

faith in **focus**

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

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**“But when the time
had fully come,
God sent his Son,
born of a woman,
born under law,
that we might
receive the full
rights of sons.”**

Galatians 4:4-5

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Editorial

It seems the forgotten word these days. Which word is that, you say? There are many things forgotten nowadays! Why only mention one? Well, this one word actually covers just about every other word. Ah, you say, I know the word now. It must be love! Or is it faith? Perhaps hope?

None of the above, actually. It's service. This is a forgotten word. Unless, that is, the word comes in **self**-service. There is certainly plenty of that around! And neither should we think that Christian service is the only kind of service not missing. That, too, is missing, because so many Christians in the western world only think about themselves. This was demonstrated by a recent test where Christians and non-Christians were both presented with the scenario of becoming wealthier in a relatively short time. 'How would they use their money?' they were asked. Well, you'd think there would be a clear difference in response, wouldn't you? Actually, there wasn't. Both groups, in the vast majority, pumped for early retirement, travel, bigger houses, better cars, and even hired help around the new mansion.

But there is also service missing out there in the everyday world. The root cause is the same as with the lack of Christian service. They, too, are not actually thinking of the needs of the one they are meant to be serving! For instance, many shop employees see the customer as another obstacle on the way to the end of the day or the next promotion. They don't think the customer is their master at all.

Just like many Christians today! New Zealand, which once had the highest proportion of Christians serving on the overseas missionary field, now has one of the highest proportions of Christians who are serving themselves in luxury and comfort. This is shown by the number who have jumped the ditch simply for the higher wages, not checking out the church life in the place they go to. And some of those were the most concerned for the state of church life here!

Who are you serving? How do you serve that person? What fills up your thoughts and your life?

Each one of us only needs to look to the example of Jesus and realise how much we fail in this respect. He who did not come to be served but to serve challenges us by His life to do the same.

*Sitting down, Jesus called the
Twelve and said,
"If anyone wants to be first, he must
be the very last,
and the servant of all."*

Mark 9:35

Cover photo: Pohutakawa flowers

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 shoot from Jesse's stump

Hans Voschezang

Danny's Christmas

It was getting too cold to be outside in the snow-covered backyard. Danny didn't wear boots: Mum couldn't afford to buy them. They were too expensive. The thin sneakers he wore didn't do much to keep his feet warm, especially when they had a few holes in them. He had been sitting on the garden bench for quite some time trying to figure out what kind of Christmas present he could give his Mum. He shook his head. It seemed so hopeless. Even if he would come up with an idea, how was he going to pay for it? He had no pocket money to spend. Shivering with utter frustration, he kicked some snow around and walked inside. Ever since his Dad passed away three years ago, the family of five had struggled to make ends meet. Mum tried her best by working nightshifts as a cleaner at the hospital. There was never enough money to go around. Her small wages could only buy the bare essentials for survival. It was sometimes heartbreaking to see her children suffer! One thing was for sure, though: whatever the family lacked in money and material things was made up for in love for each other and family unity. Danny had three sisters, two older and one younger. The two older sisters ran the household while Mum was working, sleeping during the day. His sisters had already made beautiful presents for their mother, but Danny had no artistic inclination whatsoever. It just wasn't fair. It was already Christmas Eve, and still he had nothing for Mum. Wiping away the tears from his eyes Danny walked down the street, hands in pockets, to the shops. It wasn't easy for an eight-year-old boy to be without his Dad. He missed him desperately — especially now, when he needed a man to talk to. Danny walked from shop to shop, looking at each decorated window display. Everything looked so beautiful and so out of reach. It was getting dark, just about time to go home. What was the use? As he turned to walk home, his eyes caught the reflection of something shiny beside the roadside curb. He reached down and picked up a two-dollar coin. Instantly he felt very rich. What a treasure! His whole body started to glow as he walked into the flower shop on the corner of the street, but disappeared when he saw the price of a bunch of flowers. He worked out that he could buy only one stem for his two dollars. His face dropped, and he started to

walk out of the shop. The shop keeper spotted the boy, and asked if he could help him. Danny timidly presented the two-dollar coin and asked if he could just buy one flower for his Mum as a Christmas gift. The shopkeeper looked at the shabbily clad boy with the coin. He put his hand on Danny's shoulder and said, 'You just wait here and I'll see what I can do for you.' Danny waited, looking around at the beautiful flower arrangements. Even though he was only a boy, he could see why mothers and girls liked flowers. The sound of the door closing as the last customer left

the man handed the box to him he finally knew it was true, and accepted the flowers without hesitation. 'Merry Christmas, son,' the shopkeeper said, holding the door open for Danny.

When he returned into the shop his wife asked him, 'What was that all about? I heard you talking to somebody. Where are the roses you wrapped up?'

Staring out of the window, the shopkeeper blinked a tear from his eyes and replied, 'A strange thing happened to me this morning. While I was setting up the shop and prepared



jolted Danny back to reality. It was already dark outside, and he was alone in the shop. He began to feel deserted and afraid. The shopkeeper came from the back and moved to the counter. He was holding twelve long stem red roses with shiny green leaves and tiny white flowers, tied together with a big silver bow. Danny's heart sank as the shopkeeper placed them carefully into a white box. How was he going to pay for those? "That will be two dollars, young man," the shopkeeper said, reaching out for the money. Danny gave him the coin. Could it be true? He stared at the man in disbelief. Sensing the boy's reluctance, the shopkeeper told Danny that he just happened to have this bunch of roses on special for two dollars. Would he like them? Danny smiled. When

the flowers for sale, I saw those beautiful roses and on an impulse I set them aside. I wasn't sure what to do with them at the time, or why I did it. Then, some twenty minutes ago, a little boy walked into the shop and wanted to buy just one flower for his Mum. He only had a two-dollar coin. When I looked at him, I was reminded of how poor I used to be. I, too, couldn't buy anything for my Mum. I saw myself in that little boy. I knew how it felt to be poor when you love your Mum and you can't give her anything. I knew straightaway what I had to do with those roses.'

A picture of hope

Some 800 years before the birth of Jesus, in the days when Isaiah lived, the situation in Israel seemed pretty hopeless. For cen-

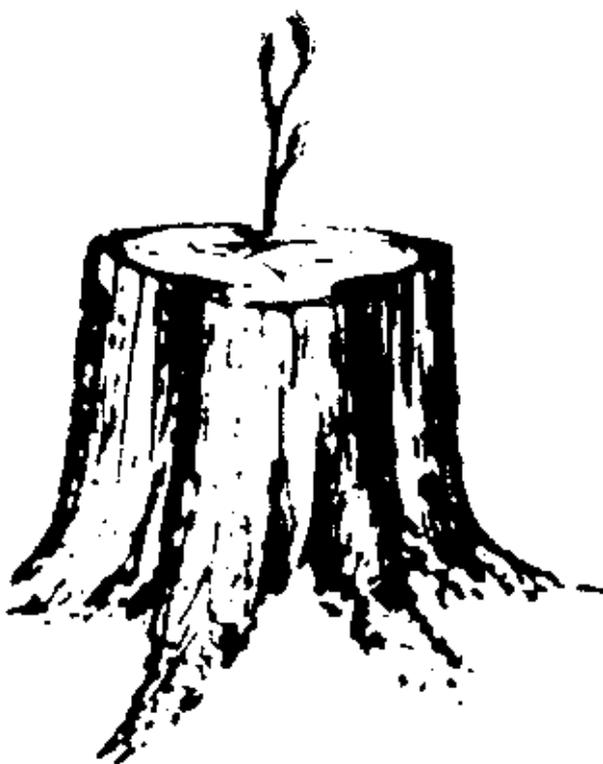
turies, Israel had pinned its hopes on the dynasty of David. God had promised David that one of his descendants would sit on the throne forever. But now this promise seemed vague at best, and impossible at worst. The family tree of David's dynasty faced extinction. Israel had been invaded and overrun by foreign

Armies, and David's family tree was cut off. The hopes and dreams of Israel were dashed like a cut-down tree stump.

But Isaiah looks into the future and sees a picture of hope for Israel. *'A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots'*. Some time ago, I cut a tree down in our garden. It looked dead and lifeless. But then a green shoot started to grow again from its stump. That's the picture Isaiah is talking about. It's a prophetic vision of a great King who will be filled with the Spirit of the Lord and who will delight in doing the Lord's will. He will hear the cries of the poor and see the injustice they suffer, and He will take up their cause. Under His rule a kingdom will flourish — a kingdom of peace and tranquility where all creatures and animals will live together with humans in harmony and safety. It is as if the prophet is looking at futuristic distant mountains. From his vantage point, he can't make out all the various ranges and hills. They look like one great blurred line of mountains. In his vision, Isaiah paints a picture of the whole future God has in mind for His Creation. Only later will the separate ranges and hills appear as the separate stages of God's future. We have travelled a bit further down that road of history into the future, and we can make out some of those diverse mountain ranges a little better. We can see that the shoot from the stump of Jesse, the great King, is none other than Jesus Christ. In Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection, we can see this ancient prophecy in clear focus. From this bleeding stump of His crucifixion rises a new green shoot of resurrection, life and power. In the risen and ascended Christ the light and the promise of victory still shines like a beacon into the future. We live in a different world today, but similar in many ways to Isaiah's.

Today's world leaders talk about democracy and a new world order with a better future for all to enjoy, finding peace and security in a political correct culture. But the more they talk about it, the more we see an increase

in lawlessness, violence and a degrading in moral and family values. The terrorists are still committing hideous crimes, murdering innocent people. Different Islamic religious groups are at each other's throats, senselessly murdering each other. The whole of the Middle East is in turmoil with the threat of nuclear conflict. Thousands of people are starving in the Darfur region in Sudan. There seems to be no end in sight. Christians worldwide are persecuted because they believe in Jesus Christ. There is the threat of economic slowdown and there is talk of a looming world recession, with thousands of workers being made redundant. It seems I'm repeating myself year after year. It seems all so hopeless. At this time of year we try to



focus on Christmas and the birth of Jesus, while the world seems to be falling apart. What hopes and fears do we have when we read the old familiar sentences from Isaiah? What kind of stumps dot the landscape of our lives? Isaiah's prophecy begins with a stump, which is where God's work always begins: the stumps of human failure. It begins in the Garden of Eden, spoiled by human rebellion. It begins with a flood, and Noah and the animals floating on the watery chaos. It begins with a childless couple, Abraham and Sarah. Out of their 'dead stumps' Isaac is born, the child of the promise. It begins with Hebrew slaves making bricks under Pharaoh's whip in the hot baking sun. God's work starts where our efforts fail and our hopes and

dreams are cut to pieces.

