

faith in **focus**

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

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**"He gathers the waters of the sea into jars;
he puts the deep into storehouses."**

Psalm 33:7

CONTENTS

Meditation
The night is always darkest before the dawn 3

A feminine focus
Silence & solitude 4

Thoughts from a senior citizen
The ministry of the elderly (2) 5

Between You & Me
Smoking & drinking 6

Why the Reformed Church still?
Rev. Deenick's Keynote Anniversary Address 7

World news 15

Books in focus 16

Church news
Gleanings in focus, Minister's Conference, Auckland Church's 50th Celebration 17

Missions in focus
Rev. Hoyt's visit to Myanmar, Prayer points 21

From the D.A.'s office
The first youth camp 24

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Editorial

It is half through the year already. We are well into the year for Catechism classes, Bible study/fellowship groups, Youth Club, Cadets & Calvinettes.

So how's it going? Are you going?

And, could I ask, if you're not going to the worship services twice each Lord's Day and attending your local fellowship, does that reflect where you are personally with the Lord? In my experience, if it is a choice that you personally make, it also shows the low priority the Lord has in your life personally. A low commitment to the church has consequences.

David Feddes compares this with baseball. He points out that attending baseball games "used to be a favourite pastime for many Americans, but these days fewer kids are eager to watch a baseball game. Why? Because they don't play the game themselves. More kids play soccer or some other sport instead, so they have less interest in baseball than their parents had. Once kids stop playing the game in their own day-to-day lives, it's only a matter of time until fewer of them show up for the big events at the stadiums.

And then he goes on: "Likewise, as fewer people worship God in their homes and their day-to-day lives, it's only a matter of time before their children lose interest in the big public gatherings in church on Sundays.

"Now, if kids don't play baseball and stadium attendance's decline, it's no great tragedy. But if daily worship declines and Sunday services eventually go down, it is an enormous tragedy. We deprive ourselves of a rich relationship with God, and we deprive God of the worship He deserves.

"Some parents and churches are alarmed that their children might lose interest in the church. Churches may respond by fine-tuning their Sunday school programs, hiring youth pastors, and redesigning worship to appeal to the next generation. But, for the most part, this doomed to fail. If those young people are not involved in daily worship at home, they simply won't have a daily, meaningful walk with Christ. Their religion will be hollow or they will eventually drop out of church entirely, no matter what the church does. But if their parents and their church teach them the practice of daily worship, these young people will focus on the living God, not on finding church events that pander to adolescent tastes.

"When Jesus called his first disciples, He said simply, "Follow me." He invited them to get to know Him by spending time with Him, talking and listening to Him. That's what Jesus is calling you to do right now. Follow Him. Walk with Him. Spend time with Him each day. Make the Lord the number one priority in your schedule. Nothing else can match the impact of a daily walk with Christ, and nothing is more basic to building a relationship with Him and honouring Him. So get started today!"

*If the parent be not visibly in earnest,
it cannot be expected
that the child will be so.*

John Angell James

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 Dordt, 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.

Meditation

The night is always darkest before the dawn

Hans Voschezang

When we reflect on Psalm 23, we know something of the circumstances of David's life. He was forced to flee into the Judean wilderness with his family and servants, and for quite some time he was unable to reclaim the throne of Israel. His life was in jeopardy and he was hunted down for months. Perhaps, because so much of his early life had been spent as a shepherd in that same wilderness, the circumstances recalled his shepherd's life. For the images in this psalm are drawn right out of his experience as a young shepherd.

David was in serious trouble. He speaks of "Walking through the valley of the shadow of death". And we, too, travel through life and encounter our own valleys and ravines. Some fear the future, they are anxious about what's going to happen. Others fear the past, and they are anxious about what has happened. Still others fear the present. Anxiety has gripped them and they cannot imagine how they can cope with the ugliness of their present circumstances in their lives.

The question then becomes: How does God want us to respond to anxiety in our life?

Well, like all the great questions in life, the Bible provides us with an answer. In Psalm 23 David tells us that there is a constructive, God-honouring response to anxiety in our lives. He says that we should trust God as the good and faithful Shepherd and rejoice in His grace.

Responding to God in this way will not necessarily solve our problems, but will provide confidence in what He is doing in our lives. He will convince us that He is leading our lives. God is in control of all the details and circumstances. This will lead to greater peace and knowledge, for we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.

In our sinful anxiety, however, we tend to focus only on our problems and circumstances. Whilst we are walking through the valley we see only the mud in front of us. We need to climb over rocks. We see only mountains of trouble ahead of us. When we look up, we see overhanging rocks of doubt. We feel utterly desolate and abandoned. We want to be left alone and want to work through what needs to be done to get us out of this present situation. We are lagging behind on our journey, and we don't hear the voice of the Great Shepherd calling us by name anymore.

