As part of the course you need to write to the prisoner on an A4 sheet of paper marking their assignment. There is not always a high literacy level among the prisoners; however, this is a worthwhile work of service which can be carried out in your own home. To become an examiner a letter will need to be send to America with a letter from your paster giving his approval.

Our conference song was ‘Whatsoever You Do to the Least’, was rehearsed a few times and was quite impressive to hear when heard sung by 90 men. Something that words don’t really do justice to.

Saturday afternoon

In the afternoon Mr Kim Workman presenting his topic of “The role of faith in the



Guest speaker, Mr Kim Workman, Director of Prison Fellowship New Zealand



Audrey Moonlight, promoting Operation Jericho

Justice system". In Rimutaka prison in Upper Hutt there is a 60 bed unit which is called the faith based unit. This is run with the help of church volunteers. Kim showed us a ten minute video where Steve Apriana gave a talk on what he could see could happen in this unit. Footage of the workings of this unit was also shown.

Charles Colson set up a bible study course. This was the catalyst to set up Prison Fellowship in the USA. He wanted the church to go into the prisons.

The first faith based unit was started in Brazil and run entirely by volunteers. In getting the faith based unit started, the role of faith was put in the proposal. The ideas put forward in trying to get the unit off the ground were supported by the prospect of reduced re-offending by way of religious and spiritual means, and the prospect of conversion. Evidence of leaving gangs because they were becoming Christians became apparent and many Maori who became Christians were more involved in their culture.

It took seven years of negotiation to get the Faith Based unit started. This occurred

in 2003. The faith based unit developed its own programme. A community of Christians exploring the faith together. In the initial launch there was a request for volunteer inmates to come into the faith based unit. Of these - 30 were full of fire, 15 would 'wait and see', 10 were very sceptical,

and 5 wanted to be as disruptive as they could be.

Kim advised that there is strength of groups 4 groups of 15. In these groups, if they have fallen by the wayside and if depressed and struggling, they can talk about it in their groups. Kim said there is



Books from Geneva Books were presented to the guest speakers



Attendee's at the Combined Conference from the Wellington Presbytery

real conflict working in prisons. Prison culture is the same wherever you go. Violence rules top, Paedophiles at the bottom, don't share innermost thoughts, prison officer's sworn enemies, don't inform. What sort of person develops as a result of this?

Kim said that in the prison system there is 14% chance of drugs being taken by anyone at anyone time. In the last three years there has been no incidence of this in the faith based unit. In the unit they operate the sycamore program of which the

inmates have to consider restorative justice. In this program a victim of crime comes in and tells their story. The inmate has to see what crime is and who the victim is. There is confession in opening up and making up for the harm they have done. Sharing what it is like being a victim. There has to be a considerable change in their attitude.

A panel of Ministers was held to answer questions at the conclusion of the conference.

In running a conference such is this

there is a lot of help needed and thanks needs to go to all those who contributed in the behind the scenes catering and setting up. I should also say thanks to my fellow deacon Luke Feenstra, whose experience in running these events was invaluable. Also thanks to Andrew Nugteren, John Holtslag and Walter Walraven in working with us to achieve a combined event.

John Lubbers, Deacon, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata

Missions in focus

Janice Reid

A Tale of Two Churches

Rev John Rogers

In September last year, Sheryl & I were sent by the Silverstream & North Shore Reformed Churches to do, mainly, a spell of teaching at the Knox Theological College in Mbale, Uganda's second largest city. We were working with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (of the US) Mission in Uganda (OPUM) which seeks to work alongside the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Uganda. Let me tell you about the Churches first and then next month I will speak about the College.

The history of the OPCU

The OPCU was established about seven years ago when about a dozen churches broke away from the Presbyterian Church of Uganda. The reason was two-fold. The PCU had over the years gradually been infiltrated with charismatic ideas and a campaign/decisionistic approach to evangelism. The other reason is related to a matter that plagues Uganda in general: too much aid, which has bred a climate of dependency and expectancy. A group of generous but foolish churches from the southern USA began, literally, bankrolling the churches of the Eastern Presbytery of the PCU; and — what was/is even worse — they appear to have sent all the money through one individual. He now drives two new 4WDs like every self-respecting director of any other

NGO¹, and distributes all this American largesse according to his good will, including paying all the pastors, a wonderful formula for control and a 'Sure-to-Rise' recipe for spiritual corruption. But, DBA, and dat be da US of A! (This scenario would, with minor variations, form a general paradigm for many churches in Africa.)