When it seems there's nothing left

It begins with stumps. You and I know what that's all about. All of us have some stumps in the backyards of our lives. We can recognize them: stumps of illness, bereavement, loneliness and the sense of abandonment in old age, or some other serious disappointment in life. Danny's Mum had her stump. She was a widow, burdened with the struggle to make ends meet. She loved her children dearly, but she didn't see them very often because of her nightshift work at the hospital. She often prayed to God in her desperation to show His mercy and grace on her and her family, and give her some sign

that He was there for her and cared for them all. Then Danny's bunch of roses turned up. That was all she needed to 'hang in' there, trusting that God would not abandon her. God specialises in those stumps: those closed-off places in life marked by failure, tragedy, collapse and despair. That's where God begins to work. He can raise up new life and new beginnings where no human thinks it possible. We live in the Kingdom where the dead will rise and stumps start to grow shoots again. But Isaiah's vision doesn't stop with God's promise of a shoot growing from our personal stumps or our personal grievances. It shows a vision of a whole new, redeemed Creation. Isaiah and many other prophets in the Old Testament recognised this. Things ought to be as they were created by God's design: a life of peace and justice, mutual respect and goodwill. In today's broken world, that's not how things are. Sin affects everyday life, in our relationships and in every social structure

imaginable. Human society has strayed into a milieu of the 'haves' and 'have-nots.' In Isaiah's days we can see the same story: people living in sin. The prophets steadfastly showed the people a vision of a time when God would put things right again. It is a vision for us — a time when weeping will cease and justice will prevail. People will work in peace, assured that their work will have meaning and purpose. All Creation will live in harmony, benign and filled with wondrous wholeness, joyful before its Creator and Saviour. That's Isaiah's vision of how things supposed to be. We are living toward this vision, captivated by the future and heading toward the peaceable Kingdom God holds before us in Christ, Who made peace on the cross.

It's a picture of God's future that ought to shape us in the way we face the stumps in our lives, and the way we think and treat each other in the world around us. We renew our hope in God's future in the face of sin,

and among the sad stumps of our hopes and dreams. The Baby of Bethlehem is a sign to the entire world that God will keep His promise. His peace will surely come. From the stumps in our lives will

grow a shoot of God's promise of peace.

For further reading:

The shoot from the Stump by Leonard J Vander Zee

World in focus

More Christians attacked in Madhya Pradesh, India

Attacks against Christians in Madhya Pradesh, India, are continuing, with Hindu extremists attacking at least three Christian gatherings.

A total of eight Christians were accused of attempted forced conversion or hurting Hindu religious sentiments. One was released without charges and four were released on bail, while another three remain in police custody.

Since January of this year, extremists have filed a total of 28 cases against pastors and evangelists in Madhya Pradesh.

+ *Compass Direct News*, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799-7250 (949) 862-0304

Historic signing of Covenant

An 16 September, an historic signing of a Covenant between the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland took place.

At Dunblane Cathedral the Right Reverend Alan McDonald, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and the Right Reverend Andrew McMillan, Moderator of the United Free Church of Scotland will be joined by Marjory McLachlan, Lord Lieutenant of Stirlingshire and Solicitor General, Elish Angiolini, to celebrate the occasion with a special service that will encompass the signing.

The purpose of the Covenant is to promote good relations and communications between both denominations and to give a greater understanding on the differences or perceived differences of each denomination. This signing is part of a larger strategy to have exploratory discussions with a variety of churches, with none having union as their immediate goal.

The United Free Church of Scotland dates from 1929 when a minority of the church refused to enter a union with the Church of Scotland. The Church of Scotland is now one of the country's largest organizations with over 600,000 members.

+ *Church of Scotland*, 121 George St., Edinburgh EH2 4YN

Return of the Ring: Son completes new Tolkien epic

Christopher Tolkien, son of the late J.R.R. Tolkien, author of the Lord of the Rings, has completed an unfinished book by his father. It is due to be published early next year. Tolkien began working on *The Children of Hurin* in 1918 but failed to complete it. Christopher has spent

about three decades completing the story from the many drafts produced by his father.

Christopher Tolkien, who drew the maps which accompanied the Lord of the Rings and has previously edited another of his father's works, *The Silmarillion*, is one of the author's three surviving children. The book will be published in Britain by HarperCollins.

+ *HarperCollins Publishers*, 10 East 53rd St., New York, NY 10022 (212) 207-7000

Global South Primates call for separate structure

Primates and leaders of the Global South Provinces of the Anglican Communion, meeting in Kigali, Rwanda, last week called upon the Archbishop of Canterbury to take initial steps toward the formation of what will be recognised as a separate ecclesiastical structure of the Anglican Communion within the United States. The Primates issued their call in light of the continuing non-response of the Episcopal Church to calls for repentance for their disregard for Scriptural teachings.

The statement issued by the Primates offered assistance in setting up such a structure and noted that at the next meeting of Primates in February 2007 some of them would not be able to recognise Dr Katherine Jefferts Schori, recently elected as the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, as a fellow Primate while others would be in impaired communion with her. Since she cannot represent those dioceses and congregations which are abiding by the teaching of the Anglican Communion, the Primates requested that another bishop — likely the Rt Rev. Robert Duncan, Episcopal Bishop of Pittsburgh and Moderator of the Anglican Communion Network — be sent to represent those dioceses.

+ *Rev. Mr. Charles A. Collins Jr.*, 289 Hastings Dr., Goose Creek, SC 29445

2006 International Conference in Morocco

On 9 August, attendees of the 2006 International Conference held in Morocco attended a banquet sponsored by the Christian Friendship Mission, part of a comprehensive exchange program between North American Evangelical leaders and the North African nation of Morocco. The unique outreach was started two years ago after Evangelical Church Alliance (ECA) board member Dr Rob Schenck joined a

delegation that visited Morocco at the invitation of its Royal Government. The Christian Friendship Mission is an effort to express the love of Jesus Christ in a tangible way to the suffering Sahrawi people of Morocco's Southern Provinces, sometimes called the Western Sahara. The project grew out of an ongoing series of exploratory visits by Schenck and teams he has recruited through both his Faith and Action ministry network and its related National Clergy Council in Washington.

Schenck believes helping the Sahrawi people will accomplish even more than simply ending their earthly suffering, saying it's a first step in the delicate process of helping the whole of Morocco's population to understand the Christian message.

+ *Christian Friendship Mission*, Tanie Guy, PO Box 1941, Shepherdstown, WV 25443-9998 (304) 886-5409 tanie@faithandaction.org.

St. Peter's Anglican Cathedral, Nigeria, burned

The Rt Rev. Yesufu Lumu, The Bishop of Dutse (Jigawa State, Nigeria), reported to the Anglican Communion News Service that a local conflict between a Christian and Muslim woman escalated into a full-blown riot on the streets of the city. The result was that St Peter's Anglican Cathedral was burned to the ground and the Bishop's office and car port destroyed.

'It was calm during the night,' the bishop said, but he was very concerned as the 'police would not respond to the calls for protection from the Christians.'

One report stated that the anger was said to have been 'sparked off by an alleged blasphemous comment on Prophet Muhammed by a Christian woman, who reportedly spoke in reaction to a similarly irreverent statement about Jesus Christ by a male Muslim.'

+ *The Church of Nigeria*, Contact Information, The Rev. Canon Akintunde A. Popoola, 23 Douala St. Wuse Zone 5, Abuja, Nigeria

Navy Chaplain convicted of misdemeanor

A military jury has convicted Lt Gordon James Klingenschmitt of a misdemeanor count of disobeying his commanding officer for wearing his uniform while delivering a prayer 'in Jesus' name' at an assembly in front of the White House.

Klingenschmitt said, 'But I had prior written permission to wear my uniform if it was a religious observance, (so) prayers are not a religious observance...Therefore I disobeyed my commanding officer's order not to pray in uniform.'

Klingenschmitt, who earlier had raised immediate concerns with his superiors when the Navy issued a new order that prayers could only be 'non-sectarian,' has also alleged he was punished for raising those concerns, and later notifying Congress and president Bush of the situation.

Klingenschmitt said that there is an appeal process that will be pursued, up to the US Supreme Court if needed.

+ US Navy Chaplain Corps, Chaplain Resource Branch, 9591 Maryland Ave., Norfolk, VA 23511-2993 (757) 444-7665

Three Christian men executed in Indonesia

International Christian Concern (ICC) has reported that the three Christian men facing the death penalty in Indonesia have been executed by firing squad on 22 September 2006.

After their execution was stayed last month by the Attorney General for Central Sulawesi, Mohammad Yahya Sibe, he was suddenly replaced. Sibe was the one who had to give the order for the executions to take place. The Chief of Police was also suddenly replaced and sent to another department.

The appeal for these men that should have lasted months or even a year to process was denied within weeks. The three Christian men were the only men charged in the Poso conflict, even though the conflict started in 1998 and went until 2003. ICC personally investigated the Poso conflict and said that entire Christian villages were attacked with government munitions and burned down using Indonesian government

fuel trucks. Christian adults and children were beheaded. The Muslim community initiated the attacks and there was every indication that local Muslim government leaders were involved. But no Muslims were ever charged in any of the attacks.

+ International Christian Concern, 2020 Pennsylvania Ave. NW #941, Washington, DC 20006 (301) 989-1708

Priest wants to be Nigeria's President in 2007

Rev. Maxwell Abraham is the presiding pastor of the Royal Priesthood and Peculiar Church which has its headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria. Abraham, who describes himself as a 'socio-political and economic evangelist,' has started mobilising members of the Christian Democratic Movement (CDM), a 'theocratic pressure group,' to take over the political leadership of Nigeria in 2007.

In an interview of this clergy at Ikeja, Lagos, Rev. Abraham stated that: 'Theocracy is the system of government where anointed men of God are appointed into elective offices, including ambassadorial, ministerial, governorship and presidential offices.' The aim, he continued, is to make up for the failure of democracy in Nigeria.

+ ASSIST News Service, PO Box 609, Lake Forest, CA 92609-0609

Boesak now promoted

The Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa has elected Allan Boesak as a moderator of its Western Cape division.

Boesak was well known for his anti-apartheid activities. In 1990 a scandal broke out when details of his extra-marital relationship with Elna Botha, whom he later married, leaked out. Boesak was forced to resign from his position as president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and nine years later he was sentenced to six years in prison on fraud and theft.

Boesak served 26 months of his sentence and later received a presidential pardon, expunging his criminal record.

Rev. J.C. Goeieman, the general secretary of the national synod, said the synod was pleased to add Boesak to its leadership team and stated, 'He has gone through the procedure of reconciliation with the church. We first reinstated him as a minister in the church and now we have shown that we have fully accepted him back into the church by his uncontested election.'