He asks us, however, to trust Him even when we cannot understand Him. He asks us to follow Him even when we cannot clearly see where He is leading, because God will never abandon us or lead us astray. God does not promise to solve all our problems, at least not in the manner we want

them to be solved.

I find no character in the Bible who lived a problem-free existence. Rather, God calls us to trust Him and to obey, whether we live in affluence and success, or in poverty. He is showing us to look up past that overhanging rock of doubt and see a blue sky of God's mercy, hope and grace. His ways in which He is dealing with us will lead us safely through to the grassy pastures.

Keep leaning on God, for He will be our anchor in life. When we learn to lean on the Lord for our every need both in difficult times and in good times, we will experience a sense of contentment and joy. We can be assured that God will work in our lives to renew our strength.

But, we still see a mountain ahead of us in the distance, and as we travel to "our mountain," we wonder how we can ever get to the summit. Then, as we come closer, we discover a small path following the seams and natural faultlines in the rock—a little track, just enough for one person to get through. By taking this path, we hike comfortably up what looked like an

insurmountable cliff. As this path zigzags, the view below changes as well. Climbing higher and higher, we reach the summit and can look out over the entire landscape. We look down, and search and then discover the valley from where we came from.

We are only a tiny speck in God's redemption plan. We cannot possibly see what God sees. He sees the entire universe. The world was good, but Adam chose to disobey God and sinned.

Through him all mankind sinned. Paul says that the whole creation has been groaning...right up to this present time. But one day God will create a new heaven and a new earth. There will be no more suffering, no more hardship. We can look forward to that day when we will stand before Jesus, where there is no sunset and no dawning.

So, the next time we find ourselves in one of those valleys looking around us at the mountains of problems, wondering from where our help may come from, be assured that our help comes from the Lord Who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 23

A psalm of David

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing.

He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.

He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

A feminine focus

The spiritual discipline of silence and solitude

Sally Davey

It's true that the less we have of something good, the more we tend to value it – even yearn for it. For me, this is certainly the case with silence and solitude. After a busy holiday period, when we've had a number of groups of visitors back-to-back, the house full of conversation, people coming and going, and meals to prepare in the midst of the chatter, an hour's quiet reflection with the Bible, or a good book, or time to pray through a thorny issue, seems bliss. I used to think this desire was just a tendency of mine, lover of solitude that I am. I knew some Christians throughout the ages have especially valued extended times of aloneness with God, but I just thought – "Oh, probably they were similar sorts of characters to me" – you know, the quiet type. So I was surprised to find silence and solitude listed among Don Whitney's spiritual disciplines for *everybody's* Christian life.

Important for us all

In fact, he cannot stress enough the need for times of quiet and uninterrupted reflection in the

Christian's life. Western culture, he reminds us, conditions us to be comfortable with noise and crowds – even to become addicted to noise. For some of us it's habitual to turn on some sound when walking into a room or when pulling out of the driveway in the car. We do these things just to have some sort of comfortable "buzz" going on around us. Some (he shudders) even feel it necessary to have background noise during Bible reading or prayer. (Have you ever heard those tapes of Scripture readings with some sort of syrupy music in the background?) Whitney believes that the "convenience of sound" in all manner of easily-switch-on-able forms has "contributed to the spiritual shallowness of contemporary western Christianity." By contrast, he observes that "Without exception, the men and women I have known who make the most rapid, consistent, and evident growth in Christlikeness have been those who develop a daily time of being alone with God."

Of course, appealing as silence and solitude are to those of us with uncomfortably hectic social commitments and general busyness, they are no escape from our overall Christian obligations to

other people. God calls us to family, fellowship, evangelism, and ministry for the sake of Christ and his kingdom. Nevertheless, through the Holy Spirit "deep calls to deep" (Ps. 42:7), and we long for the more profound communion with God that can only be had in silence and solitude. Just as we must engage with others to work on some of the other disciplines of the Christian life, so there are times when we need to withdraw temporarily from interaction and into silence and solitude. As Whitney puts it: "think of silence and solitude as complementary Disciplines to fellowship. Without silence and solitude we're shallow. Without fellowship we're stagnant. Balance requires them all." And certainly, I've found that in periods of busy "people-related" activities, time alone with God has given me the energy I needed to interact with the people.

The spiritual benefits

So what are some of the spiritual benefits we gain from practising silence and solitude? The first thing is that in a time and a place of quietness we are better able to focus our thoughts on God – who He is, what He has done, and what He wants of us. We can hear Him speak in His Word more effectively; and we can concentrate our minds on prayer to Him much better as well. Silence and solitude are really essential to a fruitful "quiet time" with our Father. The most obvious use of this discipline being our daily devotions, Whitney also points to other spiritual advantages of such times. We are able to express worship to God in silence in a God-focused stillness and hush. We do not need words, sounds or actions to express our devotion to Him – several Scriptures passages show this. For instance, Habakkuk 2:20: "But the LORD is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him," Zephaniah 1:7 "be silent before the Sovereign LORD" – and, when the seventh seal in the Revelation to John in heaven was broken, the seal which was to bring seven awesome trumpet blasts indicating seven terrible happenings, "there was silence in heaven for about half an hour." (Revelation 8:1). Silence is an important way to express our devotion to God, and our reverent respect for his majesty (also appropriate to remember in the moments before public worship!).

