

faith in **focus**

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Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

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“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Matthew 11:28

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All correspondence regarding editorial content and advertising should be sent to:

The Editor:

Sjirk Bajema
17 Phoenix Place, Papatoetoe,
Manukau 2025.
Ph/Fax: +64 9 277 9360
Email: sjirk@xtra.co.nz
Reformed Churches Home Page
<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

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Mrs Nicola Wharekawa
79 McLeod Street
Upper Hutt
Email: ricwhare@paradise.net.nz

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Editorial

Another year is nearly over. Hasn't it gone quickly? So how did it go for you? Did you progress in the faith? Has there been more commitment to the public worship service? Often when people speak of 'how they are going in their faith', they start backwards. Because they begin with how their own personal devotions are with the Lord, then their family worship, followed by fellowship groups and then the worship services.

Soon you will have, Lord willing, some holidays. Will that be a break away from church as well? While many churches cut back their service over January, that should be the very last thing on any of our Session agendas!

It was John Piper who said that mission should always lead to worship. His book, *Let The Nations Be Glad*, brings this theme out clearly. He begins a most helpful and challenging book by writing that 'missions exists because worship doesn't.'

Now some might say that Piper doesn't only have in mind public worship. There is the worship that is personal, too. True enough. But apart from what you have in God's people, it is not enough. And Piper just in the title of his book definitely has a corporate image in view.

I think we are missing a passion for worship. And I say that because we've allowed our eyes to be distracted from the Lord. Like Peter on the lake, we've become distracted by what is around us. Why else would churches two years ago when Christmas was on a Sunday cancel all their Sunday services so that people could spend times with their families? Isn't the family that you should be with God's family?

I pray that you may be rested over this holiday period. I pray that you may have true recreation because it's a being re-created in the Lord. That's why time with your church family is vitally important. For if this being rested and recreated is what we do each Lord's day, why should it be so different when your break is for a few weeks instead of one day?

There are a number of denominational occasions to help us in this. There's the Family Camp and the Youth Camp. And there are also more localised camp and happenings also. In fact, already this year we have been blessed with a number.

Did you go to them? Did I see you at the Men's Study Day, the Ladies' Presbyterial, the Combined Senior's Day, or the Reformation Conference?

*“Like newborn babies, crave spiritual milk,
so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,
now that you have tasted the Lord is good.”*

1 Peter 2:2-3

Cover photo: A bach on Waiheke Island.

Page 23: the URCNA Synod photo was provided courtesy of Christian Renewal

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.

My Soul Magnifies the Lord

A Christmas meditation on the Song of Mary

Leo de Vos

And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord,⁴⁷ And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour.⁴⁸ For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.⁴⁹ For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name.⁵⁰ And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation.⁵¹ He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.⁵² He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly.⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty.⁵⁴ He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy,⁵⁵ As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever." (Luke 1:46-55)

Some of you have heard this beautiful song of praise described as *The Magnificat*. This is because the Latin *Vulgate* begins Mary's Song with the words *Magnificat*—to magnify. Some have compared this song to Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2, but closer examination shows that it is saturated with portions of the Psalms. Boys and girls might wonder why they should memorise Scripture and Catechism, but here we see the rich results of memorisation in Mary's life. You cannot memorise too much from God's Word.

I. The occasion of Mary's praise

If we want to understand this beautiful song, we must understand the circumstances when Mary expressed these words. The angel Gabriel had already visited Mary with words of wonder. What amazing news: "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS.³² "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David (Luke 1:31-32)! Mary has been chosen by God to give birth to the Son of the Highest, the Messiah.

Now we also know that Mary had difficulty with the Gabriel's revelation. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones brings to our attention the stages of Mary's faith: At first Mary is sceptical, staggering at this great revelation – how can this be, since I have not had

relations with a man (Luke 1:34)? And we thank God for Gabriel's ready answer — with God nothing shall be impossible (Luke 1:37). Then Mary moves to the second stage: *Behold the handmaiden of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word (Luke 1:38)*. Mary says, 'I don't understand but I leave it in God's hands.' Can we not identify with this stage — well, I don't understand but I will submit? Shortly

after, Mary hurries to the house of her cousin Elizabeth, and Elizabeth speaking by the Holy Spirit confirms the words of the angel Gabriel (See Luke 1:42-45). And God used these words to speak to Mary and give her a full assurance of faith, for she immediately breaks forth into praise!

The Bible's description of Mary's stages of faith is helpful to us. We can identify with her stages of faith and also with her



The Nativity, as painted by the 16th century German, Albrecht Altdorfer, shows infant Jesus in the traditional stable setting.

weakness of faith. We also identify with the assurance of faith God gives us in His Word, just as the words of Gabriel and Elizabeth gave assurance to Mary. And when the wonderful truth of the birth of Christ penetrates our hearts, we are led to join Mary in a song of praise. How wonderful that God has not left us in our sin, but sent such a Saviour!

II. The depth of Mary's Praise

Mary uses two expressions: *my soul* and

my spirit to say that she is moved within the very depths of her being. Her joy is not superficial, but a response of everything within her to God's revelation. Does the gospel ever move you and send shivers of delight into the very core of your being? Is it not true that sometimes we are too cold and clinical in our confession of faith? *If we really understand what happened when the Son of God left the courts of heaven and came into the world in this way and manner; if we grasp something of its eternal significance, of its profundity, its amazing character, how can it fail to move us, especially in our souls and in our spirits?* (Lloyd-Jones, *Magnificat*, p. 11).

Christmas is not just having a warm, nice feeling of being surrounded with friends and family. But for us, it should move us to the depths that God loved sinners so much that, at the right moment, Christ died for the ungodly. We should be deeply moved that there is a bright light burning like a lighthouse in this dark world, a Saviour who we confess as Christ the Lord!

What do Mary's words *to magnify the Lord* mean? The verb *magnify* means *to make great, to enlarge*. But you might ask, how can God be made greater? Is He not altogether great and unchangeable? We must understand that, in this passage, the verb *magnify* means *to glorify, praise, extol*. Think of a when a young man falls in love and marries – he puts his bride on a pedestal, he magnifies her! Initially, at least, he cannot make her any different than she already is, but she becomes the centre of all his thoughts and affections. Mary in this song focuses on the Lord and his mercy to sinners. In her mind and heart, God is on a pedestal! Mary's passion is that all the world would see the greatness and mercy of God. Her song is an invitation that all sinners may come to know, love and praise Jesus Christ. *Oh, magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together* (Psalm 34:3). This Christmas season let us shout the same to our family, our neighbours, and to our work-mates – O, magnify the Lord with me, O, that all may know and love Jesus Christ, O that Christ would be lifted up on a pedestal in our minds!

III. The object of Mary's Praise

The Roman Church lifts Mary up to a high pedestal, but Mary, while humbling herself, lifts up the name of God. Notice the words by which her song addresses God: He is the LORD, Jehovah, and shines in greatness and glory! The name *Lord* or *Jehovah*

emphasises that God is our covenant God who keeps His promises. Mary also makes it clear that she is but a sinner in need of the Saviour as well. Notice that she exalts the Saviour, while confessing her own submission and weakness: *For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed* (Luke 1:48).

Sometimes in reaction to the Roman Catholic veneration of Mary, we have slighted Mary's role in giving birth to the Saviour. We must honour Mary not for anything she is in herself, but for her wonderful role in redemptive history. Mary reminds us that, because she has been chosen by God to give birth to the Messiah, all generations will call her *blessed*. However, in her song, it is crystal clear that she, too, is a sinner who needs and loves the Saviour!

Notice that Mary also praises God's great power! *For He who is mighty has done great things for me*, (Luke 1:49) *He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts* (Luke 1:51). Oh how weak and hopeless is our situation in this world. Thank God for the power of His salvation. When we feel overwhelmed surrounded by the secularism and unbelief of our New Zealand culture, we must remind ourselves of God's great power to destroy the haughty imaginations of men who are wise in their own eyes.

Mary praises God for His *holiness*: *And holy is His name* (Luke 1:49). Why does Mary mention the holiness of God here? We can answer this question with another question – why did Christ have to come into this world? The answer is because God is holy and hates sin. Christ came to satisfy the justice of a holy God, so that we could be His children. Without a clear idea of God's holiness, the righteousness work and life of Christ would not be understandable.

She praises God for His *mercy*: *And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation* (Luke 1:50). While grace takes into account our guilt, mercy takes into account our misery due to our fallen nature and sin. What do we see in hospitals, in rest homes, in the streets, on TV news? Whether we see people broken physically or spiritually, we see misery. We see people lost and groaning under increasing burdens of the consequences of sin. Christmas is the message that Christ has come to show mercy to poor but penitent sinners.

MYSTERY: GOD in the flesh!*

Mystery!

Oh glorious mystery
unfolding in the Son
coming to us from heaven:
greatest of all gifts given!

Mystery of God
hidden for many ages
becoming visible
in humble manger
in His own world
a stranger!

Mystery of God
no longer distant
but in an instant
so near
so dear
first hidden
then bidden
to let His glory shine
in sovereign salvation
yours and mine!

Mystery of God
even Christ the Lord
this Christ in you
the Hope of glory!

And *they* have seen His glory
His pleading voice *they* heard:
the voice of the Good Shepherd.

And have *you* bowed before
Him?
Have *you* obeyed His word?

Wellington, July, 2007

John Goris

(*Colossians 1:26,27; 2:2)

Mary also praises God for His *faithfulness!* *He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy,*⁵⁵ *As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever* (Luke 1:54-55). When we look at the Christmas story it is essential that we remember that God had promised to send the Saviour in the Old Testament. We can scarcely read a chapter of the Old Testament without encountering God's covenant promises time and again. God made the promise of a Saviour to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15 and then repeated this promise to Abraham and to his seed. Mary has long thought of these promises and now that God is showing his faithfulness to them by fulfilling them, she breaks out in praise. Christmas means that God keeps His promises! And these promises are still valid for us and for our covenant children. When we read the Bible at home, preach the Bible at church, teach the Bible at home, church, and school, we can never

speaking enough about God's faithfulness. This faithfulness is never more clearly seen than when God sent His Son to be our Saviour.

J. C. Ryle reminds us: *Let us lay hold of this woman's example, to lay firm hold on Bible promises. It is of the deepest importance to our peace to do so. Promises are, in fact, the manna that we should daily eat, and the water that we should daily drink, as we travel through the wilderness of this world. We see not yet all things put under us. We see not Christ, and heaven, and the book of life, and the mansions prepared for us. We walk by faith and this faith leans on the promises. But on those promises we may lean confidently. They will bear all the weight we can lay on them. We shall find one day, like the virgin Mary, that God keeps His word, and that what He has spoken, so He will always in due time perform.*

Sources:

In writing this meditation, I was blessed by a sermon of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones on this passage. It can be found in: Christmas Sermons: An Exposition of the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). I also found a note on the back cover to be of interest and hopefully instructive to us. It reads as follows: *During his long ministry at Westminster Chapel, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones used the Christmas season to preach some notable Advent sermons. In his own words, 'we take advantage of this season to remind ourselves of the coming of our blessed Lord into this world.'*

J. C. Ryle always warms the mind and heart. The quotation comes from his Expository Thoughts on the Gospels.

The Rev. Leo de Vos is the minister of the Reformed Church of Wainuiomata

Bethlehem

A study in a village

Patricia van Laar

Oh, little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie,

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by....