+ The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, Private Bag X1, Belhar 7507

Religious prisoner count tops 1900 in Eritrea

Newly compiled statistics smuggled out of Eritrea indicate that at least 1,918 Eritrean citizens are imprisoned and subjected to torture and forced labour because of their religious beliefs. 95 percent of these known religious prisoners of

conscience are Christians. Of the total in prison, 35 are pastors, priests, and church elders under arrest in Asmara's Wongel Mermera investigation center. In 14 other cities and towns, an additional 1,758 Christians of both evangelical Protestant and Orthodox confessions are jailed. None of those imprisoned for their religious beliefs in the government crackdown begun more than four years ago have been brought before a court of law to be charged or tried.

+ Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799

Designated funding has PC(USA) worried

A five-year US\$40 million capital campaign that began in 2002 is in danger of shutting down early. The cause is that almost all of the dollars raised were earmarked for specific causes, leaving too little to pay the costs of the fundraising staff.

Rev. David Peterson of Houston, co-chairman of the capital campaign, cited controversy about a General Assembly vote that would open the door to ordaining non-celibate gays and lesbians. The result is that people are wary of writing checks to the denomination in general, and instead are designating their donations toward specific causes they're familiar with, such as missionaries, schools, or church start-ups.

So far the capital campaign has raised US\$25.5 million, most of it earmarked for specific new churches and missionary activities.

Officials are looking for other ways to pay for the nine-member staff.

+ Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (USA), 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202 (888) 728-7228

Filipino Bishop Alberto Ramento stabbed to death

Bishop Alberto Ramento of Tarlac in the Philippines, former Prime Bishop of the Philippine Independent Church, or Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI), was found stabbed to death at his rectory on the morning of 3 October.

A report by the police said that he may have been killed by robbers, but the Manila Times reports that Ramento, an outspoken critic of the Philippine government, could have been the victim of a political killing.

+ ACNSlist, published by Anglican Communion News Service, St. Andrew's House, 16 Tavistock Crescent, London, England W11 1AP

Young Adult retreat

The Southern California Reformed Fellowship, a ministry of churches in the OPC, PCA, RCUS, RPCNA, and URC, is sponsoring a winter retreat for young adults, both single and married, on 2-4 February 2007 in the San Gabriel Mountains of Southern California. The conference centre is near Wrightwood, California, off of the I-15 Freeway. The speaker will be Rev. Tom Gastil, pastor of Aliso Creek PCA in Laguna Niguel,

Advertise your
Happenings and
Church events in



California. The cost is US\$120.00 per person for registrations postmarked on or before 6 January, 2007 (US\$140.00 thereafter). Make checks payable to SCRF, and mail to Timothy Novinger, SCRF, PO Box 1615, Los Alamitos, CA 90720.

+ Rev. Stephen Donovan (001 760) 740-6617 or John Novinger (001 714) 890-9705

Partial birth abortion

The US Supreme Court plans to hear challenges to the federal Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003. This law was enacted after justices struck down a Nebraska ban in a 5-4 vote. The law was then challenged in New York, Nebraska, and California. On 8 November, justices will consider Nebraska and California appeals (New York's appeal has not reached the high court).

+ US Supreme Court Information Office, (202) 479-3211

Australian girl's conversion results in mother's death

On the evening of 9 October Kaihana Hussain, the teenage daughter of Muslim immigrants, told her parents that she was converting from Islam to Christianity. Her father responded with unrestrained fury. Neighbours heard 'blood curdling' and 'terrifying' screams and cries of 'Help me, help me, they're trying to kill me,' but they were unsure which apartment the screams were coming from, and the voices were unfamiliar.

All that is known at this time is that after her father began to attack her, Kaihana's mother, Yasmin (41, and a strict and devout Muslim) intervened to aid and protect her daughter.

What police found when they entered the apartment was Yasmin bleeding severely from a fatal knife wound to the chest, and her husband, Kaihana's father, Dr. Muhammad Hussain (49) also bleeding from a potentially fatal knife wound to the chest. Yasmin died at the scene and Dr. Hussain is hospitalised in critical condition. Police have confirmed that Kaihana is not a suspect in their deaths.

+ World Evangelical Alliance - Religious Liberty News and Analysis, 644 Strander Blvd., #154, Seattle, WA 98188

Christmas play cancelled

Windmill Point Elementary School students in Port St. Lucie, Florida, were in their second day of rehearsals for "A Penguin Christmas" when they got word that the show would be cancelled. School officials said the mention of Christmas and the secular symbols in the play, such as Santa Claus, might

lead people to think of the Christian holiday.

A spokeswoman for the school district, Janice Karst, said the goal was simply to avoid offending anyone. 'We're a very diverse and very inclusive community... We have to consider every child, every day.'

Chief counsel for Liberty Legal Institute, Kelly Shackelford, said it appears school officials are considering every child except the ones who happen to be Christians. Brad Dacus, president of the Pacific Justice Institute, said the school's reaction is sending a bad message to Christian kids. 'They're basically oppressing that child, and giving them a real negative message that religious freedom means you have to keep it to yourself.'

+ Liberty Legal Institute, 903 E. 18th St., Suite 230, Plano, TX 75074 (972) 423-3131

+ Pacific Justice Institute, PO Box 276600, Sacramento, CA 95827 (916) 857-6900

Berean BerBible freeware with ESV Bible

Lynn Allan the developer of the Berean BerBible freeware is announcing that she is making this software available at no cost, including the complete English Standard Version Bible. The best way to get a quick orientation to BerBible is to view two very short animated slideshows that illustrate the basics at <<http://www.viewletcentral.com/vc/viewlet.html?id=51496316>>

Some of the relevant information comparing it to other Bible software are: Significantly smaller download for Internet distribution to people without broadband connections, especially overseas missionaries and pastors, significantly better

performance on ancient, dinosaur computers, intentionally minimized features to simplify the learning curve, and extensive documentation is part of the download.

+ Lynn Allan, 4408 Blissful Circle North, Colorado Springs, CO 80917 (719) 637-9351.

Calvin College planning major expansion

Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, has announced its plan of a major expansion of its physical education and athletic facilities, the biggest building project in school history.

Calvin hopes to break ground on these projects in the spring of 2007 and anticipates beginning to use the facilities in the fall of 2008.

Calvin professor Glen VanAndel the former chair of the health, physical education, recreation, dance and sport department (HPERDS) and the co-chairman of the committee which planned the US\$35 million expansion project said the new building and renovations will come not a moment too soon for the department, which has grown to almost 200 students who are HPERDS majors and minors (in such areas as exercise science, sports management, therapeutic recreation, dance and more).

+ Calvin College, 3201 Burton St., SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546 (616) 526-6000

How "Green" is too "Green"?

What's hype, what's helpful?

Come find out at the next

**Wellington Women's Annual Presbyterial
Saturday 17th March 2007**

To be held at the

**Reformed Church of Masterton
(Homeleigh, 37 Herbert Street)**

Morning tea at 10:00 AM

Mark your calendars

You don't want to miss it!

A feminine focus

The feminine virtue of integrity

Sally Davey

Integrity is a hot topic in New Zealand right now. Why? Because public figures are being accused of lacking it. Well, you might argue, it is nothing new for politicians to be discovered cheating on their wives, lying to the media or stealing from the public purse. Politicians, together with used car salesmen, appear at the bottom of the list in most surveys of occupational trustworthiness. And yet, when they are found out, we are somewhat outraged. Those with high profiles, like politicians and leading businessmen, have responsibilities. They govern, they spend, they appoint and dismiss; they make decisions for the rest of us. We like to think they can be trusted. We like to think we are led by people of moral virtue, whom we may respect. We like to think they act well on our behalf. We like to think that our leaders are men and women of integrity.

Defining the word

But what is integrity — this word we use so often? Sometimes it seems like a vague and over-used grab-bag expression for all the qualities we want to see in others. But it does have a clear and specific meaning — and a useful one! Integrity equates with wholeness or completeness. When applied in a chemical context it means untainted or unadulterated; the genuine substance. Likewise, in the moral sphere integrity suggests a state of soundness, of completeness, of freedom from any taint of corruption. It conveys honesty, honorability, steadfastness and rectitude. People of integrity are noble. We admire them, and we trust them. No wonder we want our governors and captains of industry to be men and women of integrity.

However, it's not just public figures that need to strive for integrity. This is a virtue

for everyone, big people and little people alike. It is something that elders and deacons, teachers and students, grandfathers and little girls all need to work at. Whatever our age or stage of life, whatever our calling may be, we need to be people of integrity. God requires nothing less of us. And that applies to women no less than to men. It applies to us as wives, as mothers, as employers and employees, as teachers and students, as children at home or as guests in someone else's home. Not one of us may say, with truth, 'My situation in life is without responsibility; integrity is required of others, but not of me.'

Its true origin

Clearly, integrity is a biblical virtue. What I have said so far suggests that it is at the heart of Christian character! When I began to do some serious thinking about the Scriptures and integrity, however, I was not quite sure where to begin. Paul's epistles (normally my first port of call for instructions on how to live as a Christian) do not seem to deal with integrity *per se*. Then one day, while thinking about some of the Psalms, it came to me. I turned to Psalm 15, one I had learned by heart through singing it at morning chapel during high school. There, in a nutshell, I had it. In a brief, five-verse summary of what God requires of the man who may live in his presence, David defines the qualities that make up integrity. So let's consider the ways they apply to the woman who wants to walk with God.

Psalm 15 gives a series of answers to the question posed in verse 1 – who shall dwell with God? Each answer describes a different characteristic of integrity; but the first part of verse 2 acts as a summary of them all. It defines integrity. '*He who walks blamelessly and does what is right...*' The

Hebrew word translated 'blameless' suggests wholeness or soundness — nothing is lacking in this person's character. He is morally well-rounded and complete. He is not strong in one area and weak in another: he strives to keep all the commandments. And he is consistent. He aims to be a man of integrity all the time, not just when he feels like it, when he's had a good sleep, or when the people he admires are looking. Furthermore, he is a man of action — he does things that are right, he is good to people, he is just and kind and generous. He shows his faith by his works: he does not simply maintain his own purity while ignoring the needs of others (James 2:14-17). Thinking about this made me reflect on some of the ways I am inconsistent, lacking in true integrity. It is right to love spending time alone with God, studying His Word and reading the truth about His character and ways; but this must be matched with time and energy spent loving and helping others. Where are you inconsistent? What are the holes in your witness, the areas you need to work on? Are you a vibrant and busy Christian on Sundays but back to your old habits by Tuesday night?