Silence can also demonstrate trust in God. Whitney notes that "the simple act of silence before the Lord, as opposed to coming before Him in a wordy fret" can indicate our faith in Him. David shows this in Psalm 62 (vv 1-2 and 5-6). Another favourite verse teaching this is Isaiah 30:15: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength." Just being quiet and reflecting on God's strength, his faithfulness, his promises; his unchanging Word and dependability is soul-strengthening! Such reflection will build our faith.

We may also meet with God in times of



My favourite place for practising silence and solitude

quietness and aloneness to be spiritually restored, to relax from the bombarding pressures of this world, and to do as Jesus said to His disciples: "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place to get some rest." (Mark 6:31). We can use such times for special prayer, to seek God's guidance, perhaps for a knotty problem, or a future direction in life. We can use them to regain a spiritual perspective when our thinking has become confused, over-burdened or distorted by the world.

Being focused

Solitude and silence help us reflect on the state of our soul before God; to plumb our sin, sort out our attitudes and motives, confess our sin and ask for His forgiveness and help to overcome it. We cannot do this while we are distracted, or our attention is divided. This is why we need to be quiet, and to be alone. But the spiritual progress and even physical refreshment we gain from disciplining ourselves to be alone for these purposes soon become so obvious that we will soon have a huge appetite for such times – we won't be able to get enough of them! (At least, that is my experience).

The example of others

There is plenty of testimony, through the ages, to convince us that God's people have always found this a soul-satisfying practice. First and foremost, Jesus, the very Son of God himself, was a regular enjoyer of silence and solitude. We find Him throughout the gospels going off alone, early in the morning, no matter how tired He was, to spend time with His Father. Though perfect and sufficient in every way, he obviously regarded it necessary to be alone and to pray regularly – and He taught His disciples to do the same. And on the very brink of what He knew would be the most fiery trial of His life among us – the brink of most terrible suffering – what do we find Him doing? Meeting God alone, praying to Him, in the garden of Gethsemane. It was there, in silence and solitude, that He was given the strength to deliver us from death.

And there were others in the Scriptures. Elijah went to Mount Horeb to hear the word of the Lord – which was in a gentle whisper. Habbakuk stood on the guard-post to keep watch and see what God would say to him. After his conversion, the apostle Paul "did not immediately consult with flesh and blood" or go up to Jerusalem to the apostles. No, instead he went to Arabia, to a sparsely settled region, for rest, prayer and meditation – to have his mind, violently shaken and reoriented, more firmly settled in the truths Jesus had spoken to him on the road to Damascus. Only after this time did he begin preaching Christ powerfully. (See William Hendricksen in his commentary on Galatians 1:16-17, pp. 55-6). It is clear that time spent alone with the Lord gives His servants clarity of thinking and purpose; and spiritual strength for tasks ahead.

Others throughout the history of the church

have given the same testimony. Last month I mentioned the example of Sarah Edwards, who spent much time meditating alone – and delighting in it. (And she was a very busy housewife, hostess and mother of a large family). Her husband, Jonathan, did exactly the same thing. He used to wander alone in the fields, or go for long afternoon rides on his horse. He would come back with paper notes pinned all over his coat – written reflections, the result of his careful meditation on the things of the Lord.

Elisabeth Elliott writes that her father's habits of quiet, solitary time spent with the Lord gave her a lifelong example to aspire to. She remembers as a child coming downstairs early and seeing her father kneeling in prayer beside a chair in the living room. He usually got up between 4:30 and 5am to do this. She herself always rises very early, throws on a dressing gown, and goes off to her study to read and meditate long before her day begins. She writes: "Few people know what to do with solitude when it is forced upon them; even fewer arrange for solitude regularly... the foundation of our devotional life is our own private relationship with God." God is looking for worshippers, she reminds us, people who will worship Him in spirit and in reality. "Will he always have to go to a church to find them, or might there be one here or there in an ordinary house, kneeling alone by a chair, simply adoring Him?" (On Asking God Why, pp.126-8)

A romantic dream?

But it can become merely a romantic dream to like the sound of this idea – a bit like the way one could like the sound of going on safari, or dieting one's way to slimness, or becoming a gourmet cook or an expert sewer of tailored suits. It is one thing to warm to the idea, but quite another to take the steps to execute it! How can we take concrete, practical steps to introduce this into the reality of our lives?