Is this, and that it was known as 'David's City', just about all we know of the Lord's birth place? Something to sing about in a lovely, but perhaps slightly sentimental carol? It could be that busy Bethlehem, full of visitors, may have been in a chaotic state that night! But even if not, to explore the 'cities' where Jesus lived, and increase our knowledge of their history, geography and the symbolic meaning of their names, as always with Scripture, is spiritually valuable. After all, the cities recorded in the Scriptures are part of the "all the things concerning Him."

There are two towns in Palestine named Bethlehem; Bethlehem in Judah, known as Bethlehem Ephratha, and Bethlehem in Zebulun, which is close to and slightly S.E. of Mt Carmel, 6 km west of Nazareth. In the 19th century both were called Beit-Lahm, and today Bayt-Lahm (Arabic), although of course, in English always Bethlehem. The

Zebulun Bethlehem does not concern us here, although a recent Time magazine article purported to prove from archaeology that it was in the Zebulun Bethlehem that Jesus was born, an article that seemed to assert that the Judah Bethlehem scarcely existed in His day. This is one reason that Christians should take an interest in learning as much as possible about the times and places of the Bible, to combat teaching that attempts to cast doubt on the Word of God. If this were true, how is it that the history of this little town goes right back to pre-Jacob times?

The Bethlehem we are interested in, the Saviour's birth place, is about 6 miles (approx. 9 km) S.W. of Jerusalem. This town already was existing when Jacob returned to Palestine from Paddan. It was then called Ephrath or Ephrathah, meaning fertile, or fruitful. Rachel's tomb was near Bethlehem. (Gen. 35: 16, 19; 48: 7. Both names are used.)

Bethlehem in the Old Testament

Mention of Bethlehem in the Old Testament is found more frequently than we often realise. It occurs, e.g., in 1 Chronicles 2:51,

4:4, where it is associated with descendants of Caleb, a son of Judah.

Salma is called the Father of Bethlehem, a term that it seems is not fully understood, but thought probably to mean leader or chief. This Salma in at least one reliable encyclopaedia, is equated with Salmon, who married Rahab. This is not unlikely, for Salmon's descendants, who led to the royal line, lived there. To our ears, some Biblical genealogies may be difficult to follow, but this need not be a matter of undue concern. The Hebrew approach was different from ours. As you will know, the Hebrew method frequently skipped a generation or two, sometimes several, as when Jesus was referred to as the son of David. (This does not apply, of course, to the pre-flood lineage where the ages of Adam's descendants are also given.) Realising this helps us to understand why sometimes there seem so few generations in the length of time given between one prominent person and his descendants. Salma is recorded as the son of Hur, whose name does not appear at all in the lineage of Matthew's Gospel.

Over a thousand years before Jesus

was born, one of Salmon's descendants, a man named Jesse, in Jewish tradition a weaver, lived in Bethlehem, with his wife and eight sons. The youngest of these brothers was to become Israel's most famous king. He was also destined to become the ancestor of our Lord Jesus. King David, second King of Israel and founder of its royal line, became the monarch in 1040 BC. So although as King, David did not make Bethlehem his capital, as his birthplace it is called the city of David in Luke 2:4. In John 7: 42 the word 'town' is used (Greek 'village'). It was certainly not a city in our sense of the word. Just a small village perched on the slope of a hill, it was strategically placed en route to Egypt. King Rehoboam, while fortifying the nation of Judah, built up towns for defence, including Bethlehem (2 Chron. 11: 6.) On the return from exile in Babylon, 123 men of Bethlehem accompanied Zerrubabel back to Israel (Ezra 2: 21). Zerrubabel, you may recall, was of the family of David, and were it not for the curse put on the royal line, would likely have been the next king. (See Matt. 1: 11, cf. Jer. 36: 30, 37: 1.)

Jeremiah speaks of Gerath Kimham (Chimham) near Bethlehem as a stopping place for the soldiers escaping to Egypt from the Babylonians. A suggestion has been made that the caravanserai built at this place was the usual starting point for Egypt, and that it was similar to, or even may have been the same inn, as the inn where there was no place for Jesus.

King David's royal line

Two people in the life of Jesus could trace their ancestry through the 10 centuries, right back in direct line to King David. These were Joseph, chosen to care for the baby as his foster father, and Mary, his mother. The Romans who were ruling Palestine then, wanted to have a record of all the inhabitants of the country for tax purposes, (a much more difficult and complex task than faces the Department of Inland Revenue today, and no doubt just as unpopular!) They ordered all the Jews to return to their ancestral homes to be registered. Christian historians see behind this action, God's hand setting the world in motion, so that His Son would be born in Bethlehem Ephratha, as prophesied in Micah. So it was that Joseph and Mary set off from their home in Nazareth, near the Sea of Galilee, to travel by foot to Bethlehem. Mary is often pictured riding on a donkey. But the Bible does not say how they travelled, and as they were poor, as

evidenced by their poor man's offering of a dove in the temple, they probably would not be able to afford to purchase one. It is much more likely that they *walked* the long, exhausting journey to Bethlehem, a terrible trip for both of them, but especially for Mary.

You know the story well – there was no room for them in the inn, but they were able to find shelter in the stable, and there the baby Jesus was born and put to sleep in the manger – the feed box of the cattle. And there, sent by angels, came

The Shepherd and the shepherds

It was night
no time to sleep
but watch to keep
and care for sheep
entrusted to their care:
these simple, simple shepherds.

It was night
Ay! Yet so bright
no time to sleep
enough alert to keep
and gaze
and stare
for there
up there
heaven burst its bounds
such brilliant sight
such jubilant sounds
the Chief Shepherd had arrived!

Headed those simple shepherds
the Chief Shepherd for to see
Ah heralded coming!
Ah wondrous mystery!

Wellington, July, 2007

John Goris

(Luke 2; John 10)

shepherds, looking for the newborn baby. The birth in Bethlehem was a fulfilment of the prophecy mentioned, Micah 5: 2, several hundred years before Jesus' birth: *But you Bethlehem Ephratha, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times (or "from days of eternity.")*

The strategic position of Bethlehem was important in our Lord's early life. God led Joseph to remain in Bethlehem in Judah for anything up to two years after the birth of the Lord, finding for his family a house to live in. Here came the Eastern astrologers, known as the Wise Men. The wisdom of the sojourn in Bethlehem then became apparent. Imagine if the escape to Egypt had had to begin from the region of Galilee, bringing the family en route to Egypt, close to Jerusalem where Herod waited to pounce. As the starting place to Egypt, already situated on the escape route, Joseph and his wife were well on the way from Jerusalem with the Child, to the safety of the country of which prophecy said, *Out of Egypt have I called my Son.*

The Christian era

The Roman emperor Hadrian devastated Bethlehem in the 2nd century. This meant that the site of the nativity was lost for two centuries. Then the mother of the emperor Constantine, who evidently had a penchant for 'discovering' lost sites, and certainly had one for building churches, had the Church of the Nativity erected over what she presumed was the Lord's birthplace, the spot that she credited as being the site. (She also is said to have claimed knowledge of the site of Mt Sinai.) The New Bible Dictionary makes the wry comment. 'This may, or may not, be the site.'

Another suggestion is that the stable was a cave. It seems to me that there is more justification for this. Justin Martyr, in the 2nd century, declared it a cave close to the village, and some think close to burial caves. This would be symbolically appropriate for the Child who was born to die. One commentator even suggested that the swaddling clothes used by Mary to wrap the baby might have been burial cloths left in nearby caves for the purpose of use during funerals. Be this as it may, we will never know the truth.

Justinian erected a more sumptuous church, grey limestone columns and roof of cedar wood, later replaced with English oak presented by Edward IV of England. Now it is a rich structure; the Grotto of the Nativity is a crypt hewn out of rock and lined with marble, a silver star and white marble 'manger'. This I cannot describe from personal knowledge, and although it would be a privilege to have visited Israel, in some ways it seems to me that modern commercialism would spoil such an event. Perhaps those of us who have not experienced it are the privileged ones?



Bethlehem today

The name Bethlehem

Finally let us consider the meaning of the name, and its significance to us as Christians. Bethlehem = House of Bread. (Beth in Hebrew means "House.") It was given this name because in and around Bethlehem, much good food grew. The area in which Bethlehem was built was called Ephrathah, and this name means 'fertile' or 'fruitful'. The hill slopes abound with vines, figs, almonds, and olive palms. Abundant grass meant the region could well support herds, such as the flocks of sheep cared for by the shepherds. The traditional scene of the angels' visit is to the North East, but even this is not conclusively determined. Fausset's Dictionary declares the hills as more likely. When Fausset produced his learned encyclopaedia, (19th century), there was one chief street and a wholly Christian population of 3000, but this is far from the case, as you will be aware, in the 21st century.

Returning to the birth of the Lord Jesus

Bread was a staple diet for the Jews of that time. Bread represented food, food for life. How appropriate, then that Jesus came down from heaven to Bethlehem, the House of Bread. One of the names Jesus later gave to himself was the Bread of Life. He told the people, *I am the bread of life*. Then he went on to say, *The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven*

and gives life to the world. So it was a very good name for Bethlehem, the place Jesus came down to when he came from heaven, as a little baby.

'I am the bread of life.'

In John 6: 32,33, recalling the manna in the wilderness, and contrasting that with His own coming, Jesus said, 'It is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread from God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world... I am the bread of life.' This was His purpose in coming — to give life, spiritual life to you and to me.

I cannot but see the inspiration of God in all Scripture, even to the very name of the village to which Jesus came at His birth. How breathtaking is the hand of the

Lord in every tiny detail in the outworking of His plan for our salvation.

So, as we celebrate the remembrance of His coming, may we rejoice to take this Bread of Life, and so partake of the Eternal Life that He brings. May each and every one of us say, in the words of the hymn,

Thou didst leave Thy Throne and Thy Kingly Crown

When Thou camest to earth for me;

But in Bethlehem's town there was found no room

For Thy Holy Nativity.

Oh come to my heart, Lord Jesus,

There is room in my heart for Thee.

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

World in focus

Persecution intensifies in northern Nigeria

Persecution of Christians has intensified in Northern Nigeria since Sharia was enacted in the northern states. A recent Muslim pogrom in the town of Tudun Wada, Kano State, left 10 Christians dead, 61 injured and over 500 displaced, with nine churches razed. This bore all the signs of an orchestrated event: it was started by a totally unsubstantiated rumour (that a Christian had drawn a cartoon of Mohammed); it destroyed every church and Christian property in the town; and as Christians fled into the bush they were ambushed and killed by waiting Muslims. If there is no justice and no security, then such violence will spread. This will be a test that could determine how northern Christians will

fare under the new government of President Yar'Adua, a Muslim.

+Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin / No. 449 / Wed 10 October 2007

Pastor disappears, 10 Protestants arrested

Christians in Eritrea confirmed that a pastor in Asmara who disappeared remains missing. Pastor Leule Gebreab of Asmara's Apostolic Church failed to return home to his family on 12 August. 'His wife is greatly distressed about his disappearance,' a local source said. Gebreab, 35, is married with two children.

In a separate development, Eritrean authorities issued an ultimatum to Roman Catholic church leaders on 16 August,

ordering that all the church's schools, clinics, orphanages, and women's vocational training centres be turned over to the government's Ministry of Social Welfare and Labour.