The second answer to David's question comes in the second part of verse 2 and the beginning of verse 3: '*[who] speaks truth in his heart; who does not slander with his tongue...*' Is this you, and I? How would you evaluate your speech? Is it honest to the very core — are you even honest in your heart, the place others cannot see? Perhaps you are the sort of woman who is always kind, and wanting to build others up. When your friends admit their faults you're inclined to protest: 'Oh no, you're not like that — you would never have thought/done/said that.' Or they apologise, and you instantly deny that you've been hurt or annoyed. 'Don't you worry about it,' you say. 'Don't give it a thought, it's no problem at all.' Is that honest, or true? Wouldn't it be the right thing to acknowledge wrongdoing when it's been done, and gently suggest ways to rectify the sin? Wouldn't it be better to accept an apology graciously, and assure your friend that if she has offended, you've completely forgiven her? Or again, are you the sort of person who harbours resentment in your heart but acts as if there's nothing going on between you and another? Do you pretend to be friendly, but have nothing but contempt for a fellow church member? Is that truly honest? How

should you deal with your contempt, and be a woman of integrity? Take time to consider some of the ways. But let's not get so carried away with the idea of honesty that we make it a kind of super-virtue! Being honest does not give us a license for rudeness or unkindness. There is no excuse for blurting out your sister's faults any old way, leaving her to cope with the consequences of your brutality. And remember, it is often amazing that those who are the most reckless with their honesty, and who defend the importance of being honest most vigorously, are the least able to 'take' it when others are honest with them. Could that be you?

The wisdom in integrity

Then, of course, we are to do no evil with our tongues. We are to avoid damaging our friends, and their reputations, by what we say about them. It is all too easy to enter into discussions that involve all-too-free 'evaluations' of other people. We weigh up their behaviour, speculate on their likely motives, and freely offer our opinions about their progress, or lack of it, in the faith. But there are some things that do not need to be said, that are not essential to someone else's knowledge of our friend — and to pass on that particular piece of information might just be — gossip. How sad it is that things that should never be said are 'shared' with the excuse that 'it will help you pray better' for the person under discussion. Be careful! I have found these three questions helpful in stopping me from talking when I shouldn't: **Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary?** Can I answer 'yes' to all three questions together? If not, then remain silent on the subject.

David's third answer comes in the second part of verse 3: '[who] does no evil to his neighbour, nor takes up a reproach against his friend.' He has shifted focus from our speech to our actions, although the same principle operates. Could we be doing our friend evil by our actions? For instance, are we treating others with respect, especially those whose position in life is less important than yours — your children, or your employees, perhaps? Do you show them contempt, by ignoring their comfort or their desires? Do you put your own pleasures before those of your children? Do you give your employees the dirtier jobs, do you put off giving them a pay rise when you've had a great year in your business? Do you ignore the shy or scruffy newcomer at coffee time after church? Do you talk down to people you don't like or respect? Are you mean to annoying children? How do you handle it when someone tells you something bad about someone else? Do you

take it on board, then act on it, behaving with disrespect or contempt next time you see that person? Do you allow the new information to alter your behaviour? Should you?

Despising evil

The fourth characteristic of integrity listed in Psalm 15 is of particular interest today, I believe. God's people, when they act with integrity, despise what is evil and honour good. More than that, in fact: **they despise evil people and honour those who are good.** I'd like to dwell on this a bit. We live in a day when many around us are calling evil good and good evil. Who is honoured by the media, and by our political leaders? Those who have material success, whose companies set the pace in our economy, those who are the first

truth) and of compassion (for those who are lost in their sin).

True heroes

But there is another level on which this verse speaks to us today. Previous generations of younger and older people, had heroes, or role models — people of integrity whom they admired and wanted to imitate. People like Winston Churchill, who was a courageous wartime leader; or Florence Nightingale, compassionate caregiver to wounded soldiers and founder of the nursing profession; or William Wilberforce, tireless campaigner against slavery. Today? We seem to be fascinated by actors, sporting stars and the unseemly details of their private lives. They are called



women to become managing directors, and so on. Those who practise immorality, even perversions, and who encourage others to do the same. Those who teach children to reject the truth about God. And who are despised by the same media and leaders? Those who refuse to condone evil, and who are willing to say so: negative, fundamentalist, bigoted Christian people (like you and me!). But we should not be surprised about this. God has told us, in many places in Scripture, that this will always be so. The leaders of the world are blind, and they suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Our response should be one of clarity and firmness (in speaking the

celebrities rather than heroes — and there is an important difference. Celebrities may have an appalling lifestyle, but they are fascinating because they are rich and famous. We seem to have reached a point in popular culture where it is more important to be envied than admired. Who cares about people who sacrifice for others; like hard-working fathers and mothers? Young people certainly don't seem to! But this is what David wants us to do. Whom do you admire? Do you honour those who are good, and despise those who are evil? Are your values guided by God, or by our modern age?

Keeping promises

The next thing a woman of integrity does is keep her word. She is one who *'swears to [her] own hurt and does not change'* (v.4). Keeping promises is something politicians are notorious for failing to do. It is one of the great marks of *lack of integrity*. But what about us? Do we always keep our word? Probably in the big things, and especially when it is easy for us to do — like giving our children the treat we promised them if they behaved. For one thing, it is a pleasure for us when they behave, and for another, their happy faces enjoying the treat make us feel good. Generally, also, we keep our word to those in authority over us. We would hardly fail to turn up for work next Monday — doing that might well cost us our job. But the smaller and less visible things are harder. What about your quick promise to pray for your friend? Did you keep that? Did you do it? Even once? Or what about your offer to contribute some money to a collective church gift? Did you actually bring the money — or was that gift presented minus your contribution? Are you letting others pay for the consequences of your broken word? But this verse actually says more. It says that the person of integrity keeps her word even when circumstances go against her. Sometimes we say we will do something, then later on, we find it more difficult to do than we'd anticipated. What then? It is at times like these that sticking to what we said really counts. Perhaps you invited some lonely or needy people over for dinner, then

things got busy, and all of a sudden you began to realise it'd be a lot easier not to have them. What did you do? Phone them and call the visit off, regardless of their disappointment? What is the right thing to do here? I'm inclined to think we should a) be more careful about making undertakings and b) be more prepared to keep our word to people, even when it hurts.

Shown in the way you handle money

One of the first things we tend to think of when the word integrity is mentioned is the way people handle money. Most of us hate the way politicians take our money from us and then mispend it. It seems that any wrongdoing, if it is associated with money, is doubly bad in most people's eyes. Here, in Psalm 15, we are told that the man of integrity does not allow material greed to overcome justice. He does not extort and he does not take advantage of others through his use of money. Naturally, what first comes to mind is someone wealthy forcing a poor person to do something they don't want to by means of money, or an unscrupulous money-lender extracting extortionate interest from a desperate debtor. But the principle may be applied to many other kinds of situations — even involving those, like us, who aren't hugely rich. We need to ask ourselves if we have ever taken advantage of anyone with our control of material resources. And then we should ask what it is that God positively requires of us in this area. What we have in Psalm 15:5 is a negative command — 'don't

do....' But surely what God wants of us is the *reverse*: to be generous, especially to the poor and needy and those at our mercy. Are we open-handed with what God has given us — our food, our houses, our resources? Further still, are we generous and unselfish and thankful when others give generously to us? Do we give back a car we have borrowed with the tank full of petrol? Do you return goods in the same condition as they were lent to you? Do you give more than you take at shared lunches, and so on? What, deep down, is our attitude to others in the use of what we have?

David ends his psalm on an encouraging note. The man who does these things, he writes, *'shall never be moved.'* Returning to his original question — *'Who shall live with God?'* — we see that it is the person who exhibits all the qualities he has outlined. The woman of integrity shall never be moved. But what does it mean, never being moved? It means having firm anchors, being kept from drowning in the storms of life — it means never, ever being swept away completely because we are held securely in God's hands. The woman of integrity is safe. Remember what happens to godless politicians and corrupt businessmen when they are found out? They suffer terrible falls. Have you ever noticed how the world's celebrities tend to lose favour, retire or make some mess of their life, and are never heard of again? The woman who walks with God, by contrast, will live forever; her reputation still bright, and her deeds of integrity following her.

I belong to a “feel good” church

John Zuidema

Allow me to begin this article by painting a scene that happens often in our circles. You are invited to a birthday celebration, a wedding or a perhaps a BBQ, and there are many relatives as well as friends present. And as you do at these occasions, you rub shoulders with people from all walks of life. Sometimes from the discussion, it is obvious that many people present are Christians. Inevitably you may ask your host, where do your friends worship? And they in an apologetic fashion reply, 'Oh they belong to the 'feel good' church.'

Now that response begins to make me wonder. "What do people actually mean

when they say that? Do they mean that their friend's church makes them feel good? Do they mean that they attend a church that has a 'wonky' theology? Perhaps they mean that our own 'church' doesn't make people feel good? Do they mean that their friends are having all the fun while we are stuck in a rut that only means boredom and long sermons: stuck in tradition with no room for change?"

No doubt when people suggest that their friends belong to a 'feel good' church they are often referring to that particular church's worship practices. They have perhaps experienced their singing, their 'sermonettes,' and their emphasis on making people 'feel good' about themselves, often revolving around a

'works' and 'social gospel' theology, rather than emphasising Scripture and God's honour and His worthiness of our worship and adoration. As a result, we tend to label these churches as 'feel good' churches. Thankfully, there are some churches that do an excellent job at being faithful to Scripture while at the same time making people 'feel good.' May we be humble enough to learn from them.

Well, the purpose of this article is to tell you that I belong to such a church, and that makes me feel good! What's more, I am becoming tired of having to make apologies for belonging to a church that makes me feel good! Therefore, since on occasions the best form of defence is attack, that is what I am about to do...in love, of course. So just in

case you didn't get it the first time, let me repeat it, 'I feel good about belonging to a church that makes me 'feel good!''

Truly feeling good

Allow me to just tease that out a little and explain what 'feel good' means for yours truly. I don't only feel good because people around me are smiling and kind. I don't only feel good because people are singing with lovely voices and have some musical backing. I don't only feel good because I see two and sometimes three generations of whole families coming to worship. I don't only feel good because I know our members love the Lord and each other deeply, and they show it with their practical care and concern for each other's well-being.

I particularly feel good because I have come to meet with my Saviour God and his saved people! I feel particularly good because I know that God's Word will be opened and read, and given a faithful exposition. I feel particularly good because I know that my Saviour's name will be held high and adored

and worshipped. I feel particularly good because I belong to a church that endeavours to be faithful to Scripture and preaches Christ crucified and risen. I particularly feel good in my church because the Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of the members.

I particularly feel good in my church for it teaches that not what my hands have done, can save my guilty soul; not what my toiling flesh has borne, can make my spirit whole; but that my Lord has saved my life, and freely pardon gives. I love because He first loved me; I live because He lives! I particularly feel good in my church because it teaches that there isn't anything in all creation that can separate me from God's love.