When you do it

The first step is to choose a time. All of us have relatively busy lives, full of other people and their need of us; and full of pressing commitments. So unless we take deliberate action to schedule it into our day, it won't happen. So, when? Like many of us, Elisabeth Elliott finds that early morning is the most practical time... "The simple fact is that early morning is probably the only time when we can be fairly sure of not being interrupted." Now, to my shame I am not usually an early riser. My "best" time for being alone with the Lord is usually after a little of the work of the house-tidying and dishes are done – after everyone has gone out on the farm and I'm alone in the house again. But I have also discovered that my most special times of solitude are early in the morning, in those times when I wake at 3 or 4am and can't get back to sleep. When these times of sleeplessness started some years ago, I used to

RTC Biblical Preaching Workshop 2003

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lie there fretting about how tired I was going to feel for the rest of the day (and 4 or 5 hours of sleep *does* leave me energy-less and more prone to sin!). But as soon as I started using those times for prayer, Bible reading and meditation, I found that they were a real blessing. Instead of merely sapping my physical strength, they gave me spiritual rest and strength. Perhaps you find the same thing?

Each of you, I know, has different life circumstances. Maybe you're a student. When would be the best time for you to practise silence and solitude? Perhaps on a walk to university classes, or a detour to a park on the route across town? Perhaps, if you're like me when I was a student, the moment you sit down at your desk in a quiet part of the library, or in your room?

You've got your papers and your books ready, all is tidy and ready for action... What better moment is there to get out your Bible, read and reflect? The quiet place of regular academic study is often also a good place to study the things of the Lord. It is a place where you are all "set up" to get on with the serious business of thinking.

Perhaps you are at home with small children. The best time for you may be after the children have gone down for their afternoon sleep. Or perhaps it is when you're up in the night, feeding a small baby. One of Whitney's most helpful points is the reminder that we need to be ready to seize even the small moments of quiet, to treat them as mini-retreats for the soul, to reflect on one verse, to pray for one person, or for help with one sinful attitude. This can be especially important

for mothers whose quiet moments are brief, scattered, and irregular. And one very practical and thoughtful suggestion that Whitney makes is the idea of swapping responsibilities with your husband or a friend. Young mothers the world over know that even short moments alone without toddlers and babies are hard to find. The most practical, inexpensive method of overcoming this problem is to ask your spouse or a friend to temporarily take care of the children in order to give you time alone. Then return the favour by providing the same or another service. Short of ideas? Ask an experienced mother with the ability to think creatively!

Do you have full-time or part-time work? Probably the regular early morning, disciplined time would be the best for you, as it's then that you can bring the whole day's tasks – and temptations – before the Lord at a time *before* they rush in at you. But if this is not possible, what about a walk at lunchtime? You know what your own schedules, limitations and needs to take disciplined action are. You decide when you need to do this necessary, and blessed thing with the Lord!

Where you do it

And what about place? This is almost as important as time, because it needs to be *somewhere* that you can be undistracted and able to focus on God alone. Christians through the ages have chosen a huge variety of places. Some have walked in the woods or climbed into deserted church towers (maybe not so readily available to us today!). Others tell of parking the car a few blocks from home and praying or meditating a little before they face the "onslaught" of home-life clamour. Do you pick the children up from school in the car? Have you ever thought of leaving home half an hour early, parking in some quiet street in which *nobody* you know lives, and using that time to be with God? (I've used that one frequently when I'm having a busy day in town!) Some who live in a very full household, complete with boarders etc. relate their practice of locking themselves in the bathroom (somewhat cold, but guaranteed to be private). My favourite place on a sunny day is the gazebo in our garden. Paul built it a couple of years ago, and it's a wonderful place for enjoying quiet, a view of the garden, and opportunity for thankfulness for God's creation and many other blessings. In addition to being the scene of al fresco dinner parties, it's become my spiritual retreat-place!

Why you do it

Yes, our Lord has given us hugely-varying circumstances and callings in life. But whatever they are, one thing is sure: He has called us to glorify Him, and enjoy Him forever. And that glorifying and enjoyment begins with the time we make to spend with Him alone.

JUBILEE

THEN, NOW AND TOMORROW!

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach
(one of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand)
plans to celebrate 50 years of the Lord's goodness to us
on 13th and 14th September 2003

The programme will include:
Saturday afternoon – Recreational Entertainment for all ages
Saturday evening – Family Anniversary Dinner
Sunday – Celebratory Service followed by Luncheon

Guest Preacher: Dr Murray Capill

Links with Bucklands Beach?
Don't miss this opportunity to renew old friendships this side of Glory!

To help us with planning, expressions of interest would be appreciated

Please return the slip below by 17th May to:

"Anniversary"
Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach
PO Box 39 275 Howick Auckland
or email: mbrooks@clear.net.nz



I am interested in attending your 50th Anniversary Celebrations

Please send me further information as it becomes available

Name.....