More than 2,000 Eritrean Christians remain have been locked up and subjected to severe torture for their religious beliefs. A Kale Hiwot church pastor and 20 members of his congregation arrested in the town of Dekemhare in late May and early June have yet to be released from custody.

However, the Rev. Zecharias Abraham and 80 worshippers at the Mehrete Yesus Evangelical Presbyterian Church, who had been arrested during Sunday services in Asmara on April 29, were all reported released during the fourth week of May.

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

Kaua'i Reformation church opens

Approximately 45 people participated in the first service of the Kaua'i Reformation Church on 2 September.

A handful of families from all parts of the island have been meeting on a weekly basis since early summer. This inaugural service was the culmination of hard work and dedication to forming Kaua'i's only distinctly Reformed congregation.

These local efforts are being supported by Oceanside United Reformed Church (Oceanside, California) and Grace Evangelical Church (Torrance, California), member congregations of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA).

The URCNA is a federation of churches that traces its roots to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century. The body formed in North America from congregations which in large measure had emerged from the Christian Reformed Church.

+ Kauai Reformation Church, Meeting at Kauai Veterans Center (Rooms 3 & 4), 3215 Kapule Highway, Lihue, HI 96766 (808) 821-1800

Gaza church loses a leader, servant, husband and father

Rami Khader Ayyad (30) was a youth leader in Gaza Baptist Church and the director of Gaza's only Christian bookshop, 'The Teacher's Bookshop', a ministry of the Palestinian Bible Society. On Friday 5 October Rami noticed he was being stalked by men in an unregistered car. Despite this, he went out on Saturday and opened the

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Nelson, South Island

bookshop, ensuring the Word of God and the ministry of the Palestinian Bible Society remained available to Palestinians. As Rami was closing up the shop at around 4:30pm he was kidnapped. His body, with multiple stab wounds and a gunshot wound to the head, was found early on Sunday morning, dumped in a Gaza City street close to the bookshop where he had courageously and faithfully served his Lord and the people of Gaza.

While Rami is now with his Lord, his grieving pregnant wife, Pauline, and their two young children are left without him in increasingly dangerous Gaza. Please pray for this family, that God will faithfully provide for them and give them peace. Christians, who account for only 0.2 percent of Gaza's population, are extremely vulnerable and increasingly fearful. Please pray for God's merciful deliverance. Pray for an Arab awakening.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | No. 449 | Wed 10 October 2007

10 Commandments good for business

German-speaking business leaders in Paraguay have been encouraged to practice Biblical values. More than 300 leaders from the South American country took part in a Christian convention in Asuncion, 4-6 October. One of the main speakers was the chairman of the Christian Leadership Congress in Germany, Rev. Horst Marquardt, who described the Ten Commandments as an unrivaled code of conduct. According to leading economists economies flourish, when the Ten Commandments are heeded.

Marquardt quoted honesty, charity, faithfulness, and conscientiousness as core values for entrepreneurs; and also admonished business leaders to keep their professional and their spiritual life in balance

The Christian leadership convention was held for the third time in Paraguay. Conference Director Siegfried Funk was pleased with the outcome.

The convention was organised by the organisations Capellania Empresarial and MEDA in Paraguay. Capellania Empresarial promotes Christian values at the workplace and MEDA offers micro-credits to the needy. Paraguay has six million inhabitants. Among them are 35,000 Mennonites of German descent. They are leaders in certain commercial fields, for example in dairy products. Mennonites trace their origins back to the Anabaptist movement during the time of the Reformation. Their name

goes back to the Frisian theologian Menno Simons (1496-1561).

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

Terror with western complicity in Iraq

Islamic terror groups in Iraq are aiming for total ethnic and religious cleansing to 'make Allah's word supreme'. Various Western Internet Service Providers assist them by hosting the websites they use to popularise their jihad ideology and recruit militants. Most Christians in southern and central Iraq have fled north to the historic Assyrian heartland, the Nineveh plains. However, the US surge has forced al-Qaeda militants in Baghdad and other areas to flee north also. Mosul, the capital of Nineveh Province, is now an al-Qaeda hub where two Syrian Catholic priests were kidnapped on Saturday 13 October.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | No. 450 | Wed 17 October 2007

Pakistan: Talibanisation and terror

Taliban and al-Qaeda forces in north-western Pakistan have cranked up their terrorism since the government conquest of the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) in Islamabad in July. Whilst their main target has been the Pakistan Army, they are also attacking everything they deem un-Islamic, from ancient carved Bhuddas to girls' schools and especially Christian-run schools. In September, a Catholic high school in the Swat Valley, North West Frontier Province, received a letter threatening it with suicide bombings if full Islamisation is not implemented. The demand was later published in a local newspaper. The local government has chosen to align with the Islamists against the Christians and order full Islamisation including the veiling of all girls in burqas. This has caused an exodus of students. Some 1000 Christians live amongst 1.5 million Muslims in Swat Valley. Pray for God to protect and deliver them.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | No. 451 | Wed 24 October 2007

Eberhard Bush To Lecture on Karl Barth at Princeton Seminary

Eberhard Busch, professor emeritus in systematic theology at Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Germany, will deliver a lecture at Princeton Theological Seminary on 8 in the Main Lounge of the Mackay Campus Center.

Titled "A Swiss Voice": The Campaign of

the Swiss Government against the Voice of Karl Barth during the Second World War," the lecture will bring to light previously unknown archival documents relating to the Swiss government's campaign to silence Barth's political speech in the face of potential National Socialist retaliation.

Dr. Eberhard Busch is a world-renowned Barth scholar and was Barth's last assistant. Busch's research interests lie in Barth's life and works, John Calvin and the history of the Reformed Reformation, Reformed confessions in past and present, the "church struggle" in Germany from 1933 to 1945, the history of pietism in the 18th Century, and Reformed identity.

Busch is the author of the definitive biography of Barth, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiography Texts* (first English edition by SCM Press, London, 1976). In 2004, he published *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology*, which has since become a standard introduction to Barthian theology.

+ *Princeton Theological Seminary*, PO Box 821, 64 Mercer Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08542-0803

Northeast Associate Reformed Presbytery

Approximately 50 presbyters and guests attended Northeast Presbytery's fall meeting 11 and 12 October at the Kirkridge Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Manchester, Maryland. The Presbytery received five Korean ministers into its membership who were received under care at the spring Presbytery meeting.

Also received into membership was the Rev. Y. H. Chung, missionary pastor of the Church of the Lord in Osaka, Japan, and Mr. S.S. Yim as a licentiate from the Korean American Presbyterian Church. Yim is a pastoral assistant at the Hyo Shin Church.

Presbytery also received the Rev. Ian Duguid upon letter of transfer from the Ascension Presbytery, Presbyterian Church in America, to labor out of bounds as a college professor.

The Presbytery received the Hyo Shin Bible Presbyterian Church, the Joyful Church, and the Yae Dam Presbyterian Church as member congregations of the Presbytery and received under care the Philadelphia Korean Presbyterian Church, Glen Burney, Maryland. Northeast approved appointment of a commission to organize the Faith Presbyterian Church of Scranton, Pennsylvania, and to install the Rev. Ron Bell as pastor.

+ *Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church*, 1 Cleveland St., Greenville South Carolina, 29601-3696 (864) 232-8297

A feminine focus

So what should I read, then?

Sally Davey

Is your idea of bliss curling up on a winter's day in front of the fire, cup of tea beside you and a good book on your lap? Mmm... Or dropping into bed after an exhausting day and opening the engrossing story you're part-way through? Most women find solace in reading, and I'm certainly no exception. Have you ever wondered why we like it so much? There are some good reasons, aren't there?

For a start, reading is enjoyable. It is pleasurable and interesting. The imagination delights in a good story, well told, about attractive characters with whom we can identify. Whatever the book is about, if the writer has set it in a time, place or situation that the reader can imagine herself in – with pleasure – then reading it gives hours of enjoyable experience.

Secondly, reading is relaxing. We have plenty of stresses and trials in our lives, and not all of them can be solved by applying a bit of extra physical, mental or emotional effort. Sometimes we just have to leave the problem, shut the door firmly on it, and think of something else. Fill the mind with something other than the problem that's wearing us down. A good book can be helpful, taking us out of our own world and putting us in another. Absorbed in the issues of someone else's life (real or imaginary), we forget the troubles and distractions of our own. Frequently, a few chapters spent in another time or place are enough to relax us completely.

Reading, in particular, helps many people get to sleep. Partly this is because it helps us 'close down' on the concerns of the day; thus resting the mind from re-running conversations, re-visiting decisions and formulating potential plans for the next day. A dry, difficult book can be even more helpful than a gripping story – and put you off to sleep in no time. (I was once lent a historical article that worked – in the first paragraph – three nights in a row!)

Learning while reading

But let's think a little more about the books that take us to another time, or country, or culture, or situation in life. While these rest and restore the mind, they also – if they are accurate depictions, well-written – teach us something worthwhile. Have you ever thought you might be learning when you're reading a good story? You may have thought that reading for learning is what you do when you read 'difficult', 'heavy' 'dry' books – things like systematic theologies, history textbooks, or books that discuss the philosophy of the day or analyse political trends... The sort of book that improves your mind but requires a lot of mental effort. To be sure, we all need to read these kinds of books sometimes. These are the kinds of books that teach us most directly. But have you ever thought about the ways that good fiction teaches? Yes, novels may also educate us; giving us understanding of different times, places and cultures; and most importantly, of the complex truths about human nature.

This might surprise you, if you've always thought of novels as light, relaxing and non-demanding reading. How can they help us grow, and become wise in the things of life? Some examples: Have you ever read a story set in Reformation times, and realised, at the end of it, that you understand a whole lot better the pressures that came upon believers' consciences back then? Or a novel based in Victorian England that puts you inside the mind of an impoverished governess? You'll really see, from the inside out, how it felt to be 'the odd woman out' in a household; excluded by the family she was employed to teach, and kept at arm's length by the servants - compared to whom she was a social superior. Have you ever read stories set in China, or Africa, or Russia? If they are good ones, they will greatly help your knowledge of life in these cultures, and the ways people's different beliefs shape their lives in different ways. You'll also learn some things that make you realise that human nature has certain basic similarities, wherever people live. That's just one more reminder that Scripture speaks to all mankind, wherever and whenever human beings have lived.

The value of good novels

Fiction can teach many things – but only if

the novels you are reading are good ones. So, it is important to ask what kinds of things make a book good. One of the first things a good book does is deal wisely, and with insight, with some big question of life. These big questions concern things like truth, sin and salvation, suffering, trials, love, perseverance and the like. For instance, a book may explore the ways people sometimes suffer for the sake of integrity – or conversely, the kinds of consequences they reap if they forsake integrity. An example of a modern novel that deals perceptively with such an issue (in this case with the evil inherent in the human heart) is William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. Perhaps you studied it at school? It reminds us of what humans (even us) are capable of, given the opportunity. A good novel like this leaves you with new insight into the human condition. In the Narnia chronicles C.S. Lewis explored the themes of selfishness, greed, temptation, forgiveness and the love Christ demonstrated when He died for his people. Many centuries ago Aesop's fables also dealt with great themes; as did Shakespeare's plays in the time of Elizabeth I's England. Even lighter novels contain wisdom: Jane Austen's novels deal with foolishness and its consequences, the effect of family on individuals' happiness and prospects in life. Many of the novels written in Victorian England explore such themes as self-denial for the sake of others; the ways individuals might deal with circumstances in life beyond their control; and what forces tempt people to give up their faith. These are big and important questions; and writers that probe them with clarity and insight definitely teach us about human nature.