I feel good about my church because I know my church takes particular interest in my children, teaching them the wonderful truths of Scripture in various classes, especially set up to compliment what I already teach at home. I feel good about my church because it has mid-week events which are also designed to nurture us in our faith. I feel good about being in my church because

I know that everything is done with the one aim: to bring glory to God and us safely to glory! I feel good about my church because it supports a College where men and women can be trained for the work of ministry so that God's word will continue to be proclaimed faithfully to my children and their children.

A different approach

So next time someone asks you, 'Why do you belong to your church?' tell them, that you belong to a Reformed church that makes you feel good! If they then ask you what they do to make you feel good, tell them about the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ and all that means for you. Perhaps, when we live and act in this wonderful knowledge, we will no longer be making apologies for our church, but will be a positive avenue for evangelism and 'church growth.' I for one make no apology for telling people that I belong to a church that makes me feel good, and I give God thanks for it every day!

The gates of Jerusalem

The East Gate

Patricia van Laar

Malachi 4:2 - The sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.

Here we approach another of the gates in which man has no part – the fulfillment of this, like that of the Fountain, Water and Horse Gates, is solely the initiative and activity of God, in which man has no part.

The above prophecy of Malachi refers specifically to the Day of the Lord, the Day of Judgement. As this writing is not intended as a dogmatic, doctrinal dissertation, but rather as a few devotional thoughts based on the Gates of Jerusalem, it is appropriate to quote Malachi's verse in connection with the East Gate. Say the word sunrise, and the eastern direction is indicated; say the word east, and sunrise comes into mind. But for Christians, the word in Malachi's verse is spelt Son rise. Is not Jesus the Sun of Righteousness, Who rose with healing in His 'wings'? The east as the place of sunrise, draws our thoughts to Him, and to His two-fold Coming.

The East Gate in Nehemiah's Wall

Naturally, the name East Gate was given in accordance with its relationship to Jerusalem itself, on the east wall of the city. Yet its unique name of position rather than specific meaning or use, seems to point to East itself being somewhat significant. That significance will become apparent.

The mention of the gate in Nehemiah 3 seems another with only a passing reference. Shemaiah, son of Shecaniah, who was the keeper of the gate, made the repairs, and the account follows with a list of those who repaired wall sections from here to the house of the temple servants and merchants opposite the final gate, the Inspection Gate (NIV). This does not lessen the importance of the East Gate. It was one of those on this royal, priestly side of the city, and it is not unusual for the Bible to associate the east in some way with the coming of the Lord. The approach of the Lord to the city on Palm Sunday, as referred to in the account of the Horse Gate, was from the eastern region, from the village of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Perhaps this was the gate he entered then, not the Horse Gate

as suggested in last month's topic. Both are fitting. We cannot say for certain, nor is it vital to know.

A Gate for the Church or Catechism Calendar

By coincidence, not design, this article will appear in the December magazine, the month in which, in the Church's Year, the traditional celebration of Jesus' birth is observed. During the preceding Advent season, it is customary in some churches to prepare the hearts of the people not only for Christmas, but also to remind them of the promise of his Second Coming, and of the even greater need to prepare for this Advent (Coming) too.

While it is by no means certain that Jesus was born at this time, it being possible that the birth actually occurred, as some believe, in early October, and while some churches prefer to remember the events surrounding His birth during the Catechism Calendar (Lord's Day 14) rather than the Church Calendar, nevertheless traditionally most are accustomed to celebrate Christmas this month. And in the Christmas/Epiphany sea-

son the east is prominently featured in the story of the visit of the magi, the so-called 'three wise men.' They saw His star while they were still in the east, and so travelled in a westerly direction following its leading, to the gates of Jerusalem, the logical place as far as they were concerned, to find a newborn King of the Jews. The east they came from, thought in probability to be Babylon, is where the prophet Daniel had seen his vision of the Anointed one, the ruler Who would come (Dan. 9:25). And Balaam of Pethor by the River (Euphrates) foretold a 'star' coming out of Jacob, a sceptre arising out of Israel.

(Numbers 24:17) So the magi came from the east when they saw His star, and following the star they were led westward, even beyond Jerusalem to Bethlehem. From within Jerusalem, if the star were seen, it would be approaching the city from the east.

The East Gate in Ezekiel's Temple

In Ezekiel, the east gate of the visionary temple seen by the Prophet also features in an interesting way. This is not the East Gate in the wall of Nehemiah, of course, but it is not irrelevant to our present thoughts. Ezekiel 43:1, 2, 4 tell us that the Glory of

the God of Israel was coming from the east to the gate facing east. "His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with His glory." Cf. Rev.1:15. It was a gate of great importance. (See Ez. 44:1, 2; 46:1,12.) 'The Glory of the Lord', the God of Israel, is a frequent phrase in this book of prophecy. Who is this Glory of the Lord?

John 1: 14 answers: "The Word became flesh and lived for a while amongst us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." There will be no end to our marvelling at such glory!

The East in the Garden of Eden

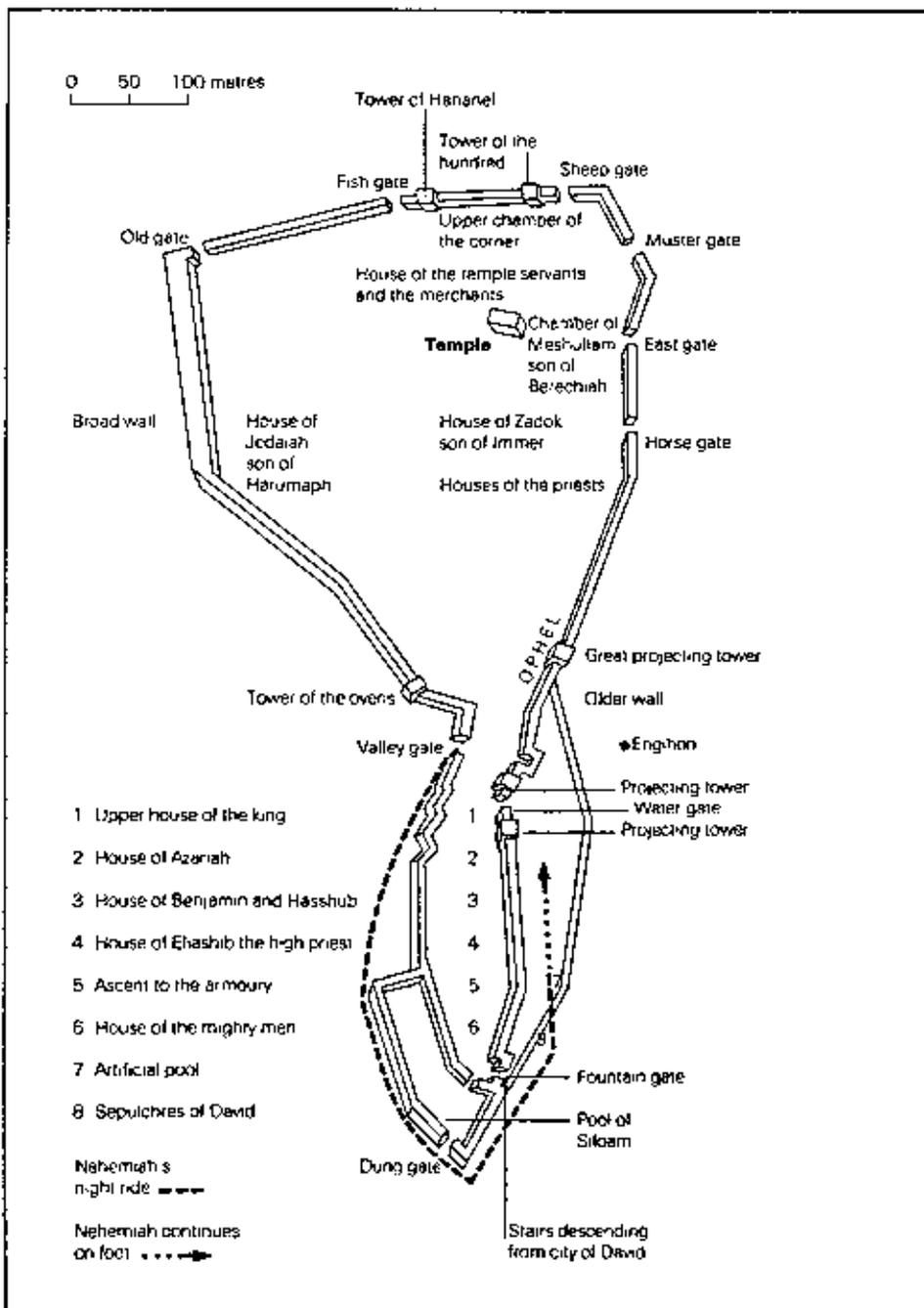
Ezekiel 44:2 brings a further thought to mind. "The Lord said to me, "This gate (the one facing east) is to remain shut. It must not be opened; no one may enter through it. It is to remain shut because the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered through it. The prince himself is the only one who may sit inside the gateway to eat in the presence of the Lord. He is to enter by way of the portico and go out the same way." Chapter 46:1 says, "The gate of the inner court facing east is to be shut on the six working days, but on the Sabbath Day and on the Day of the New Moon it is to be opened. The prince is to enter from the outside through the portico of the gateway." Again, this is referring to the temple of the Prophet's vision, and the symbolism must not be pressed too far. But from this reading my thoughts switched backward to the Garden of Eden, where the way to the Tree of Life was shut off by God. Genesis 3: 24 points to the east as the place of the 'shutting out' – "after (God) drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life."

Our Prince is the only one with the right to enter the Gate that remains shut until He re-opens to us the way to the Tree of Life. More than that, although this is changing the metaphor a little, He said, "I am the Gate, whoever enters through me, will be saved." (John 10: 9).

Saved? It was inspired writing that tells us, "As far as the east is from the west, so far have I removed their sins from them." Unlike north and south, definite points on the globe from which we can travel one to the other, east and west have no points; east and west never meet. Sin once removed, will never catch us up.

The East Gate at the end of Time

Our devotional meditation this month has developed from Nehemiah's almost casual



Nehemiah's Jerusalem (after Aharoni and Avi-Yonah). The site names are derived from Ne. 3:1-32, proceeding anti-clockwise from the Sheep Gate at the NE Corner. Taken from Derek Kidner's Commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah, IVP.

mention of the East Gate, by a thread of ideas concerning the Coming of the Lord, that now culminate in the sign given in Matthew 24:27, 30 – 31: “As the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man... At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of

Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from one end of the heavens to the other.”