Sadly, the OPCU is not free of this spirit — on both scores. The other part of my brief was to make myself available to preach in the churches as called upon. On a visit to one church, after the Rev. Brian Wingard (an OPC colleague) had finished preaching, the pastor gave an appeal. One old man came forward — and who knows what the Lord may have been doing? But, as Brian pointed out before he prayed for this man, 'the act of coming forward does not constitute conversion' — but it has surely led to many false professions in the last 150 years! The pastor then asked if any who had need of healing, or any other needs, to come forward. Well, as I have observed in other places in NZ in response to such a call, half the congregation was at the front. My turn to pray this time. After that the pastor began to introduce all the office-bearers. As each man spoke, the pastor leaned over to Brian and told him this one needs 50,000/- for school fees (1300 Ug./- to the NZD); & that one needs 30,000 to have three teeth pulled, ad nauseum. Then the session had a quick meeting, appointed a spokesman, and proceeded to tell us what they needed as a Church — money for solid walls, concrete floor, new forms, new long drop — it was shameless and shameful! It

showed through at the Presbytery meeting a couple of weeks later where one chap pronounced that the mission should pay the pastors.

This is something we really need to pray for, for these brothers and sisters — for unity within the denomination and, at the present time, unity that will revolve around a united determination to break from this welfare mentality, a form of slavery, and be Christ's freedmen (1 Corinthians 7) owing no man anything, being individuals and churches which, under Christ who provides all our needs, stand (except in genuine emergencies) on their own two feet, 'every man under his own vine and his own fig tree, drinking from his own cistern,' as the OT portrays the ideal; and instead 'work every man with his own hands what is good, that he may have something to give to him who has need' (Ephesians 4:28). I asked Stephen Hamya, one of the local pastors and librarian of the College, whether this mindset was from old Uganda, or did it arise under colonialism, or since the Second World War? He thinks that, although it has a link back to old Uganda where the chief is seen as the 'father of the tribe' and hence provider, it has mainly arisen as a (sinful) response to all the aid that has poured into this country, among others, in the past fifty years. Even Janet Museveni, the president's wife, was quoted two or three times in the papers while we were there, exhorting her countrymen to grow out of this mentality.

The godly side

On the other hand, there are good men and good churches in the denomination. I think of three especially that we visited. At two particularly you could see that the pastors knew what a Worship Service was

¹ NGO is a common term in developing nations, and means 'non-government organisation.' It refers to any developmental or aid organisations other than those organised for specifically religious purposes.

about and they were trying hard to make it about God rather than about man. The Services followed a sensible structure. One of these men is an ex-Anglican and he had taught the elder who led in congregational prayer how to use the Anglican Prayerbook, which he did very well, using two or three prayers from it to guide him but then adding to them his own petitions. So the prayer rose higher than the small-minded petty things we hear so often, that concentrate on ourselves and our personal needs (all a proper subject for prayer, but with restraint in public prayer in a formal Worship Service); we praised God in the language of Isaiah, we prayed for the world at large and Uganda and President Museveni; we prayed for the persecuted in other countries. That sort of prayer that



Right: Rev. Mesalamu Musamali with a lady recently converted from Islam with her young son, just having professed her faith, and two mothers with their newly baptised children at Bukonde OPCU.



Worship Service at Mazimasa OPCU, near Mbale (as is Bukonde in previous photo)

looks outside of ourselves is sometimes refreshing enough in our own country. It was even more so in this society that has been taught and learned so well to depend on the rest of the world for a living. (And it occurs to me that if that list of requests at the church I mentioned above seemed shameless, how often are our prayers that are merely a list of requests/demands shameless to God who gives us all things and who ought to be worshipped for who he is before he is asked for anything?) At

some of the churches we were given a meal after the Service and the hospitality was genuine and gracious. That's when one prays the inoculations all work! Yet, in all fairness, many of the people do try to be clean, especially before eating. They invariably bring you a jug of water and soap with two pours, first for you to wash your hands and then to rinse them. It reminds one of Mark 7:3.

Pray for these Churches. In a way, they are young and immature. But if we continue the dependency culture, that is exactly what they will remain, as will the whole country. Pray that they will see what the mission is trying to achieve as it tightens up a little on its diaconal aid.

one occasion, a couple of people in Mbale were killed by lightening. The humidity also gets pretty high. Temperatures were around 16-18 at nights and 25-28 during the day. Hence my tomato plants grew twice as fast as ever I've seen in NZ, although about two weeks was too slow to eat any! As we got into November, we began to approach the dry season, so the rain lessened off and the temperature rose to the thirties – and would go a bit higher still.

Below: Rev. Barry James lecturing

Right top: Kiwis celebrating Thanksgiving with Yanks in Uganda – and after going all that way, no Turkey! To Sheryl's left: Craig & Kris Eldeen; to Sheryl's right: Al & Laurie Tricarico, Chrissie Schiktanz (school teacher) and the Tricarico children.