Address.....

Phone No.....(please print)

Number of people(over 12 years)
.....(under 12 years)

Effective prayer

The ministry of the elderly (and of younger folk!) Part II

Patricia van Laar

Were you hit, as it were, by the sentence quoted in last month's article on the topic of prayer, "Our time with God each morning is indeed a morning watch"? W. Wierbse in his book *"Preaching and Teaching with Imagination"* painted the picture of troops assembled to receive orders for the day. This morning watch is a vital and helpful habit. We greet our husband/wife and our family in the morning, and talk over our plans for the day. One father exasperated his family at breakfast each morning by expecting them to outline almost hour by hour the day's plans. Still, this was good training for his children, and showed his interest in them, and concern that they should consider what they were doing, and not just fritter time away aimlessly.

Still more is God interested and concerned, so we should endeavour to talk the day over with Him too, that we may receive His guidance and help and sometimes His restraint, not by bringing our plans to Him for His blessing, but by finding His plans for us and making them our plans! Often easier said than done. Of course in daily routine we just need His blessing, but in important decisions beyond just routine, it means finding His will for us.

Unless you are a morning person, you may find it difficult beginning the day with Bible reading and prayer. For me, it has always been easy to get up in the morning. This was a blessing in my life, although at one stage it was interrupted by my youngest daughter, who is also a morning person. No matter what time I rose, be it six o'clock or even earlier, five minutes later there she was, chatting away for all she was worth. Looking back, I wonder why I never did quite work out how to cope with this. I should have made it a quiet time with and for her too, when we came to the Lord together, and I can't think why I allowed myself to miss such an opportunity by just 'putting up with' the interruption. Young parents, don't make the same mistake! Some of us, however, are not morning people, and find it difficult to get going. Others find their morning schedule causes a problem. Many mothers have such a busy household they cannot settle to an early hour of meditation and prayer. A solution can be found. One devoted Christian with a prominent clergyman husband, a large family and busy breakfast and early morning responsibilities, made a point of setting aside eleven o'clock every day for her time of quiet, and allowed nothing to interfere with it. If any of her family were at home at this time, they knew better than to interrupt her. Another teacher would go every lunch-time into her storeroom for a time of prayer. But I don't recommend substituting 'quiet times' with 'Promise Boxes'! A friend of mine always had a

prayer time first thing in the morning. One day she awoke late, and having an early dentist appointment, thought she would take a promise from a so-far unused box that she had been given, so as to have something to chew over while at the dentist. These promises were printed on little rolled up pieces of paper. She pulled one out. She read: "Open Thy mouth wide and I will fill it!"

Wierbse's point about orderly prayer is important. Looking at the ACTS acrostic, it might be useful to spend a little more thought on details of the S - Supplication. The Wycliffe Bible Translators have made the point that it is not sufficient or satisfactory to say, "God bless so and so," in a vague kind of way. How can we make our prayers of supplication for others be more meaningful and effective? The key is awareness. If we are unaware of others' needs



and problems, how can we pray? There are of course problems in some lives which cannot be shared, or can be shared with only a few close trusted friends. If we are amongst those trusted few, we must be certain never to betray that trust.

Here, then, are some practical suggestions:

Family and friends

These are the ones whose needs we should be most aware of. Pray not only for the individuals in your immediate family. Pray also for future family - for your children's (or grandchildren's) future spouses, who exist somewhere in the world although as yet unknown to you, and for their parents as they raise them. Do not be discouraged, either, when you pray for those of your loved ones who have turned away from the Lord. One couple tell of a sister who had done this. For years they prayed for her, almost as an automatic habit, and without great expectation. The Lord surprised them. Not long ago she came right back, with joy and strength. Are we surprised when the Lord answers? Would He say, "Oh ye of little faith."?

The local church

In the local church the congregation will be aware of certain members' needs or difficulties—the sick, the widowed, the unemployed, students. Other needs may not be so obvious—the wavering, the tempted, the strugglers in marriage or other relationships. One church used to put brackets beside the name of every family or individual in the address list. The members were asked to put the figure (1) in the bracket immediately following their own name, (2) in the next, and so on through the whole list until (30) is reached. They were then asked to pray for the family or individual on the day of the month indicated in the bracket. (For larger congregations the numbers would need doubling up). This meant that, if faithfully followed by the congregation, every person was prayed for every day by someone in the church. It is an idea for every church, and I wonder why it was not continued in the church concerned. An even better way would be to make a similar list, minus the addresses and updated regularly, for each person to keep in his own Bible. (Food for thought—and action?)