Good fiction writers are generally shrewd observers of human character, and they draw men, women and children that really live and breath. The characters they create are believable; they will act as people really do act in different situations. Their speech will live; their motives will make sense. We will identify with them. We will love the good ones without for a minute thinking they have no flaws. We will despise the weak ones and loathe the selfish ones; yet realise, because the writer has drawn them well, that they are complex, and not altogether undeserving of pity. In other words, the characters in good novels are definitely not one-dimensional. We often

see how people can change, and develop over time through humbling lessons or by gaining a better grasp of the truth.

Good novels use good language

Finally, good novels are marked by good use of the English language. By this I don't mean lots of long, difficult words – or weighty, complex sentences. Good use of language means interesting, varied vocabulary, which enables the writer to convey his thoughts expressively and clearly. Often when a writer puts something with an unusual turn of phrase, or explains a point in extra-vivid descriptive words, the reader is able to appreciate his meaning with new eyes. I absolutely love P.G. Wodehouse's *Jeeves* novels. Wodehouse's plots are really nonsense – though very funny indeed. But it is the way he says things that delight me every time. His verbs sparkle: Jeeves 'shimmered in' or 'glided' to Wooster's rescue – how much better than 'raced or 'arrived in answer to the bell.' It is a mark of good writing that clichés (over-used expressions) are avoided and fresh, imaginative ways of saying things are used instead. Certainly, we can learn a lot from reading good writing. Our own vocabularies get stretched; and we are going to learn much more precise and interesting ways of saying things. We ourselves will become better communicators.

Other qualities in good novels

Good writers also craft their plots (story-lines) carefully. It is fascinating, for instance, to follow the winding mysteries in Wilkie Collins's detective novels – he was a master of plot-invention. Reading novels like these teaches us to pay more attention to detail when reading other narratives. Are you an attentive reader? Try practising with Wilkie Collins, Dorothy Sayers or Agatha Christie.

Good novelists are also masters of conversation. Try reading the witty repartee of Jane Austen in *Pride and Prejudice*. You'll be impressed at what may be said decisively without rudeness; fluently without hesitation, repetition or redundancy; and tenderly, without sentimental mushiness. As Winston Churchill always maintained, the best way to learn to speak well is to read good speech. Why not take him at his word?

Picking out the good

But good books are only useful to a reader if she has eyes to see what can be learned from them. In other words, we need to

develop discernment. How do we do this? I think there are a number of ways. Most of us will have studied English literature at high school – possibly even senior high school or university. These courses specifically teach the skills of identifying and appreciating the themes of good novels, studying the characters, noting their interaction with each other, watching their development in the course of the story, and so on. We usually learn to recognise important imagery, symbolism and other features of the writer's craft. This is a very helpful start for a lifetime of appreciating, and benefiting from good literature.

Another thing that helps is becoming familiar with the main themes and principles of the Bible. By studying the Scriptures we become conversant with the big questions of life, and the Bible's answers to these questions. Then when we come to read novels, we are more easily able to assess whether the writer has wisdom, and whether he has shone some real insight into eternal human problems. We're also going to be much better at recognising faulty assessments of human actions, wrong solutions

to human relationship problems, and so on. As we grow older, if we're continually applying biblical wisdom to everyday life, we're going to become better and better students of life, and will much more quickly see it when characters in novels don't ring true, or are drawn in a shallow way. Weak, shoddy fiction simply won't satisfy any more.

Where are they?

By now, I'm sure you're asking yourself: where on earth do I find good books? There are several answers to this question. First, and most simple – ask someone who reads a lot: an older, discerning friend, perhaps. She will tell you what she's enjoyed, and read many times over; and most importantly, *why* she loves particular books that never fail to offer something rewarding every time they're re-read. Then again, perhaps you grew to love some of the books you studied at school, but never tried others written by the same author. Many of us enjoyed *Pride and Prejudice* or *Jane Eyre* – but how many have read the rest of Jane Austen's and Charlotte

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Bronte's works? Try them – you won't be disappointed! Have you enjoyed learning about a particular period in history? Why not read good novels set in that period – or better still, the literature actually written in that period? This will give you great primary source-material for pursuing your interest. I'm interested in Victorian England, for instance, and also in the 1920s; so I've made a concerted effort to read as many novels written in those times as I can find. What I've learned has been fascinating. How do you find what's been written? Any general social history of a given time (and there are many good, well-illustrated ones around) will usually have a chapter on the literature of the period, with plenty of titles for you to look out. And if you're just looking for a guide to good books of any type, try *Honey for a Woman's Heart*¹. It has many ideas.

Leaving aside the bad

So far, this has been a discussion of good books. But what about bad books, or what *might* be bad books? Often I've had conversations with concerned mothers, looking for books that would be suitable for their children; and with conscientious young women who want to read only what would be pleasing to God. I admire them for their desire to be careful about books. They're worried that factors like bad language, or violence, or sexual references or sex scenes may spoil an otherwise good book, and make it unsuitable for them or their children to read. How can they be sure, they ask, that a novel is going to be safe reading for them?

Here are some interim thoughts I've had as I've been trying to help. To begin with, it seems to me there are degrees of how bad the language and the immorality may be, and that affects one's conclusion. In addition, a lot depends on how these things are portrayed. Does the author put the bad language frequently and as a matter of course into the characters' mouths? Is it all of them who use it? Or is it only some of the worse characters, who later change their behaviour? Are otherwise good people depicted as using bad language (thus 'normalising' it)? And so on. In respect of sexual immorality - is it, too, treated as normal behaviour? Are its serious consequences commented on, pointed out, described? Or is it dealt with at great length, in graphic detail? These kinds of portrayal are wrong, and would suggest such novels would not be helpful to read. But if the writer does not dwell

on the details pruriently, and does indicate the ways such acts are wrong, this may not be an unhelpful book to read. Think, for instance, of the Bible's portrayal of David's adultery with Bathsheba. In 2 Samuel 11 we learn that David slides into his situation because he is not where he ought to be, as king. It was the time of year 'when kings go out to battle', yet here is David, lounging around in the afternoon in Jerusalem. And with roving eyes, on the roof of his house. The writer does not (of course) tell us what Bathsheba looked like in her bath, or what actually went through David's mind. But we certainly learn that they committed adultery; we certainly learn what evil lengths David went to in trying to cover it up; and we are left in no doubt that he reaped some terrible consequences of his sin. That is the way such stories should be told. Similarly, think of the way sexual pleasure is described in the Song of Solomon – not graphically or earthily; but poetically, using the imagery of a lovely garden. The point I am trying to make is that the mere presence of profanity or sexual references in a novel does not necessarily make it a bad one. It all depends on how they are depicted; and with what effect.

The place of romance novels

Then we come to a major chunk of the fiction written especially for women, and which many women love: romantic novels. Who doesn't enjoy a tenderly-told story of attraction, love, courtship – and marriage? This is a highlight of life we're either looking forward to, looking back on with fond memories – or still enjoying! Romance has always made novels interesting: many, if not most of the great classic novels have been at least partly love stories, after all. Is there a problem with reading them? Not always, but at times there is. For instance, if a major part of our reading consists of romantic fiction, we really should be asking ourselves: am I feeding myself a diet that accurately reflects the importance of romance in the Christian's life? Is romance, and the emotional excitement generated as I read these novels, something I should be giving so much time to? Or should I be applying my reading time to other types of books, such as how to live the Christian life, what the Bible teaches about God, or church history? Or other novels that deal with a wider range of life-issues? (Remember, a lot of modern light romantic fiction is written simply to make money, not to make a point about life.) It is a bit of a

worry to see teenagers flocking around the library shelves that contain these books. How heavy is their diet of reading in this area?

Then what about the downside: the unreality of much of it? Much of popular romantic fiction is what we might call escapist literature. The sorts of romances they depict are often idealised. The settings are exotic, and the men are never boorish or inconsiderate. Instead they are rich, attentive, sensitive and romantic (and of course, good-looking). If the heroines are not already sophisticated and successful, they are made so by the money and status of the hero – whom they marry. I'm overstating the case, of course, but this is the general trend. The effect on women who get too engrossed in such fiction is often gnawing disappointment with their own lives - and the men in their lives. The Bible calls it discontent. As Elisabeth Elliot so wisely reminds us in her book *Let Me Be a Woman*, we must never expect any man to fulfill all our longings. No man can ever do this: only Christ can ever fulfill all our righteous desires.

And what about Christian novels?

Finally, what about Christian novels? There is a large and growing international market for these books, and there are many titles to choose from. They are often written in longish series, and you can follow the story from one volume to the next. Lots of Christian woman like them; and one of the reasons is that they seem predictably safe: there is no bad language, no sex scenes, and the main characters claim to follow Jesus. I've read quite a few in the past 15 years or so, because I wanted to find out what they are like. But sadly, for the most part I've found them disappointing. Too many of them are not well written. The language is flat and unvaried, the characters are poorly drawn and not really believable. Often there are historical inaccuracies if set in a different time period. Not many of them address major issues of life, and they seem to focus on romance or mystery or both. In many cases the Christians depicted in them live lone-ranger lives as far as churches are concerned: they do not appear to be functioning members of any body of believers – at least, not so far as it would seem to have a discernable effect on their lives. They do not seem to read the Scriptures much; and their view of guidance is often based on subjective feelings or an idea that God is speaking directly to them in their minds. They are

not a good model for living the Christian life. (I know that in stating these points so briefly the criticism appears harsh; but I am more than willing to explain in more detail.) There are, of course, exceptions, and I'm very glad of them. Elizabeth Prentiss's *Stepping Heavenward* (the story of a young woman growing in faith through difficulties in her life) is one; and some of Francine

Rivers's novels (such as *Leota's Garden*, which deals with old age and euthanasia) are others.

Reading good novels is a delightful and instructive pastime. May we choose wisely and well, growing in our appreciation for them – and reaping the benefits of time well spent.

Postscript: If anyone would like help locating the books I've mentioned in this article, suggestions for good books to read, or further clarification of any of these points, I would be happy to try and assist.

(Endnotes)

1 Gladys Hunt, *Honey for a Woman's Heart* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2002)

Missions in focus

Janice Reid

Snapshots

Alex and Renona Munro served in the Philippines for 26 years, planting new congregations. During some of that time they were partially supported by the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. After they left the Philippines, they spent a short time in Ukraine to help in the beginning of a new Presbyterian congregation there.

More recently, they have been working for the Bible League for the last 11 years. In 1996 they began ministry with the Bible League utilizing their experience in church planting through the training of others. They have worked with hundreds of church planters and seen through them hundreds of new congregations begun.

Alex served for 3 years as director of Eastern Europe ministries for the Bible League, and for the last 10 years he has held the position of director of Middle East ministries. He has also been Director of Church Planter Training, working in Russia, Central Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, China and some other countries of Asia.

The stories below come from some of the church planters the Munros have worked with; they are snapshots that reflect the results of Alex and Renona's ministry. Names and places have been changed for the safety of those described.