Right bottom: One building for the new premises for Knox on land the OPC Mission has bought.

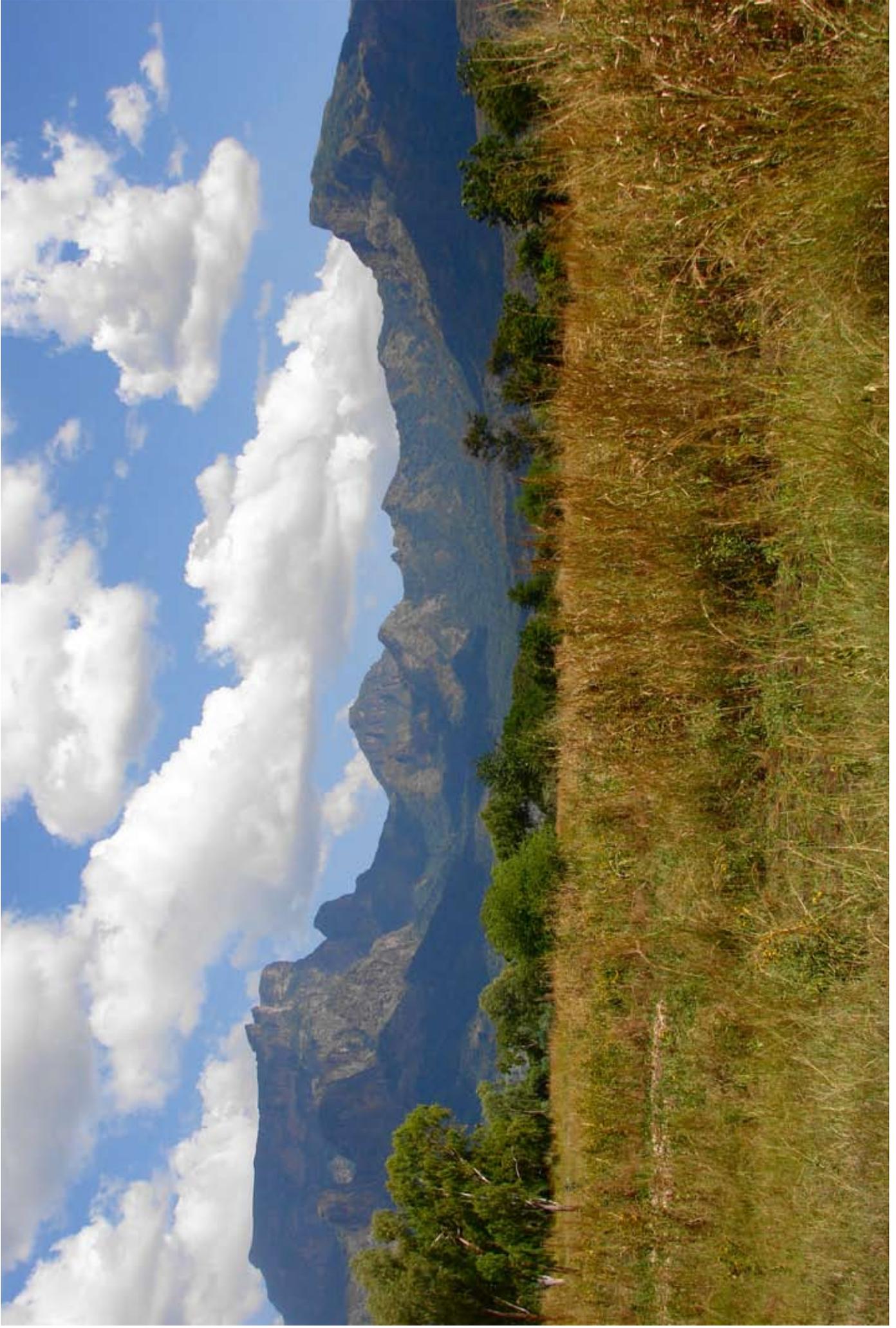
A bit of Africana

The usual weather pattern while we were there was fine in the morning and then gradually clouding over with thunderstorms sometime in the afternoon. They are generally quite welcome as they cool the air down and are the source of Uganda's lushness. Sometimes the heavens really open and on

Planning a mission trip? Let us pray for you! If you or somebody you know is planning a mission trip — short or long — please let us know. We want to pray for those on mission trips overseas, but we cannot pray if we don't know that you're going! Deadline for submission of articles to Faith in Focus is 6 weeks before the month the magazine comes to your church. If you would like our congregations to pray for you on your mission trip, send details to Janice at reid4radio@gmail.com







Beautiful Mt Kadam which overlooks Nakaale, but about 40km north and to the left of the photo.