The wider church

Amy Carmichael of Dohnavur Fellowship made the point that although the field is the world, nobody can be in the whole world. Each must find his/her own part of the world for service, and in the same way nobody can pray for every Christian activity in every country, so each must also find the sphere of individual focus for prayer. Obviously this means beginning with those of denominational and personal interest. The Lord will show individually how or where this should be extended. We are not all the same, and while some Christians are led to a much wider sphere for prayer than others, all should have their own particular focus points. Knowledge is the important factor. For this reason missionaries send out prayer letters, and mission societies monthly or regular prayer notes for daily use. Let us look at some of these, starting with those closest to our hearts.

Janice Reid brings us up to date with outreach in her own branch of **FEBC** and her own work with this organisation. Do we understand the importance of Radio broadcasts, especially into closed countries, into kitchens and houses and tents where nothing else can penetrate? Janice brings us regular news of this work and her own contribution, to guide our prayer. So she asks us

- Remember the staff making decisions on the content of these broadcasts, e.g. health, music, and for an interesting and tactful presentation of the gospel.
- Remember those who hear the broadcasts, and especially those who listen in secret, in danger.

- Remember those who write in, expressing an interest with queries or asking for further instruction.
- Remember the staff who answer this correspondence.
- Remember too, other branches of FEBC. In 2002, Janice told us about new developments in the Mongolian branch. Her latest letter at time of writing this tells us of the devastating fire in the building housing all the equipment of this branch. A case in point—can we help here, prayerfully, financially or materially? Can a builder give a few months to help rebuild? Is this desirable? An electrician....a brick layer...Pray for these needs.

Janice does not make many personal requests, but remember these needs also—her spiritual and devotional growth, her decisions, her family, her isolation from colleagues at present as she works from home and the loneliness of this, as well as the loneliness of serving as a single.

Past missionaries

Do we know what is happening in regions we have supported in the past; Nigeria, Taiwan, Kenya, Pakistan, the Philippines? Could past missionaries be approached for an update on their former spheres of service? We should not forget all about the fields where they have laboured just because they are now elsewhere. .

Beyond the sphere of personal knowledge

Recently someone asked, "How can 1 pray for someone 1 have never met? 1 find this difficult."

There are ways of overcoming this difficulty too. Again, the key is knowledge. It is surprising how with this and with consistent remembrance before the Father, these unknowns become dear to us and almost like personal friends. Paul is a great example to us. He prayed constantly for the 'saints at such a place', many not acquaintances of his, but all dear to his heart.

Interdenominational organisations

Apart from one's own denomination there are several of these that the Lord has called into existence. Please do not call them 'para-church organisations' in the sense of being outside the church, beyond the control and influence of the church. The ones worth supporting respect and work in conjunction with the churches, expecting advice and reports of applicants from their own home churches, and giving account to these churches concerning members. They are not substitutes for the church. Several specialise in particular areas of service which could not be undertaken by just one denomination alone.

Perhaps some of the following are for your interest and prayer support.

Wycliffe Bible Translators/Summer Institute of Linguistics A specialised work of training and the placing of translators is undertaken that no individual church could do on its own. The S.I.L.

gives linguistic training, which is available not only for those committed to Wycliffe's own organisations, but is also open to others—a preparation of benefit for anybody intending to serve in a 'mission field' country. W.B.T. organises translation work and the placement of its translators. For all practical support purposes we can look upon these as one and the same organisation.

Specific prayer needs of New Zealand personnel are given in a monthly Intercessors' Fellowship Prayer and Praise Calendar.

W.B.T Private Bag 13347, Onehunga, Auckland Phone (09) 622 4790. E mail- ad ad_min@wycliffeorg.nz

The NZ Bible Society gives national and international reports of progress in world-wide Bible Society work, news of completed translations (NT and full Bibles), of administration, distribution and restrictions in each country. It undertakes the printing of completed New Testaments and Bibles as well as Bible portions. (Did you know the NZ Bible Society has statistics to support its claim that the Bible is still by far NZ's best seller?)

The annual prayer booklet (United BS) gives maps to show the geographical position of each country (a marvellous way to learn geography), with the diary being divided into weekly sections.

NZ Bible Society, Private Bag 27901, Marion Square, Wellington 6030 Free-phone 0800 424253.

The Bible League will print translations for small populations which are often otherwise delayed by the needs of Scriptures for larger populations. As we are aware, it also distributes Bibles to individual homes.

Open Doors with Brother Andrew The monthly prayer calendars have their finger on the pulse of the persecuted world. Frequently they report events of significance in world affairs months before the secular press (and the Readers' Digest!) wake up to them, so if you want to be ahead in world knowledge take note. A good introduction to this work is a book many of you have already read, "*God's Smuggler*." The Open Doors notes often paint a grimmer picture than the Bible Society, probably because of the different nature of the work of these two organisations, and Open Door's relationship with the suffering church. They have similar aims, taking the Bible into all the world, but the prime function of each is different.