The dressmaker

One lady worker told this story at our church planter training workshop. She had graduated from a class in dressmaking. She began her new business. Into the pocket of each dress she made, she put a tract with Scripture verses. One Muslim lady who received a dress read the tract and became a believer. She desired to marry a Christian man. She later met a Muslim man who wanted to marry a Christian lady. Through her influence he also became a Christian and they were married. The dressmaker has seen 5 people become followers of Christ through this gentle ministry. (*this story comes from an Egyptian church worker*)

The sword struck my heart

"I acknowledged Jesus as my Savior at the age of 14. There were only a few believers in my congregation in the beginning. I prayed that somehow God would use me to build His Kingdom. I used my own money to buy Christian books. I was poor and there was a lack of funds. The Lord will provide, I thought. The Bible had many examples for me to follow. However, some of my Muslim acquaintances tried to put down my commitment to the Christian's God. I was listening to them and then the thought came to me, 'Why not just steal money? It is much easier this way'. Immediately I felt something like a sword

strike my heart! I came home and cried. Why was I being tempted like this? I was so ashamed of myself. I opened my Bible and the Holy Spirit led me to Ephesians 2:10, 'For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do'. God changed my attitude through this verse that my life was meant for God to do good for myself and others, and not evil."

What is a life really worth?

"I am 40 years old. I grew up in a normal family. We went to church but we lived as nominal Christians. There was no vitality to our lives. I believed I was a good person. One day I discovered that I was a nominal Christian and it scared me. I wrote an article in the newspaper. I knew it was a good and true article, but I also knew that for some people this could be cause them to attack me, even physically. I was very much afraid. What was my life really worth? It was then I felt the closeness of Jesus. I knew I was not ready to die. In my life I had had a good influence on people, but I lacked the knowledge of just how valuable is each life. I realized that my life really only had value in Jesus Christ. I became a true follower of Jesus not only in name but in my heart."

Influencing the influential

"I explained to a Muslim man the second (Project Philip) Booklet (Who Is Jesus). The man studied it over a number of days. He said, 'My father is an important man in the Mosque, but I would like to be baptized.' He was baptized and is now a member of a local congregation." (*this story from an*

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

Egyptian church planter)

Let's not continue working

"I began to serve God in sharing the Gospel. I was going to a place where there were many Muslims, so I changed my name so not to hinder my witness. I went with a friend to this village where there were no churches. A man welcomed us and we began a meeting. When we started the meeting people were not interested. They had other amusements and a bad lifestyle

and speech. I was discouraged and told my friend, 'Let's not continue working with these people. My friend said "No, they need the gospel'. So we continued and with the help of others we were able to see God changing the lives of some of these people."

My husband abused me

"I was away from God; did not go to church; had no fellowship and never confessed my sins. I was bad. All my family was the same. My husband abused me. There was

no peace in my home. I was a diabetic for 3 years. Now I thank God because He sought to give me peace and He cared for me. I reached out to Him like the lady in the Bible who reached out and touched the hem of His garment. He took away all my sins. Jesus is now in my home! I am now a servant of God because He brought me from darkness to light – I am a new creation. He changed me, my husband, my home and now I fellowship with a group of believers and serve God."

Conferences in focus

A Report on the Preaching the Kingdom Conference

Held Thursday 26th to Friday 27th September at the campus of the Reformed Theological College in Geelong, Victoria

The annual conference is designed primarily to equip pastors in their preaching. Approximately 90 people attended the conference, which was opened on Thursday morning by Principal Henk DeWaard.

The first session was led by Professor Alistair McEwen. He addressed the subject of the Kingdom in the Old Testament. He spoke of the many Old Testament references revealing the Great Kingdom of Jehovah and the prophecies that pointed to the One who would come as King. Much time was spent considering the Messianic Psalms and pausing often to sing of the hope and joy that they point the Lord's people towards. Professor McEwen ended by assuming the attitude of an Old Testament saint and challenging the rest of the speakers to show him how the Old Testament promises of the King are revealed.

His call was answered immediately by Professor Steve Voorwinde, who addressed the subject of the Kingdom in the New Testament. He spoke from Mark 1:15 and Christ's declaration that 'the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.' He explained the meaning of the Kingdom being both here now, and still coming. The 'already and not yet' status

of the Kingdom is completed by the call to repent and believe in the gospel.'

After lunch, Professor Bill Berends delivered a multimedia presentation on the subject of worldviews. He demonstrated how all preaching comes from within a particular mindset, and urged us to preach from a Kingdom mindset. This means we are to aim for amazement, antithesis, and anticipation; words and concepts which were regular outcomes of Jesus' preaching.

The afternoon gave us all a couple of hours to fellowship and rest before we gathered again for the conference Dinner. Following dinner, a time of worship included the joyful singing of some kingdom related songs and the reading of some kingdom related Scripture passages. Rev. Voorwinde preached a sermon on the Kingdom parable of the leaven in Matthew 13:33.

On Friday, Principal Henk DeWaard began the day with a lecture on the Kingdom and Mission. He looked at Matthew 24:1-14 and dwelt on the link between theology and mission. He encouraged us to preach the gospel of the Kingdom as a sign of impending consummation; Christ is coming and His Kingdom will end with judgment.

After morning tea, Professor Murray Capill presented us with the Confessions of a pietistic preacher. Professor Capill used his time to make 'confession' for the failings of frequently proclaiming a 'small' gospel focused on individual spirituality rather than a 'large' gospel of Kingdom transformation.

Henk DeWaard then introduced six Indonesian guests who had travelled here also for the conference. Following this, a panel

discussion discussed previously submitted audience questions.

After lunch, Bill Berends spoke again on preaching a Kingdom lifestyle. He set a number of different complex ethical situations before us. He then explained the merit of an ethical approach that grows out of a Kingdom perspective.

Murray Capill ended the conference by preaching to us from Luke 4:16-21. He proclaimed the excellencies of the gospel message and how needed it was amongst the broken in our societies. And yet, because the Kingdom of God is not just a message, churches need to be characterised by ministry and not just preaching. A challenging question he posed was, 'What would the community say if your church closed?' Would we be missed?

All in all, this was a wonderfully invigorating couple of days. The lectures were thorough and challenging. A wide and eclectic gathering of conference attendees from different churches were blessed with the challenge of Scripture itself. The hospitality extended by the R.T.C. staff was wonderfully warm and more than compensated for the windy and wet weather. Most attendees stayed at the campus which has ample room for accommodation. In addition, the kitchen staff were very creative and plentiful in the provision of meals.

The lectures themselves are available on CD in MP3 format from the College. However, nothing compares to the real life experience of participating in the fellowship that surrounds the conference. Ministers from Australia and New Zealand are able to get acquainted or re-acquaint themselves.

It also provides an opportunity for Kiwis to meet up again with some of the ex-pats who are now in Australia.

This annual conference makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing equipping

of our ministers. May God continue to bless the preaching conference and use it to strengthen the preaching of His servants and bless His congregations in these countries.

Andrew Holtslag (Andre is presently serving a Vicariate in the Reformed Church of Pukekohe)



Kiwi attendees (including former Kiwis!) of the Preaching the Kingdom Conference – R.T.C. Geelong, September, 2007.

Back row (L-R) - Robert VanWichen, Andre Holtslag, Michael Willemse, John Zuidema, Craig Van Echten, Nigel Cunningham, Andrew Nugteren, Alan Douma, Reinier Noppers.

Front Row (L-R) - Laurel VanWichen, Hans Vaatstra, David Capill, Trudy Zuidema, Murray Capill, Betty Wiersma, Bill Wiersma, Bill Berends.

Weekend with Joey

A review of the New Zealand Conference on Reformation Theology held in Christchurch in October

By Tim Sterne

I must say, the last thing I expected to hear in the middle of the afternoon at a Reformed conference on worship was an exhortation to be more physically active during church services. Perhaps at an Anglican or Pentecostal conference, but Reformed? However, that was one of the areas in which Dr Joey Pipa issued a very thought-provoking and Biblically-based chal-

lenge to our congregations. Why do we sit down for our public Scripture readings when in the Bible people usually stood to hear Scripture read? Why do we sit down to pray when the three body positions described in the Bible for prayer are standing, kneeling and lying prostrate? And why don't we ever raise our eyes and hands heavenward when we pray?

But there was much more to this conference than lectures about hand-raising. Most of the time was spent on sound explanation of why our services are the way they are – something desperately needed in a denomination so steeped in tradition. In fact, at times that tradition was a little overbearing, with a lot of supporting evidence coming from Calvin and Luther when

perhaps what people needed to hear was the Scriptural backing for the views of those great reformers. Despite this, by Saturday night our services made a lot more sense to me than they ever have before. And that, I guess, was the point.

Disappointingly, that was the main point of the whole conference. The title, *Worship*, was something of a misnomer (although explanations did appear in the promotional material). Corporate Worship would have been more accurate. While there is nothing wrong with studying the ins and outs of our church services, worship is a lot more than that. Everything we do should be worship, and a conference focusing on our corporate worship services may not have been addressing our denomination's



Dr Pipa in Mangere, Auckland.



Serving the soup



The Salad Bar



Reformation Conference

greatest need. However, I digress.

One of Dr Pipa's biggest strengths is in providing a structure and a framework within which we can think about issues like corporate worship. For instance, being able to see the differences between the elements, circumstances and forms of corporate worship, fosters far clearer thinking than a vague feeling that dancing

in church 'just doesn't seem right'.

However, what I enjoyed most about Dr Pipa's input wasn't actually his teaching, but his testimony. Reformed folk aren't exactly known for being ready to present public testimonies at the drop of a hat, so it was refreshing and upbuilding to hear, during some down time, Dr Pipa's story of how God has worked in his life. If you

have the opportunity to speak to him, ask him to share it with you.

A common theme throughout the sessions was the responsibility that leading a worship service entails, particularly that of 'framing the prayers of the congregation' (to paraphrase Dr Pipa). Practical application: pray for our ministers and elders.

It was sometimes difficult to take notes from the lectures — PowerPoint or a detailed handout would have been a welcome enhancement — but there was a wealth of valuable information to absorb nevertheless. I have to admit to feeling a little Biblically illiterate on several occasions though, as Dr Pipa had a habit of rushing through some points with phrases like 'of course we all know that...' I often didn't know. Perhaps I should have.

All this was punctuated by powerful hymn singing, with Dr Ron Newton providing appropriately definitive organ accompaniment. And the lunch on Saturday was deliciously hearty.

But aside from the food — spiritual and physical — there was also the fellowship. In a building which was probably half-full most of the time, there were representatives from a variety of congregations including the Reformed Churches of Dovedale, Bishopdale, Cornwall St and Oamaru, Ashburton Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Grace Baptist Church and others. It was uplifting to see 'we who are many' form-

ing one body to learn together. And it was encouraging to catch up with those not often caught up with.

If you're a regular attendee at these conferences, there's probably not much more I can say to you except 'see you next year'. But if you didn't attend this year's conference, and you have no intention of attending next year's, allow me to put forward a few reasons why you should reconsider.

One of the thrills of being a Christian is acknowledging the fact that Jesus Christ is king of this world and king of your life. In Acts, He is described as 'Lord of all'¹.

Consequently, Paul tells us, whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we should do it all 'to the glory of God'². So it follows that we should put a lot of effort into finding out just how we can glorify God in every area of our lives. And if you come to one of these conferences, chances are God will teach you something new about how you can glorify Him.