So the East Gate of Jerusalem leads us from the First Coming of our Lord to His Second Coming. All eyes will see Him in His great Glory. Though the nations of earth will

mourn, for us who believe, this final event of history will be a time of great blessing and rejoicing. In His wings will be final healing – from sin, from sorrow, from physical suffering, from the worry and catastrophe of earthly life into the joy and peace of His heavenly Presence.

Glory be to His Name.

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

Mens Breakfast: This event will be postponed to the second Saturday in October due to Promise Keepers being on and a Young adults' camp in Rotorua, so the date to circle on your calendar will be the 14th of October. The venue is the hall with the usual goodies to eat. If you want anything added to the menu please speak to Tjeerd or Thom; the custard went down a treat last time. The study will be led by our brother Arnout Wassenaar. Thus far the studies have been great, with lots of discussion. It was also great to see three 'younger' men turn up. Remember your \$5 to cover the cost of the food, so come along all you men of the congregation. Thom, Tjeerd and Reuben.

Congratulations to Joshua & Heidi, Zac, Bradley and Levi on the birth of a lovely little daughter and sister, Zoe Eleonore. May the Lord bless and strengthen you as you seek to raise your family in his name.

Bishopdale

Do you have any church photos?? We are updating the church photo albums for the church's 25th anniversary next year, and we need photos!! — the last ones in the album are from 1988. If you have any photos of church activities, picnics, camps, youth club, cadets etc., please let us know. Have a hunt through your albums and if you are able to scan them and put them on a disk that would be great; if not, I can do it for you. Dates and names will also be appreciated!! Also, if you want to help with this,

please see me. Thanks, Robyn Bosma.

Garden Makeover: Next Saturday we have a wonderful opportunity to help the Capill family as one of our service activities for mission work, and have a little fellowship and fun on the way. Meet at Capills 578 Pound Rd, Yaldhurst. From 8.30am to 1pm. Morning tea will be provided. Please bring spades, rakes, and yourselves. For more information or if you need transport arrangements don't hesitate to ring David Capill on 342-4411.

Mentoring: There are female and male mentors available. Young people, if you find being a Christian a struggle, then this is for you. Some encouragement, someone committed to praying for you, someone available for any support you may need on a casual arrangement — if you are interested do not hesitate to let Peter or Joyce or one of the Leadership Team know.

As you are aware, we are still looking for a second minister. We have arranged for two men to come here and preach: Pieter van Huyssteen from the North Shore and Michael Willemse from Pukekohe. They are both in the process of completing vicariates in the Auckland Presbytery. Pieter will take the morning and evening services on 29 October, and Michael will do the same on 12 November. There will be opportunity for you to meet them and their wives. After Michael Willemse has been here, we will consider whether we should extend a call to either of them. We will give more information about what will happen when they are here closer to the time.

Buckland's Beach

Pastoral. What a week! The Holiday Club programme (Secret Agents Club) absolutely dominated the life and ministry of our fellowship from Monday through till Wednesday. Attendance was well up on last year — in

excess of 80 children attending each day. The programme challenged the children to investigate and find out for themselves who Jesus was, what he did and why. The main emphasis was on the death and resurrection of Jesus — what this means about Jesus and what this has meant for us today. The cooperation and team-work was outstanding. What was especially noteworthy is the growing crew of young people in our fellowship who gave their time and themselves to this ministry. Thanks to the whole team. The stories, the songs, the games, the crafts and the food were all top quality. As part of the 'follow up' please continue to remember the children who came and, for those who were there, to pray for them by name! This morning we want to enable you to get a tiny taste of what happened. We will introduce our talented music team and a few songs which the children learnt and encourage you to sing along with us.

Christchurch

Ilam Homestead. We will again sing at the Ilam Homestead next Sunday 1 October at 2.30 pm. Look forward to seeing you all there. There will only be one more Sunday of singing at the homestead in 2006 after that, probably the 19th of November. This will be our Christmas program. Please note this on your calendar!

Rev. Sid Cooper Jubilee. On 26 November the Rev. Sid Cooper will celebrate his 50th anniversary in gospel ministry. He served in our congregation from 1960 to 1963. The celebration will take place in the First Christian Reformed Church of Sarnia on November 26, where Sid will preach his 'farewell' sermon. The church in Sarnia will collate the greetings. Messages of congratulation can be sent directly to Sid Cooper's email address: sjcooper@rivernet.net

Milestones to give thanks to our Lord for... congratulations to Mrs Willy van der Goot

who celebrates her 80th this Wednesday.

Dovedale

Wedding Banns: Rodney Thompson and Akari Shimono will be married this Saturday, 14th October. Rodney has recently transferred to our congregation from the Reformed Church of Dunedin. The wedding will take place at 11:00 am and will be held in the Mound Garden at Monavale. If the weather is wet the service will be held at the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

Dunedin

Cyber Safety Issues. Have you ever wondered what your child is doing on the computer? Have the contents of texting given you or your child anxiety? Do you understand about

chat rooms and is it possible to accidentally go into a bad site? The Caversham Presbyterian Church is sponsoring an information evening in their church hall at 61 Thorn Street, Caversham on Thursday 12 October at 7:30 pm. More information is available on the notice board.

A warm welcome to Pastor Mark Smith of the Grace Presbyterian Church! It's good to have you with us once again. Mark and I are swapping pulpits this evening, one of several ways in which we hope to encourage one another, from time to time, as confessional churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Any Questions Please? Ever had a question you couldn't find an answer for? Perhaps from a Bible study, a Bible passage that

wasn't clear, an issue we face as Christians in contemporary society, or a question about church practice? Now's your chance to ask those questions and to have them addressed by a panel who will do their best to answer them in the light of Scripture. On Thursday 30 November, DV, we will have a question-and-answer evening at the church hall. But before then we need your questions. So put on your thinking caps and submit your question (in writing or by e-mail) to a member of Session by Sunday 29 October. Questions may be on any topic; however, it must be understood that not all those submitted will necessarily be dealt with.

Foxton

Session meeting report: A review was held with regards the Foxton Spring Carnival. It was found to be a success and it was decided to participate again next year, even though some different approaches may be tried. A big "Thank you" to all who participated and made it a successful event.

Official welcome: We welcome Arie and Janny Nugteren as communicant members of the Reformed Church of Foxton. You might be new as 'members,' but we've known you for many a year. May our fellowship together continue for many more years. The Session

Fellowship news: We extend our thanks to God and congratulations to John & Sue Huzinga for the safe arrival of Cohan Luke, 7lb 9oz, last Wednesday morning. Both mother and baby are doing well.

Hamilton

Prayer Meeting: At No9 (house next to the church) every Sunday morning at 9.30. Do join us.

Hastings

From the Pastor. When a child is the first of a family to go to church, in only 3.5% of cases does the family follow. When the mother is the first to go to church, in 17% of cases the family follows. When the father is the first to go to church, the family follows in 93% of cases. These statistics are from Barna research in America. I suppose that New Zealand statistics would be fairly close. I believe those stats say something about the way God has structured the family. Men are made by God to lead their families. Where the men go, the families follow in a very large percentage of families. **M e n**, if your families are not going in the way you think they should, then you must take a good, hard look at your leadership. Are you leading them according to the will of God and for the advance of His kingdom? If you abdicate your

Gleanings clarification

Some years ago a change in editorship for *Faith in Focus* also brought about a slight change in focus for the magazine, which included new contributors and columns. 'Gleanings' was introduced to replace the previous 'News from the Churches' column, which, although well read, was sporadic, with some churches contributing regularly or semi-regularly and some churches seldom contributing at all. 'Gleanings' was established to enable a single contributor to ensure that news, items and events in all churches are regularly reported. Gleanings are typically excerpts, or 'bits and pieces.'

The purposes of the 'Gleanings' column is threefold:

- To inform.
- To encourage
- To share

It is my intention that each contribution would fall under one or more of the above categories, and that readers would take such a perspective when reading the column. Items should not be read as announcements (as intended when printed in a local congregations bulletin), but rather, to advise the broader readership of what is happening and what other congregations are doing – ideas that could be tried or done in the readers' own congregations, information of interest that may go beyond the local congregation, or items that might be upbuilding or encouraging.

As bulletins are published weekly and *Faith in Focus* is published monthly, it will also be inevitable that some events will have occurred by the time the reader becomes aware of them. However, as the intention is to inform, encourage and share, and not to announce, the timing is effectively unimportant. Furthermore, the timing between an item appearing in a local bulletin that is published just after the cut-off time for the next issue of *Faith in Focus* will almost certainly mean the event has occurred by the time it gets into the next issue. Again this is inevitable.

Some feedback has also suggested that a little discretion be applied by altering bulletin announcements to reflect their past occurrence prior to coming to print. Although this idea has some merit, in reality it has the potential to create more problems than it solves. And as clarified previously, given the intention is to inform, encourage and share rather than to announce, an item's 'post-datedness' becomes irrelevant. This would also completely change the required style of the 'Gleanings' presentation from a collection of excerpts to an edited-style 'News from the Churches', without any local input.

I hope this clarification helps readers understand the purpose of 'Gleanings', and that readers will continue to be informed, encouraged and upbuilt by its intent, content and inclusion in *Faith in Focus*.

Andrew Reinders
October 2006

role and leave it to your wife, she will try to step into that role because she is concerned about the direction of the family. But she can't fill that role. God has shaped that role for men and has shaped men for that role. Don't put your wife in the position of trying to be Dad.

Mangere

I received this note from the Rev. Peter Kossen: Thank you all for your prayers on our behalf. I went to the doctor yesterday afternoon, and it appears that by removing the kidney, they have removed the cancer entirely. This means I need no follow up treatment. I need to go for check up scans and ultrasounds in six months to make sure that it hasn't spread. This is the best news we could hope for, and we are thankful for this. I will be returning to work next week.

Combined youth group event at Avondale. We are having a combined FEAR FACTOR night for all the local Reformed Church Youth Groups. This is going to be held on Saturday the 28th of October (the week after Labour weekend.) As this event is going to be quite big, if everyone could bring along a gold coin that would help a lot with costs. Bring along old clothes (because its probably going to get messy).and a strong stomach is a must! Meet at the Reformed Church of Avondale at 7.30pm, Saturday, 28 October.

Nelson

Something to think about...

When Rev. Joe Wright was asked to open the new session of the Kansas (USA) Senate, everyone was expecting the usual generalities, but this is what they heard:

"Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask your forgiveness and to seek your direction and guidance. We know Your Word says, 'Woe to those who call evil good,' but that is exactly what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed our values.

- We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery.
- We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare.
- We have killed our unborn and called it choice.
- We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable homicide.
- We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self esteem.
- We have abused power and called it politics.
- We have coveted our neighbour's possessions and called it ambition.

- We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of speech and expression.
- We have ridiculed the time-honoured values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment.

Search us, Oh, God, and know our hearts today; cleanse us from every sin and set us free. Amen!"