Open Doors with Bro. Andrew, PO Box 27630, Mt. Roskill, Auckland

The Leprosy Mission (TLM) This mission of compassion does not give a prayer diary, but sends regular reports to supporters, with plenty of items for prayer. It gives statistics of the progress made globally in the eradication of the disease and encouraging accounts of the rehabilitation of sufferers. The task is far from

complete. Doctors and nurses, physiotherapists and health instructors still have essential parts to play.

The Leprosy Mission, P.O.Box 10277, Dominion Road, Auckland. Free Phone 0800 862873

Overseas Missionary Fellowship (O.M.F.), Service in Mission (S.I.M.) and World Evangelisation Crusade (W.E.C.) These interdenominational missions work in special outreach areas, with individual mission partners from evangelical churches under their umbrellas. The least known, World Evangelisation Crusade, founded in the 18th century, sends workers to places where no missionary has yet been.

This lists a few of the missions which we can pray for. It is only intended as a guide, as food for thought, and as a direction you perhaps might want to go. Your list may well be different.

The advantage of newsletters and publications is that we are kept up-to-date with developments, and can pray with knowledge and understanding. The disadvantage is that our prayer can become just a list to be got through. The only way to avoid this is to be always thoughtful as we pray. Try to put yourselves into the prayer. Imagine the situation. Picture the person in his/her setting. Picture the recipients of the gospel. Place yourself in thought with Christian prisoners. Enter the struggles of the teacher. Be the doctor, the nurse. Feel the weariness, the frustrations, the heat, the joy. Use your imagination, not wildly but realistically. We do not know how to pray, but the Bible promises that the Holy Spirit can take our prayers and make them meaningful. Although we do not know the specifics, though we may not personally know the ones we pray for, God does. And if it comes one day that you are too ill or in pain and too tired even to pray in this way, God knows and understands. A weak whisper will surely reach Him, and especially when it has been our habit in better days, to come before His throne faithfully. How wonderful He is, that He can take our feeble prayers and use them for the accomplishment of His purposes.

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Between You and Me!

Smoking & drinking

Dick Vanderpyl

There are alarming and disturbing reports here and overseas. What about us here?

In a recent magazine of an Orthodox Reformed Denomination overseas my attention was drawn to an article on smoking and drinking. It was quite disturbing reading!

Smoking and drinking became quite a big issue in our churches back in the Fifties. For Evangelicals and other Bible-believing Christians, it was a big stumbling block. The late Rev. Alex Scarrow, the first minister of Bucklands Beach, would say that if you met a Dutchman with a cigarette in his mouth, he must be either Reformed or a non-believer. This was often heard! In those early years smoking and drinking became an absolute 'no-no,' and early synods had this issue on their agenda time and again. The rebels refused to give in! Some delegates would sneak out for a quick drag, hoping that a few King peppermints would cover any smell! Of course the Purists easily smelled it as they came back to their seats. Woollen jerseys were the worst for retaining the smoker's sin.

Some time ago my attention was drawn to an article in a fortnightly magazine from one of our sister churches. The heading stated that the

leadership of this denomination was more than concerned about some seriously unhealthy behaviour, which would eventually have devastating results!

A recent study on smoking and the use of alcohol shows its effects on the Low Lands health-wise. Evidence is that smokers and drinkers grow old quicker. As a matter of fact, they are getting age-wise well behind the rest of Europe! Sinful habits! More and more women have now accepted this habit of smoking from their colleagues in the workforce, with all its results. The younger generation has also accepted this pattern of smoking and drinking. It has been established that the number of deaths at around the age of forty, due to heavy drinking and smoking, are a result of unhealthy habits.

The down spiral of those who smoke and drink has now also affected the young generation at primary schools! It's a great concern in the nation.

We have so-called controls on age-levels to prevent under-age use of cigarettes and alcohol. But as the saying goes: young taught, old learned!

The Christchurch PRESS recently spent more than a week in their daily newspapers proving that alcohol has had an impact in our communities. Our crime rates, our youth culture, our mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing, are affected. This social problem has penetrated right through our society. And when cancer comes into their homes; it is not their fault. The suppliers are blamed and even taken to court because it is

their fault, their sin! And so the booze soaks deeply into the fabric of this nation. I vividly remember in the early Fifties when pubs closed down at 6 p.m. and the workforce raced like mad on an empty stomach to the nearest pub to quickly get drunk, and saw the consequences in their homes. Well, enough said. After all, there is nothing new under the sun.

The question asked is: why do these youngsters get so drunk over the weekend? This includes boy racers as well as others. The sad thing is that these teenagers are quite proud about breaking the law, and think it's smart!

But here, as in Europe, there is now sufficient evidence that it is affecting the aging process. They hurt themselves and...the innocent victims. That's what alcohol does to you! Many of our first generation accepted this.