It's also worth considering the impact your presence might have on others. 'Behold, how good and how pleasant it is', writes David, 'For brothers to dwell together in unity'³. I mentioned earlier how encouraging and uplifting it was to spend time

learning about God in a half-full building of brothers and sisters in Christ. Imagine how much more uplifting it would have been to have to sit outside on the lawn because the main auditorium was overflowing with Christians eager to learn how to glorify God. Just turning up to events like these can make a big difference.

And hey, if neither of those reasons excites you, you could always turn up for the free lunch — God sometimes works in mysterious ways!

1 Acts 10:36

2 1 Corinthians 10:31

3 Psalm 133:1

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

Wedding banns: Congregation, Natalie Huysdens and Luke Bylsma have indicated their desire to be united in marriage. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place at the Reformed Church of Avondale, on Saturday 13 October 2007 at 2.30pm. Frank and Ann Huysdens extend an Open Invitation to the congregation to attend the wedding of Natalie and Luke, which will be followed by afternoon tea in the hall.

Special Session Meeting. The search for a new minister continues; a special meeting of Session has been arranged for next Saturday morning after the Men's breakfast at which members will meet with Andre Holtslag, currently vicar in Pukekohe. Session has also extended an invitation to David Waldron, currently vicar in Hastings, to visit again in November. Br Waldron is currently preparing for his Presbytery exam early in November.

Congregational meeting: All members are invited to attend a congregational meeting on Wednesday 24 October. The purpose of the meeting is to give formal approval to proceed with the building project which will include a new hall, renovations to the

old manse and construction of additional car parks in front of the kindergarten. Further details will be in the handout in your pigeon hole. If you can't make it to the meeting, please vote using the proxy form which will be handed out.

Family prayer & praise items: Congratulations to Rinze and Ties Gjaltema who celebrate their 55th wedding anniversary on Tuesday. We give thanks to God for the years He has given them and pray that He will continue to bless and keep them in His care.

Bishopdale

Family Fun Day - keep Saturday the 3rd of November free for an afternoon and evening of family fun. Exciting events planned include a car rally, fish and chip tea, movie and pot luck dessert. This day is open to all church members - young and old. Get a car load together and watch this space for further details!

Pastoral: Jake and Thelmarie Couprie have been blessed with a foster child, a little boy named Jayden. He is eight months old. May the Lord guide and richly bless you as you seek to provide a home for Jayden.

Pastoral. On Wednesday, 31 October, we will have a combined praise, prayer and fellowship service here at 7:30pm. Please note this occasion in your diary. This is a wonderful opportunity for the three Christchurch Reformed churches to get together for a time of worship and mutual encouragement.

Craig van Echten will be doing a summer

internship here. He is expected to be here from early December to early February. He will be preaching here and elsewhere, do some visiting, and will be helping Robert van Wichen with the National Youth Camp.

Family Camp 2007

The RCNZ Family Camp 2007 will run from 27 December 2007 to 3 January 2008 at Finlay Park, Lake Karapiro. Come and join us for a time of wonderful fellowship, relaxation, fun and recreation in beautiful and tranquil surroundings. Details and registration forms are available in your church.

If you have any enquiries please contact

Helen Wassenaar
(tel. 09 – 828 3938 e-mail ahwassenaar@paradise.net.nz) or
Johan Swanepoel
(tel. 09 - 426 1428 e-mail johan.swanepoel@xtra.co.nz)

We look forward to seeing many old timers as well as new faces at Family Camp this year.

**Kind regards,
Auckland Presbytery Family Camp Committee**

*It is with thankfulness to God
that we plan to celebrate the*

50th Wedding Anniversary

of

Carl and Joyce Larsen



**married at the
Reformed Presbyterian Church
of Bucklands Beach, Auckland
on 18th January 1958**

*"We are more than conquerors
through Him who loved us."
Romans 8:37*

Congratulations and love from your children and grandchildren:

Christine and John Willson
Charlotte
(Fairlie, South Island)

Janice and Paul Eshuis
Daniel, Ruth, David, Peter
(Drouin, Australia)

Vanessa and Rowan Cammell
Aimee, Justin
(Auckland)

Susan Larsen
(Wellington)

Robyn and Chris Good
Emily, Kirstin, Jessica, Richard
(Palmerston North)

**6 Te Akau Crescent
Bucklands Beach
Auckland
Ph: 09-534-1665**

Second minister. Unfortunately, the Session is pretty much back to square one again with respect to calling a second minister. The calling committee worked through a short list of six names, and eventually eliminated all but one—Rev. Ralph Pontier from the United Reformed Church. We were in the process of arranging for him to come here with his wife from the United States. But then he received a call from a particularly needy congregation in Canada, and just last week indicated that he is highly likely to accept that call. But we are still hopeful. There are still quite a number of potential candidates whom we will now investigate further. If you have any questions or suggestions, please speak to one of the calling committee (that is, Jos Bosma, Rob Moot, Tony Posthuma, Neville Watson or Robert van Wichen)

Bucklands Beach

Pastoral. Sr Bud Ferguson was taken to be with the Lord (and her beloved Ivan) on Tuesday evening this week. She had been admitted to the North Shore Hospital on Saturday afternoon with a bleeding ulcer. While experiencing a real sense of loss, there is also joy and thanksgiving. In the past months Bud often expressed a longing to be with the Lord. She is now at home with the Lord which is better by far. May the hope and joy of the faith that sustained our dear sister all her life also be real for the family and for all of us who knew and loved her. Bud and Ivan were founding members of our church in Bucklands Beach who for many years gave themselves as faithful and willing servants in many and various ways. Praise God for their faithfulness and generosity. The funeral took place here at Bucklands Beach yesterday afternoon.

Christchurch

Pastoral. The Rev. Jim Klazinga and family are shifting to Timaru where Jim, Lord willing, will be instrumental in establishing a Reformed church. We did explore this path before, years ago, but now we have a firm contact in Timaru. We do pray that the Lord will bless his efforts and that we may see another church being planted in the biggest city between here and Dunedin. He will have a job waiting for him when he arrives and hopefully a house. Please remember this in your prayers.

Wedding banns. Unless there are lawful objections the marriage of Pieter Havelaar jr and Jasmine Plug will take place on the 24th of November 2007 at 11.00 am at the Free Reformed Church of West Albany,

Western Australia.

Pastoral. We congratulate Jouke van der Woude and Jannie... van der Woude on their wedding yesterday in Hanmer! Our prayer is that you may be a blessing to each other as you seek to serve the Lord's together.

Dovedale

We Pastoral notes. We are delighted that Miss Jung Hwa Ryu has asked to become a member of our church. The elders had an encouraging meeting with Jung Hwa to talk about her faith and her desire to be a member and have joy in announcing that, Lord willing, she will publicly profess her faith on 4 November; Mr Brauning's last day with us.

Church camp: Planning is well under way for our annual church camp to be held at Glenroy from 18-20 April 2008, mark these dates on your calendar. Church camps are always full of fun, fellowship and great food. Plan to come along for a camp not to be missed! The theme will be "The Fruit of the Spirit". Fees and speaker will be announced in the new year. Any queries see Derrick and Frances Watson, or Louis and Joanna Couperus.

Dunedin

Pastoral Notes. It's good to be home again after a three-week absence due to a preaching conference, visits to family members in Australia and visits to the Reformed Churches of Toowoomba and Gosnells both of whom are looking for ministers. At this stage I have been placed on a duo, with Jonathon Deenick, by the session of the Reformed Church of Gosnells. This is a relatively large Perth congregation who are looking for a second minister. Rev John De Jong sent me an e-mail on Wednesday night as follows: "Please pass on our thanks to the Dunedin congregation for their willingness to spare you for the time that you were away. Following on from our visit with you, Session last night decided to present you (and Jonathon Deenick) as a duo to the Gosnells congregation for the position of second minister. "In the meantime we keep you in our prayers with these times of consideration, election and calling being unsettling for yourselves and families, and in Hans's case, also the congregation in Dunedin. We pray that God will use this process to reveal his will in this matter both to us and yourselves."

Hamilton

Pastoral: Congratulations to Mrs Ali Vethaak

who turned 90 this last Tuesday. Van hartel-ijk gefeliciteerd! We rejoice with you and your family on reaching this milestone.

Pastoral: There was a good turn out at the congregational meeting on Tuesday evening and good discussion with regards to session's proposal to employ Pieter van der Wel for two days a week. It was heartening also to see a clear majority of those present indicating support for moving in this direction. Some notes have been added to clarify the proposal and some minor amendments made – a copy of this is in your pigeon-hole. Voting will take place after the morning service on 28 October. To be carried, the proposal requires a 2/3 majority vote from the congregation.

Session Report. Vicariate request - It was noted from the presbytery agenda that Daniel Wilson (a ministry student from Greenville Seminary) who did a summer 'vicariate' in Mangere has requested to be considered for a vicariate in the RCNZ after he finishes his studies next year. Presbytery will discuss this request at its next meeting on 26-10-07

Hastings

Event for everyone! The Social Club is organising a Car Rally for everyone (families, couples & singles.) This event is planned for Saturday 3rd of November starting at 2pm from the church. It will also finish at the church with a sausage sizzle. There will be a form to fill out in your pigeon hole. Come along and enjoy this fun activity as planned. - The Social Club.

Duo for elder and deacon. The session was overwhelmed by the number of nominations given to us for consideration. We had eleven names to consider for elder and eleven names for deacon. That is another indication of the Lord's blessing on us as a congregation. It is a sign that members of the congregation have seen evidence of spiritual maturity in these men. In presenting a duo to the congregation session is required to evaluate and select men who are spiritually mature according to the standard given in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. In addition we have to pare down the list from eleven to two. This does not mean that those not selected are not qualified. It is rather an indication that we have more men qualified than we need on session. What a blessing!

From the pastor. It is with deep sadness that we gather on this Lord's Day after the funeral of one of our much loved youth, Astrid Gulliksen. Not only will her family

miss her greatly, but we as a congregation will miss her. Astrid's desire to serve the Lord, her concern for others and her willingness to help were a great encouragement to us all. However, our sadness and grief does not overwhelm us because we have the confidence of God's promise that those who believe in Jesus are forever safe, they have eternal life. We have not only heard Astrid's profession of faith recently, but we have seen it lived out in her life. In various ways we have seen her commitment to serve the Lord. So we have full confidence, based on God's Word that Astrid is with her Lord whom she loved. Our heartfelt Christian sympathy goes out to Steve and Angela, Jake, Marc, Hakan, Erik and Dae-jahn and also to their extended family. May the Lord continue to be your strength and comfort at this time. It is with joy that we may join together as the family of God even in our sadness to remember the death of our Lord on our behalf. We do this as we come to the Lord's table. His death for us and His victory over sin and death, seen in His rising from the dead on the third day, gives us confidence that death does not have the last word! Christ Jesus our Lord does. When He returns, He will say to all who trust in Him, "Come you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matt 25:34)

Mangere

Pastoral. At last week's Session meeting it was decided to follow through our commitment to the evangelism program decided on at the Special Congregational Meeting of the 1/8/07 by implementing a thorough on-going effort in the neighbourhood of the church in 2008. This would consist of such things as letter-box drops, local newspaper advertising, community-oriented events with BBQ's, Women's day-time Bible studies and evening Bible studies, and Family-promoting public meetings. We are also looking at revamping the notice boards at the front to be more noticeable. In all this Session has the definite aim of growth from the area around the church and will review this process half way through 2008. You as the congregation are invited to offer any further suggestions in this area. We want us all to be actively involved – to give it a good go. Let's pray and work for the proclamation of the gospel.