The response was immediate. A number of legislators walked out during the prayer in protest. In 6 short weeks, Central Christian Church, where Rev. Wright is pastor, logged more than 5,000 phone calls with only 47 of those calls responding negatively. The church is now receiving international requests for copies of this prayer from India, Africa and Korea.

North Shore

We rejoice with Frank & Rachel den Hartigh who received the final confirmation of Allannah's adoption this past week. Congratulations, Frank & Rachel. May our God continue to bless you as you raise Allannah in His service.

Congratulations, too, to Joel & Natalie Brunton, who received a healthy baby boy this past week. May our Lord continue to give you all that need, also as you raise this child to love and fear Him.

Deacons request: The care of the congregation is one of the deacons' prime responsibilities to administer. The deacons will be contacting different groups in the church over the next few weeks to discuss how the congregation and deacons can best implement and operate when a member of the congregation needs help. The current system is the grape vine that does not always work that well. Until the deacons come up with a better arrangement, if there is a member of the congregation in need could you please ensure a deacon is informed so they can respond in an appropriate manner.

Social evening 28 October – please respond today! The Hibiscus Coast fellowship group is planning a Guess Who's Coming to Dinner evening on Saturday 28 October. For more details see the notice on the glass door in the foyer, and indicate your preference on the sheet of paper in the foyer of the church. You are welcome to take your children along to dinner, or let us know if you prefer to make use of child minding facilities. We want everybody to be comfortable with the arrangements and before we allocate guests will also confirm with hosts if they are prepared to host children for dinner. If you have any questions please see Tinus, Martha or

Johan. Today is the last day for indicating if you want to be a guest or a host!

Palmerston North

We extend our sympathy to the de Klerk family on the passing away of Theo's father last week. May our compassionate God comfort you all as you grieve.

Congratulations to Angelo and Rufina Mascarenhas on the birth of their son, Judah, born last Monday and weighing in at 8.4lb. We pray our Fathers bountiful blessings and love as you raise Judah and Andrea and Reuben for Him.

Congratulations also to John and Sue Huizinga on the birth of their son, Cohan

Sponsorship Opportunities!!

The Wellington Regional Youth Committee (WRYC) is seeking sponsorship for the upcoming National Youth Camp (NYC) in January 2007. As many of you are aware, these camps are great opportunities for our youth to gather together for a week to learn more about our Lord, spend time in His Word together, build new and existing friendships, help each other out with the duties and take part in the sports and other activities that are arranged.

While it is free (Praise the Lord!) to read and study the Word, there are many other costs involved in running a youth camp for hundreds of youth. Any sponsorship surrounding finance, clothing, AV equipment, sports gear or anything else would be much appreciated.

If you would like more information or are interested, please contact the WRYC president Josh Couperus at jmcouperus@slingshot.co.nz or alternatively Jesse Dyson at jesseandhannah@xtra.co.nz

*Yours in Christ,
Wellington Regional Youth
Committee*

Luke, born last Wednesday and weighing in at 7.9lb. May Cohan never know a day out of the tender care of our heavenly Father's hand and may He give you wisdom as you raise your family for Him.

Pukekohe

Last Tuesday the Loefs heard news that the baby their daughter Teresa is carrying is a spina bifida child. The baby is 21 weeks at present and is not expected to live after birth without significant medical intervention.

Please keep Ruben and Teresa and the Loef family in your prayers.

Going bananas! If Jennifer, Sarah and George and the other helpers all look a bit tired today, it's because they went bananas this week, running the holiday programme. Around thirty children came each day and found the Bible stories, crafts and games very appealing! Many enjoyed it so much that they are already asking if we will be having a holiday programme next holidays! A big "Thank you" to the whole bunch who

helped out and particularly to Jennifer, Sarah and George for all their hard work. Some folk expressed interest in sending their children along to Sunday School and/or in coming to church. Please pray for these folk and, if you see someone new, be sure to say "hi." MW.

Wedding: It is with much joy that we announce the wedding of William Haverland and Rachel Kaijser. If there are no lawful objections this will take place at 10:30am on Saturday 28 October at St James Presbyterian Church, West Street. You are all warmly invited to attend the wedding service.

The Reformed Church of Wellington celebrates,

with thankfulness to the Lord and King of the Church, some historic milestones in the busy life of our pastor.

Rev. John Goris having already past his 40th anniversary of preaching and teaching in the churches of Australia and New Zealand will now officially depart from his ministry with us.

John was ordained in the Ulverstone Reformed Church Tasmania (Now Christian Reformed Church) on the 20th of August 1966 as a graduate from Geelong College and he served in the congregations of Ulverstone, Toowoomba in Australia and Avondale, Mangere, Nelson and Wellington in New Zealand.

John faithfully and compassionately preaches Christ, our only comfort in life and in death, with sincerity and great passion. His zeal for mission is an example to us all. John still serves on the NZ Overseas Mission Board and as Mission-Secretary of the International Council of Reformed Churches. His pastoral visits to many, in hospital or at home, always bring comfort and hope not only to those in our own churches but well beyond too!

The hospitality given to many by John and Diana in their home has been outstanding and very much appreciated.

On behalf of them and all of us, thank you John for your long and gracious ministry among us. May the Lord bless you and Diana and watch over you and your family in the years to come.

John, now approaching 70, is still going strong and we certainly hope to hear him preach again and make use of the many talents the Lord has given him, even though he will be officially '**retired**'.

An invitation is extended to anyone who would like to attend this anniversary's celebration with us.

40th Celebration:

Saturday the 9th December 2006 DV, in the Presbyterian Church Hall, 88 The Parade, Island Bay, Wellington. Time 7.00PM.

Words of greetings from colleagues, former congregation members, family and friends would also be most welcome. These can be addressed to Willem Bos (clerk of Session) P.O.Box 27-091 Wellington or emailed to rcwgt@clear.net.nz

The congregation of the Reformed Church of Wellington.

Silverstream

Congregational get-together. Members of the congregation are reminded that the Stokes Valley Pool has been booked for a time of fun and fellowship on Saturday, 25 November, from 6-8.00pm Lord willing. Edwin, Henk and Yvonne.

Prison Ministry. On September 14, 5 men from this congregation visited the Faith Based Unit at Rimutaka Prison. We spent about 1-and-a-half hours with about 9 or 10 prisoners, during which time we presented a video on the relevance of Genesis and Creation, from the Answers in Genesis series, and then discussed and answered questions from the men. Being in the FBU, and attending the compulsory courses, the prisoners already have some Scripture knowledge, either from when they were younger, or, being introduced to the Scriptures in the FBU. However, many of the men had never considered the implications of Genesis 1-11 as foundational to the rest of the Scriptures. During the video, we could see men shaking their heads in agreement with the message from Ken Ham. We will be presenting the whole series of 12 videos to the men over a period of 6 months, Lord willing. Our first impression was that we were well received. In fact they are keen for us to come again, which we will do this Thursday evening, Lord willing. If you want to be part of this ministry and have some time to spare every second Thursday, please contact Walter Walraven. Please pray for this very worthwhile ministry and the men involved.

Wainuiomata

Congratulations to Andrew and Wilma Reinders and family on the birth of a healthy baby girl. Julia Chelsea was born on September 26th. May the Lord grant you much wisdom, patience and love as you strive to raise up Julia in the fear of God and in the way of life eternal.

Baptism of Laine Marissa Feenstra. Today we are privileged to witness the baptism of Laine. Look at this little baby, just a month old! Can she clothe or feed herself? No, Laine is quite helpless and depends upon her parents for almost everything. Now notice in baptism that God places the sign and seal of His promise upon Laine when she is so weak. Is it not a wonderful blessing that God takes us as helpless babies and gives us the promise of forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Jesus Christ? All our life long we can claim these promises. We can remind ourselves that God, who gave us His promise when we were so weak and helpless, will never forsake us or leave us.

Wellington

Profession of Faith. Last Tuesday the elders met with Edward Oosterbaan, Emma Snoek and Rachel Wierenga, and interviewed them as to their motives and the implications of their desire to make a public profession of faith in the midst of the congregation. This was a special time with them and it was most encouraging. The Lord willing, they will make that profession before the congregation on Sunday morning, 15th October, unless valid objections are raised.

Situations vacant – vergers. The Board of management is seeking volunteers to fill the function of verger. No previous experience is needed. Applicants can be male or female and must be able to walk, talk, look and smile (not necessarily at the same time). If you have the above attributes and would like to contribute to the life of the church, please contact Gary Oosterbaan for a job description.

SHORT REPORT OF THE AUCKLAND PRESBYTERY MEETING HELD 13-14 OCTOBER, 2006

The meeting was convened in Pukekohe on Friday evening for the purpose of examining vicar Michael Willemse. In the chair was the Rev. Dirk van Garderen and also present as synodical examiners from the Wellington and Christchurch Presbyteries were the Revs Paul Archbald and Jim Klazinga.

Michael preached to us from Acts 5:1-25, the story of the Gospel going to Samaria and confronting Simon Magus. After considering the sermon in closed session, it was sustained. After this he was examined in Old

Testament, New Testament and Dogmatics (Christian doctrine) by the Revs Reinier Noppers, Sjirk Bajema and Dirk van Garderen respectively and these parts of the exam were also sustained. Thus brother Willemse was declared eligible for call to the ministry in our Churches. We give thanks to the Lord for this outcome and congratulate Michael and his wife, Gea, and family. We wish them the best for the future and above all, a profitable ministry in the Word of God among us.

The meeting reconvened the next morning in the North Shore Church to examine vicar Pieter van Huyssteen who first of all preached to us on Colossians 1:21-23. Pieter's sermon also was sustained by the Presbytery. He also was then examined in OT, NT and Dogmatics by the same ministers as was Michael. His exam in OT and NT was sustained but Presbytery felt unable to sustain the Dogmatics portion. This was a disappointment for all. However, Pieter has been asked to present himself before the Presbytery again on February 16th to be re-examined in Dogmatics. In the meantime, the North Shore session has been asked to continue supporting and working with brother van Huyssteen with that exam in view. We commit Pieter and his wife, Annette, and family to the Lord in prayer in the hope that he too may be given to the Churches as a minister of the Word.

After some items of housekeeping business the meeting ended just after 1pm.