Masterton

Pastoral Notes: The Lord in His grace has gathered us here today. We are mindful of

our constant dependence on Him. We have seen His grace in our lives displayed through the past week in His preservation and provision. Yet we come this morning because we continue to need God's grace. We need it in our congregation; that we may grow and mature in our love for the Lord and each other. We need it in our families; that the work of Christ may be made known in our relationships as husbands and wives and parents and children. We need God's grace in our personal lives; that we might know the work of Christ and show His love in all of our circumstances. As we come before the Lord today. We come as children to request the Father's provision for our needs, especially our need of grace. He delights and is able to provide for us abundantly. He won't give stones for bread. Instead, He gave His only begotten Son and the full measure of the Spirit so that we might come to Him.

Singing. As we did last year, we would like to get people, young to old, together to go around the rest homes in Masterton and also further south. Next week, after the morning service can you please meet in the church hall with your favorite (Christmas) song and other poems/instrumentals which you would like to do.

Palmerston North

Session Report. An article introducing our congregation was approved for the Guardian newspaper. A photo of our worship service will be obtained for this article. Lord willing, you should see the information going in soon.

It was decided to hold a Session planning meeting in January 2008. This will be an opportunity to reflect on longer term goals for the congregation. If you have any suggestions for this, please pass them on to one of the office-bearers.

Wanganui Update: We have approached a number of ministers regarding short-term ministry without any success. The ministers that we have approached to date are: Rev Dick Wynja, Rev Tom Tyson, and Rev Barry James. These men have reluctantly declined, but all have expressed to us that they will continue to uphold our congregation in their thoughts and prayers. We are also making contact with the Rev Ken Campbell, but he is out of the country until the end of this month. With regard to calling a minister for long term ministry to Wanganui the Calling Committee and the Session are at present considering two names: Rev John Rogers and Rev Hans Vaatstra. We are in the process of obtain-

ing some sermons to evaluate from Rev Hans Vaatstra, and we will make these available to the congregation when they arrive. Sermons from Rev John Rogers are available on the Internet, at the RCNZ website (www.rcnz.org.nz). If you have problems downloading these sermons talk to one of the elders and they will burn a copy to CD for you. We would encourage members of the congregation to listen to these sermons, and give any feedback that you might have to the elders. We will endeavour to get these men to preach in Wanganui at some stage, but cannot give any fixed date at this time. Please continue to keep the calling committee and Session in your prayers, and continue to pray that God would be preparing a minister and his family to serve in Wanganui. If you have any questions, please talk to your elder. The Calling Committee

Pukekohe

Special Collection: The special collection during next week's Lord's Supper service will be dedicated to Gideons International. The Gideons is an international organisation, which distributes the Word of God by placing Bibles in as many hospitals, hotels, motels, and schools as possible. A

new venture for the local branch is to also provide Bibles to the inmates at the newly opened Spring Hill Correction facility.

Deacons Training: Andre Holtslag will lead a series of four evenings of training for future deacons over the next couple of months. All the men of the church are encouraged to attend. Further details to follow.

Session Report: Three men in the CRCA have passed their classis exams and are available for call – Jonathan Deenick and Colin Grant. Nigel Cunningham was recently ordained as a home missionary in the Cobden Congregation, Victoria. Rev Ralph Adams of the Reformed Church of Nelson will retire in March 2008. The Nelson Session has asked Andre Holtslag to come and preach there one Sunday and he will arrange a suitable weekend to do that.

Course in Pastoral Care: Grace Theological College, in Manurewa, is offering, in 2008 for pastors, elders, church leaders and potential leaders, a course in pastoral care and shepherding: Biblical Dynamics of How People Change. In order to provide a taste of what to expect Grace College is inviting church leaders to a free evening seminar on Thursday, November 1 at GTC (75 Rog-

ers Road). This two hour seminar (7–9pm) will spend the first hour covering the topic of change and Christian maturity, and the second hour applying what we have learnt to real situations you are acquainted with. This will be an interactive time in which we will seek to hear from each other, and learn from the Scriptures.

From the Pastor: Last Tuesday evening the elders met with Alanna Grul, Katrina van Echten and Mark Voschezang regarding their desire to profess their faith, and were very happy to allow them to do so. Katrina has requested to do this in her home congregation of Foxton. Alanna and Mark will profess their faith in Pukekohe on a Sunday in the near future. We rejoice in God's grace in bringing these young people to this point.

Silverstream

Session Notes. Profession of Faith—Session is pleased to announce that Mark Haakma is to profess his faith, Lord willing, during the morning worship service next Sunday. If there are any lawful objections, please let your elder know as soon as possible.

Wainuiomata

Volunteers wanted for evangelism: In early December we plan to do some door to door ministry by inviting people to our Christmas Service. Anyone interested in having training for door to door ministry, please come out to a meeting scheduled for November 14th at 8:00 pm! Please give this your prayerful consideration and mark your calendar. Also, who are you planning to invite to this service - work-mate, neighbour, old friend? Think about it! If we have new life through the life of Christ, would it not be our great desire that others know Jesus Christ?

Evangelism meeting notes: Gerry Leibbrandt has now put Leo's digitally recorded sermons on www.sermonaudio.com.

Wellington

Church family: This morning we witness baptism of Elizabeth van Schalkwyk. A warm welcome to family and friends who are visiting us for the occasion!

Potluck and Games. A church potluck dinner is planned for Saturday, 17th November. So circle this date on your calendars! Bring mains, a plate for supper, plates and cutlery, and all your wits to join in a board game if you like. You'll also have an opportunity to find out How well do you know your city? Come from 5.30 pm to eat by 6 pm.

The Free Reformed School Association (Tas) Incorporated of Launceston, Tasmania, invites applications and expressions of interest for the position of an

Early Childhood teacher

The mission of our John Calvin School is to assist the parents of its students in equipping them, the children, for a life of service in God's Kingdom.

Full-time employment would commence at the beginning of the new school year, January 2008. Those who are interested but cannot start until later in 2008 are encouraged to apply as well.

Any primary-trained teacher (or student-teacher finishing his/her degree by the end of 2007) is encouraged to apply.

John Calvin School staff members are required to be a member of the Free Reformed Church of Australia.

Those who are interested in only a part-time position are encouraged to apply as well.

Applicants should consider the advantages of the school's very small class sizes.

All enquiries will be responded to promptly and with confidentiality.

Conditions and salary are in accordance with the Tasmanian Independent Schools (Teachers) Award.

For more information on this position, general information and expressions of interest, please contact the Principal, Mr G Brouwer.

Phone: + 61 3 63271800 (home), + 61 3 63443794 (school)
E-mail: brouwerg@netspace.net.au or jcalvin@netspace.net.au

Applications should be directed to:

The Staffing Committee,

E-mail: jcalvin@netspace.net.au

Address: PO Box 89, Launceston 7250, Tasmania, Australia.

Report of Auckland Presbytery – October 26, 2007

The Auckland presbytery had its third and final meeting for 2007 at the Reformed Church of Pukekohe on October 26, 2007.

Elder Jacob Ploeg opened the meeting on behalf of the Reformed Church of Avondale by reading from Philippians 2 and making a few comments about this passage. We then sang from Psalter Hymnal 286. Rev. Reinier Noppers was appointed to the chair. A special welcome was given to Mr Andre Holtslag who is serving as a vicar in Pukekohe, and to Rev. and Mrs Wynja who are serving in the North Shore congregation while John and Sheryl Rogers are in Uganda.

It was agreed that the questions of Article 47 of the Church Order would not be asked of the two designated churches at this meeting as recent Church Visitation reports were before us and these covered all the questions. In future the Article 47 questions will be asked of the churches in the first two meetings of the year, leaving the church visitation reports for the end of the year.

It was decided to concur with the response of the Wellington presbytery regarding our concern about the behaviour of a small group at the National Youth Camps. Concerns about potential behavioural issues will be referred to the Youth Liaison Officers of the three presbyteries to exchange information among themselves and pass this on to the local Camp Committee.

Appreciation was expressed for the Men's Presbytery Study Day held mid-2007 in Mangere, and for the talk given by Mr Daniel Wilson. The next Study Day will be organised by Hamilton for mid-2008.

The church visitation reports were received and discussed. Appreciation was expressed that all the visits for this year had been completed and reports handed in on time. The clerk was commended for his promptings! We also gave thanks to God for reports of healthy church life in all the churches of the presbytery. All the visits were of mutual blessing to the visitors and those visited.

Rev. van Garderen reported on the work of the National Diaconate Committee and encouraged the churches to hold a mid-year collection for this work. Reinier Noppers reported on his work as Youth Liaison. Rev. VanGarderen reported on his work as

Overseas Mission Board Liaison.

Pulpit supply for Avondale was working out well and the church was thankful for the regular supply of ministers to their pulpit.

The RTC deputies sought the advice of presbytery regarding a request from Daniel Wilson for a vicariate in the RCNZ. Mr Wilson is married to Raewyn Couperus and is completing his studies for the ministry at Greenville Theological Seminary. Earlier this year he served in the Reformed Church of Mangere under the supervision of Rev. Sjikr Bajema. The presbytery was supportive of his request.

Vicar Andre Holtslag and the Pukekohe Reformed Church requested that his preliminary examination take place on Friday 29th of February 2008.

Hamilton raised the possibility of a denominational licence covering copyright on Christian music. They were advised to circulate this to all the churches in the denomination to determine the level of interest.

Buckland's Beach flagged a possible overture on a denominational name change to 'Reformed Presbyterian'. There was some sympathy for this among a number of the delegates.

The next meeting will be held DV on Friday the 29th of February 2008 in Pukekohe. The main item on the agenda will be the preliminary examination of Vicar Andre Holtslag.

Reporters: A. Holtslag and J. Haverland.

Short report of the meeting of Wellington Presbytery held on 3 November 2007

Reverend Bruce Hoyt opened the meeting with a devotion from 1Corinthians 1. He welcomed the delegates, visitors, and the synodical examiners Reverends Hans Vaatstra and John Haverland.

Presbytery then moved to the examination of Br. David Waldron. David preached on Genesis 47:1-12 and after deliberation by the delegates, this part of the examination was sustained.

The next part of the examination was Old Testament exegesis (Ruth 1), then New Testament exegesis (Romans 7:14-25), then dogmatics. Again, after deliberation, the examination was sustained and the synodical examiners concurred with the

decision. With thankfulness, Presbytery declared Br. David Waldron available for call in our churches.

Church Order article 47 questions were answered positively by Wellington, Foxton and Palmerston North.

Church visitation reports were received from Masterton and Wellington.

Reverend Nugteren, our youth liaison reporter, commented on an edifying weekend gathering in Hastings recently, led by David Waldron.

Under the Overseas Mission Board report, it was noted that Hastings session has extended a call to Reverend Alan Douma for work in PNG. Reverend Douma has indicated positive acceptance to the call subject to a successful colloquium doctum to be held in March, 2008. OMB members have also met fruitfully with mission representatives of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Presbytery decided, with the concurring advice of the synodical examiners, to declare Reverend Ed Rademaker to be released from the ministerial office. This flowed from a decision of Synod 2005 which reads, "a minister of the word has been released from service in a congregation shall be eligible for call for a period of two years, after which time the Presbytery, with the concurring advice of the synodical examiners, shall declare him to be released from ministerial office." In addition, Presbytery decided to grant Br. Ed Rademaker a preaching license for a period of one year, on the understanding that this license may be renewed after that period. Oversight for Br. Rademaker's preaching ministry will be the responsibility of the Session of the Reformed Church of Palmerston North. It was also decided that these decisions, together with the background correspondence, would be referred to the Church Order Committee for inclusion in their report to Synod 2008.

The church visitation roster for 2008 was approved.

Reverend Leo de Vos will attend the examination of Vicar Andre Holtslag in Auckland on behalf of the Wellington Presbytery.

Presbytery decided ordinarily to alternate venues for Presbytery meetings between Foxton and Palmerston North although the next meeting will be held in Hastings.

Reverend Bruce Hoyt closed the meeting with prayer.

Reporter: Rev M Flinn.

The URCNA Synod of 2007

Reflections from a son of the denomination

Peter Kloosterman

From 13 to 18 July the Synod of the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) met at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights (a suburb of Chicago), Illinois. This federation is made up of approximately 90 congregations in the US and Canada. I had the privilege of attending as a representative of the RCNZ. The URCNA was the denomination in which I served prior to coming to New Zealand. It was good to catch up with former colleagues and see the development of this federation as well.

Perhaps a little history would be helpful for you who are unfamiliar with this denomination. The URCNA officially began in 1995. Prior to this many of the churches that make up the URCNA had been members of the Christian Reformed Churches of North America (CRCNA). When the CRCNA began to compromise her submission to the authority of Scripture a number of the congregations departed. The individual churches were affiliated for a time and their relationship developed and deepened into a new denomination: the URCNA. Since 1995 the denomination has been growing not only from other churches leaving the CRCNA, but also through a number of church plants. The congregations that make up the denomination were generally mature in the Reformed faith, but needed to develop their ability to work together and trust one another. This is something that requires time and cultivation. There was evidence of this developing at the recent Synod meeting.

At the meeting there were 164 delegates. Two from each congregation are required, though not all congregations were able to send delegates. The agenda

was lengthy, 340 pages, and included 17 overtures, 1 appeal and a number of reports. The Community United Reformed Church of Schererville, Indiana was responsible for the oversight and organisation of the Synod. In the URCNA there is not an inter-Synodical committee responsible for dealing with interim decisions. Instead this responsibility is entrusted to the Session that convenes the next assembly. The reason for this arrangement is the recognition of the primacy of the authority that lies with the Session. So, decisions about inter-Synodical matters and the agenda are under the convening Session's authority. This can be a daunting task for a local body, but the Synod was well organised, and the oversight was faithful. The facilities of Trinity Christian College exceeded the needs of the delegates.

The matters dealt with by the Synod were resolved in great harmony and it was enjoyable to witness the Lord working through His Spirit as some difficult issues were resolved amicably. There was much that had the potential to divide, but through discussion and deliberation a way was found to move forward. There are two issues that the URCNA is facing particularly. The first has to do with the confessional prerequisites for membership and the second deals with a theological movement known as 'Federal Vision'. For both these issues a study committee was appointed and assigned the task of bringing clarity to these issues at the next Synod.

Regarding the first there are some struggles within the denomination as to how narrowly or broadly membership should be identified. The URCNA has begun to struggle with this in the context of the North American

church life. Many evangelicals are tired of the programmatic activities geared solely for evangelism. They are yearning for more substantial preaching and teaching from the Bible. Many are coming to appreciate this not only in the URCNA but in other Reformed denominations as well. Some hesitation, not from the churches of the URCNA but from the visitors, exists regarding the teaching of infant baptism. This tension is not new. Many denominations have addressed this question throughout history. Generally, those with a continental polity require confessional agreement from their members. There are exceptions allowed, however, these are to be determined based upon the authority and pastoral discretion of the local Session. The Synods in times past have given some directions on this issue, though they have sought to recognise the pastoral sensitivity as well.

The request for an appointment of a study committee recognises the delicate nature of this issue and the danger of making hasty Synodical decisions. It is one that calls for wisdom regarding the decisions that are made. The churches are seeking to remain faithful to God's Word and are also striving to be united. Similarly, there is a desire not to be more restrictive than God's Word and to guard against a Synodical proclamation which undermines the authority and pastoral sensitivity of a local Session. In this issue the study committee has a significant task ahead of it.

The second issue addressed is the error of Federal Vision. This is an undermining of justification by faith alone. This is something that many of the reformed denominations in North America are addressing. The URCNA formulated the following statement to demonstrate the commitment of the denomination to the truth of justification:

'Synod affirms that the Scriptures and confessions teach the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone and that nothing is taught under the rubric of covenant theology in our churches may contradict this fundamental error. Therefore the Synod rejects the errors of those:

1. who deny or modify the teaching that 'God created man good and after His own image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness,' able to perform 'the commandment of life' as the representative

MIF prayer notes

Please pray for **Wally & Jeannette Hagoort** as they host a work-team from NZ who hope, Lord willing, to construct a classroom at the Bible school this month. Pray for safety, health and energy for both Hagoorts and also for the team. Pray for the ongoing process of Jeannette's application for a work permit; it's not a quick procedure!!

Janice Reid is trying to fit a little language-learning time in this month, between earnest requests from stations that need training. Please pray for diligence and energy as she tries to focus on taking in more of the language after a year that has been filled with challenges. Pray also for a clear understanding as plans are developed for future training commitments in the South East Asia sub-region.



URCNA Synod delegates

of mankind (HC 6,9; BC 14);

2. who, in any way and for any reason, confuse the 'commandment of life' given before the fall with the gospel announced after the fall (BC 14, 17, 18; HC 19, 21, 56, 60);

3. who confuse the ground and instrument of acceptance with God before the fall (obedience to the commandment of life) with the ground (Christ who kept the commandment of life) and instrument (faith in Christ) of acceptance with God after the fall;

4. who deny that Christ earned acceptance with God and that all His merits have been imputed to believers (BC 19, 20, 22, 26; HC 11-19, 21, 36-37, 60, 84; CD I.7, RE I.3, RE II.1);

5. who teach that a person can be historically, conditionally elect, regenerated, savingly united to Christ, justified and adopted by virtue of participation in outward administration of the covenant of grace but may lose these benefits through lack of covenantal faithfulness (CD I, V);

6. who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way such that there is no distinction between those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace alone through faith alone (HC 21, 60; BC 29);

7. who teach that Spirit-wrought sanctity, human works, or cooperation with grace is any part either of the ground of our righteousness before God or any part of faith, that is, the 'instrument by which we

embrace Christ, our righteousness' (BC 22-24; HC 21, 60, 86);

8. who define faith, in the act of justification, as being anything more than 'learning and resting on the sole obedience of Christ crucified' or 'a certain knowledge' of and 'a hearty trust' in Christ and His obedience and death for the elect (BC 23; HC 21);

9. who teach that there is a separated and final justification grounded partly upon righteousness or sanctity inherent in the Christian (HC 52; BC 37).'

Other matters that Synod dealt with were less doctrinal and more practical. These also received substantial deliberation. Several overtures dealt with the Church Order. Some were merely tidying up the language. Others were more significant amendments. Those of significance dealt mainly with matters revolving around ecumenical relations. The URCNA works through a three-phase mode to develop unity with sister congregations. The final phase would be a merger of the two denominations. The URCNA is moving gradually toward this with the Canadian Reformed Church. The overtures sought to clarify the process and put in a few more significant checks and balances in the process. There is always the danger that a Synod's decisions will force an unnatural merger which will not work at the local level. The churches sought through these clarifications and additional procedures to ensure that unity will arise from among the churches as well as from Synodical decisions.

The URCNA is very willing to work with churches that are abroad. They have agreed

to develop sister relations with the RCNZ and several other denominations. The ICRC is a helpful conference for the furtherance of the unity of the churches. This was apparent in the URCNA's commitment to continue to send delegates but also to the development of relations with churches that are members of the ICRC. What this looks like for the RCNZ is the development of the relationship through a two-phase process. The first step is known as 'Ecumenical Contact'. In this phase the two denominations familiarise themselves with one another and seek to discuss matters of general concern. Both differences and agreements are discussed. Following favourable contact, the next step of the relationship would be 'Ecumenical Fellowship.' This is a full recognition of one another as faithful and true churches. This is the closest unity that can arise when there is significant geographical separation. Yet it is a complete recognition of our unity together.

The assembly closed on Friday: the churches of the URCNA were well served by the meeting. I was glad to see her mature. Hopefully, as our relationship grows we can learn from one another and share our blessings and burdens together in the work of the Lord. Our unity, while we are separated by many miles, is one which transcends time and space. It is that of the truth of the work of Jesus Christ. It was a privilege to represent that to the Synod of the URCNA and report on that to the RCNZ.

South Island Women's Presbyterial

The South Island Women's Presbyterial meeting was this year hosted by the ladies from the Reformed Church of Nelson on Saturday 15th of September.

The theme was 'ALTOGETHER HEALTHY'.

At 9.15 am the ladies started to arrive and everyone collected her bag with the programme as well as a recipe booklet with 'healthy recipes'!

Plenty of chatter, of course, as friends met and new friends were made.

There were about 50 ladies present, even 3 from Dunedin!

After morning tea, when some of the recipes from the booklet could be tasted, it was time to go into the auditorium, where we sang songs of praise to our Lord and Saviour and we listened to 3 speakers, related to our theme:

Francois Ter Blanche, medical doctor, spoke to us on 'Physical Health'.

Jeanette Vander Burg, mental health worker, told us the importance of 'Mental Health'.

Ralph Adams, pastor, gave us guidelines on 'Spiritual Health'.

It is amazing how they are connected, looking after the bodies and minds God has given us, and remembering that they are a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Lunch was served by some of the menfolk, who were on kitchen duties.

After lunch Jetje Adams introduced us to a craft, cutting out pictures from serviettes and sticking them on big stones or tiles with PVA glue, as well as going over them with the (watered down)

glue which made them glossy. When dry it looked as if they were painted on, quite effective.

The 'Mystery Outing' turned out to be a 'Double Decker Bus' ride, showing some of the Nelson area, with full commentary by the driver, along the foreshore, harbour, to the Japanese Gardens — where afternoon tea was served, and all had a relaxing time in the sun. The ride back was through the older parts of Nelson and even the local ladies learnt something new.

After we got back to the church building, there was a 'Sushi making' demonstration by Elaine Borger.

These sushis were available for eating at the dinner that followed as well as a variety of nourishing soups, home-made pizza', salads, etc. all featuring in the recipe booklet. The men were busy in the kitchen again, and did a great job!

Plenty of time in between to chat and have fellowship with each other.

Then in the evening something different again by way of a game, with plenty of laughter, especially when we heard the different versions of stories, with as many words as possible starting with the letter S.

Finishing time about 9pm.

All are looking forward to getting together again next year (Lord willing).



Jeanette Vander Burg



Francois Ter Blanche



Ralph Adams



Women's Presb Group



Elisabeth VandenBerg