Reporter: John Rogers

SHORT REPORT OF THE MEETING OF CHRISTCHURCH PRESBYTERY HELD OCTOBER, 2006

Presbytery commenced on Friday evening 6th of October at 7pm for the examination of Vicar Andrew Nugteren. The moderator, Rev. Jim Klazinga, cordially welcomed all the delegates, synodical examiners Revs. Dirk van Garderen and Leo deVos and members of the Dunedin & Oamaru congregations who had come to witness the exam. A special welcome was extended to Rev. Tom Tyson, who was also given speaking rights at the meeting. Rev. Klazinga then opened the meeting with a devotion on Habbakuk 3, then we all sang 297 from the Psalter Hymnal, after which Jim led us in prayer. Andrew Nugteren then delivered his examination sermon on John 2:1-11. Following discussion in closed

session the moderator announced that the sermon had been sustained. Andrew was then examined on Biblical exegesis and Systematic Theology. Rev. R. Adams assigned 2 Timothy 3:10-4:8, Rev. J Klazinga Isaiah 65:17-25 and Rev. R. Van Wichen examined Andrew in the areas of the **doctrine of God, doctrine of creation and apologetics**. This part of the examination was also sustained. All other prerequisites were found to be in order and the moderator declared Andrew Nugteren eligible for call. The clerk was instructed to send letters advising the churches of Andrew's availability to the RCNZ, CRCA and PCEA.

Presbytery reconvened the following morning at 9am. Moderator Klazinga opened

with a devotion from Philippians 3:12-20 and led in prayer. Nelson delegates withdrew their proposal requesting that presbytery investigate the possibility of our South Island churches negotiating insurance cover as a block.

Church visitation reports for Christchurch and Bishopdale were received. Brief reports were also heard from the OMB and NPC Presbytery liaisons. It was noted that Leen van Vliet had retired as NPC chairman, and that his position was taken over by John Holtslag. Presbytery also spent considerable time discussing a proposal from the Dunedin congregation to call a second minister to work in Oamaru and Timaru. The proposal included a request for financial support from Christchurch Presbytery and the Church Extension Committee under the home mission rules. Christchurch Presbytery supported Dunedin's proposal 'in principle' with delegates explaining that their sessions would need to go to their congregations for approval of finance. The meeting concluded shortly after midday with Rev. Ralph Adams closing the meeting in prayer.

Hans Vaatstra

*Reprints of
articles in Faith
in Focus can
be obtained by
contacting the
Editor*

Auckland Combined Senior's Day – October 3rd 2006

This year the Hamilton folk organised our now annual Auckland Presbytery Senior's Day. It was a blessed day of fellowship, with some brethren meeting each other again for the first time in many years and others meeting for the first time altogether!

Br Theo Grul most capably organised the busy troops in Hamilton, who provided us with great food – donated by a member of the Hamilton church who is a baker. We heard from Evan Christensen, from Raglan, who has just visited Myanmar with a mission team. We gained a good insight into the openness to the gospel that there is in that country despite the socialist oppression. After lunch we were able to enjoy the gifts of music and song from Breony and Talia van der Wel.

Our thanks go out to the Hamilton folk for all their great work. We look forward to next year when we hope to meet at the Avondale church.



Missions in focus

Janice Reid

Christian Witness to Israel: To a people of promise ... the message of Messiah

By Howard Fleming

For almost 1,800 years, the Church largely disregarded the Jewish people. Christians forgot the Jewishness of their faith; they ignored the fact that the first Christians were Jewish, that the New Testament is Jewish, and even that Jesus was a Jew.

Instead of loving the Jewish people by sharing the gospel with them, the mainly Gentile Church in the West became arrogant and persecuted them. Because of this, Jewish people often view Jesus and the Church as their enemies.

However, about 200 years ago, Christians in Britain became concerned for the salvation of the Jewish people and several societies were established to take the Good News of Jesus to them. One of the first centres for Jewish mission was Budapest in Hungary and, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, almost 250,000 Jewish people in Eastern Europe became believers in Jesus.

Christian Witness to Israel (CWI) has its origins in that great gospel movement. It is an evangelical, international, non-denominational organisation with workers in Australia, Bulgaria, France, Hungary, Israel, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. CWI believes that the Jewish people's greatest need is to know Jesus their Messiah. To help address this need, we provide appropriate literature in six languages. For example, in Israel we run a publishing house, HaGefen Publishing, which has produced many Christian books in Modern Hebrew, two examples being *The Sovereignty of God* by A.W. Pink and *The Mystery of Providence* by the Puritan John Flavel. We also run an evangelistic website, www.shalom.org.uk, host outreach events and provide training for Christians who wish to share the gospel with their Jewish friends, neighbours and colleagues. We aim to combat anti-Semitism in all its forms and to teach Christians about the debt we owe to the Jewish people. Working alongside local churches, our missionaries find many different ways to share the gospel with Jewish people. Some call at Jewish homes; others meet Jewish people at Hebrew classes or

make friends by attending Jewish cultural events; yet others set up booktables, with literature in Hebrew to attract Jewish people. After friendships are established, our missionaries show from the Bible that Jesus is the Messiah and that everyone needs to believe in him for salvation.

However the work of salvation is God's work and that is especially evident within Jewish mission. One of the things we emphasise is the importance of prayer. So in each issue of our quarterly magazine, *CWI Herald*, there is a full page devoted to prayer topics, one for each day of the month. We also send out monthly prayer updates by email (MP3 files) or cassette tape. Through these you can hear three of our missionaries giving reports on their work and sharing topics for prayer. In addition, every three months each of our missionaries produces a prayer letter (available by post or email).

In New Zealand, Brian and Vicky Wells have been working for many years amongst the Jewish community and have seen much blessing on their work. Recently Brian was asked how he approaches the task of telling Jewish people about Jesus. His reply was that he prefers not to 'tell' but to encourage people to discover the truth for themselves.

'I believe you have to begin with what is known and accepted rather than with what is unknown or rejected. As Christians, we tend to begin our witness where we feel comfortable i.e. by using the New Testament. But that is not where Jewish people feel comfortable. Of course many Jewish people are quite irreligious, but whether they have a high regard for the Jewish Scriptures or not, the *Tanakh* [Old Testament] is their book and I think that that is the place to start. That's the place where Jesus began! So I always begin with the Old Testament and ask my Jewish friends questions about the Scriptures. It is better to be the student and not to presume you know more than the person to whom you are talking. We should be prepared to learn and, as we listen, something our friends say may strike a chord. We should aim for a two-way discussion about the Word of God. We believe the best way of helping Jewish people to come to faith in Jesus is to let them discover him in their own Scriptures. It is also important to establish ongoing contact by putting Jewish people in touch with local Christians who know their Bibles and who can help them.'

At this time of year the Jewish people celebrate *Hanukkah*, whilst many Christians celebrate the birth of the Lord Jesus. Both provide opportunities for witness to Jewish people. *Hanukkah* means "rededication" and the feast commemorates the rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabee, a Jewish leader who recaptured Jerusalem from Antiochus IV, King of Syria. Antiochus had profaned the temple by setting up an altar of Zeus within it. He also forbade the practice of Judaism. In 165 B.C. Judas Maccabee rededicated the temple to the worship of God. At that time a miracle is supposed to have taken place, in that a one-day supply of consecrated oil is said to have burned for eight days. In the modern Hanukkah celebration, Jewish people remember this by lighting a special menorah with eight branches. One candle is lit each day for eight days. But there is a ninth candle on the menorah. It sits at the centre and all the other candles are lit from it. It is known as the servant candle. What a beautiful picture of the one who came as the Light of the World!

From time to time we meet Jewish people who state that Jesus never claimed to be God. One of the many passages of Scripture that we point them to is John 10:22-33. This event happened at the time of the Feast of *Hanukkah*. The people asked Jesus if he was the Messiah. Many were seeking a military leader like Judas Maccabee who would lead them against the Romans. However, in answer to their question Jesus told them that not only was he the Messiah, but that he and the Father were one. This was not the type of Messiah they wanted, and the crowd picked up stones to stone him because he claimed to be God.

Of course Jesus was both the Messiah and God. The Scriptures that we often read in our churches at this time of year remind us of this fact. And most of those readings are taken from the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament), for example Isaiah 7:14 which speaks of a virgin giving birth to a child whose name will be *Emmanuel* (Hebrew for "God with us").

One of the leaflets we use amongst Jewish people who are still today looking for a future Messiah is called *When Messiah comes, How will we Know Him?* It includes passages such as Micah 5:2, the verse through which the Magi and Herod discovered where the Messiah would be born (see Matthew 2:5). Isaiah 9:6-7 (which declares



For further information about Christian Witness to Israel, please visit their website, www.cwi.org.uk, email hq@cwi.org.uk or write to Brain and Vicky Wells c/o PO Box 6455, Wellesley Street, Auckland 1141, NZ.

MIF prayer notes

Pray for Fred and Tineke Frericks who are in Pakistan, working at the ARPC(USA) hospital and school in Sahiwal. Pray for wisdom, resources and results as Fred and Tineke help to get the school up and running. Pray also that people would answer the call to serve there as English teachers, or to teach computer, welding, and other courses.

Leo and Heidi Hendrikse continue their ministry in Romania, where they are helping to run a dairy farm that was set up in conjunction with the Hungarian Reformed Churches and the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee. Profits from the farm go to support a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre. Pray that Leo and Heidi would receive much blessing from their work, and that they would be safe and well able to cope with the extremely cold climate.

Evan Whetton is also missing his New Zealand summer, and is enduring a cold winter in South Korea as he helps Reformed missionary candidates to improve their English language skills so they can go to other countries to preach the Gospel. These people must learn English before they learn the language of the country where they are sent for ministry; so Evan's work is vital. Please pray for Evan as he plans lessons, that they will be effective and he will be blessed by the time he spends equipping others for service.

Janice Reid is back from training announcers at FEBCambodia and the HCJB-affiliated *new Life* station in Cambodia. Please pray that those trained will implement the things they have learned, and that listeners will be blessed. Pray also for safety as Janice makes several trips around the country where she lives, this month, to train more announcers in local stations.

Please pray for **Wally & Jeannette Hagoort** and the rest of the Reformed Ministries team, as they continue to develop the Bible College. Pray that sufficient money is available to build student housing, and the teaching staff are suitably prepared to start classes next year.

that the son given to us will be the Mighty God and the Prince of Peace) is also quoted, as is Isaiah 49:5-6 which speaks of one who will be "a light to the Gentiles" and through whom God's salvation would reach the ends of the earth.

God had always intended that the Jewish people would be the means by which the light of the knowledge of the one true God would come to the to the nations and, through Jesus and his followers, that was how it happened.

The words of Simeon parallel the passages from Isaiah:

*Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,
According to Your word;
For my eyes have seen Your salvation
Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,
A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of Your people Israel. (Luke 2:29-32)*

Paul also took up the theme when he wrote:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. (Romans 1:16)

God gave us his Word through the Jewish people. We are simply bringing it back to them.

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 of publication; so, for September, information should be sent before the 15th of July. If you would like our congregations to pray for you on your mission trip, send details to Janice at reid4radio@ihug.co.nz.