In the Fifties we struggled with this issue of smoking and alcoholic drinks! Eventually at the Synod of 1964 our churches adopted a guiding principle that the use of fermented wine and tobacco be left to the conscience of the individual Christians. Fair enough! But we did struggle with this issue in those early years.

There was also the argument of grieving the Holy Spirit in our bodies! It took many synods and more than a decade before we decided that enough is enough. There were other issues to be dealt with!

My wife and I were glad to make that decision to stop smoking, but failed on the other issue!

Why the Reformed Church still?

Bill Deenick

I - Why Then?

The first question that must come up when we think about the establishment of the RCNZ 50 years ago, is this: were we right? Were we right when we added to the divisiveness of the Christian Church in New Zealand and established yet another denomination, the Reformed Churches? Was that what the Lord Jesus, the king of the Church, expected from us? What were the alternatives?

We could have decided that it was much better for Dutch migrants with a Reformational background to join one of the existing denominations and make a positive contribution within these churches. There were other positively evangelical Christians within these churches; some more organised than others. Within the Presbyterian Church there was the Westminster Fellowship, which was decidedly Reformational in its intentions and in its membership and, at the time, under the leadership of the Miller brothers.

Also among the Anglicans and the Methodists there were 'evangelically-minded' members and preachers. Then there were the Baptists who allowed an open kind 'membership' for believers who chose not to be re-baptised by immersion. The Dutch Protestant migrants were divided about it. Some decided they should join one of these NZ churches. The Lord Jesus was doing a saving work among them. Why should we not join them?

We decided against that. Why; and was it the right decision?

Our argument was that we could not join a church in which essential aspects of the Gospel were called into question; such as: our Lord's atoning sacrifice for our sins; his bodily resurrection and ascension into heaven; his second coming. Also other biblical doctrines: salvation by grace and faith alone; the reliability of God's Word in Scripture; and the inclusion of the children within the covenant of God's grace.

We also had serious misgivings about the 'open' communion table. We believed that the Lord Jesus, through the apostles, taught us that

the local elders were to keep watch over both the pulpit and the table.

We found that the Lutherans and the Baptists were closest to us, but the Lutherans were specifically Lutheran both in their doctrine of the Holy Supper and in their organisation. Moreover, in all of New Zealand there were only one or two (more or less viable) Lutheran congregations.

The Baptists, on the contrary, would have made us most welcome through their open membership but, if we joined them, we would need to forget about the covenant and the baptism of infant children.

In written statements, addressed to those who would have liked us to join them, we explained (as best we could) why we believed that the Lord called us to establish churches fully committed to a Reformational expression of the faith. Then the NZRC was established, first in Christchurch, a month later in Auckland and a few weeks later in Wellington. Both the Baptists and the Presbyterians were unhappy about that; the Presbyterians in particular. By approaching the

NZ government, they even tried to curtail Dutch immigration into New Zealand, but that effort was unsuccessful. The Dutch legation at Wellington managed that matter tactfully but firmly.

On the basis of its commitment to the Reformed faith, the NZRC have now existed for fifty years. In New Zealand, we included from the start the Westminster Confession of Faith (with a few deletions) among our doctrinal standards. We did that most of all to clarify that our purpose was not to establish a Dutch church.

Different than Australia

In Australia things developed slightly differently, mostly for local reasons. To begin with, in Australia there were a (Free) Presbyterian Church of (Eastern) Australia and an (Irish) Reformed Presbyterian Church, both of which made the early Reformed migrants quite welcome, albeit with some trepidation. Understandably they were uncertain about an influx of Dutchmen with opinions and traditions of their own. If these Dutch Calvinists were to join their relatively small Psalm-singing communities, they could easily alter their churches' character. In good conscience before the Lord, they could not allow that to happen.

With regard to the Lutherans and the Baptists, the situation in Australia was very similar to that in New Zealand but regarding the Church of England, in the extended arch-diocese of Sydney, the Reformed migrants (to their great surprise) found things to be radically different. There the Thirty-Nine Articles of the CoE and Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer were faithfully adhered to, and Moore Theological College was as close to a sound neo-Calvinistic institution as could have been hoped for. Still that applied only to the one (numerically and financially very strong but still isolated) segment of the CoE, and the Dutch migrants were settling throughout the length and breadth of the Australian continent. So, essentially the situation on both sides of the Tasman was much the same.

From the start, though, the New Zealand churches moved in a slightly different direction. I already mentioned the adoption of the Westminster Confession among the doctrinal standards, and that was an indication that the New Zealand churches looked for closer ties with Anglo-Saxons, more specifically the Scottish Reformed tradition.

Then a further, quite unexpected development occurred when, within the first year of their existence, the RCNZ were approached by members who had broken away from the Presbyterian Church of Howick. They asked whether they could join us. They did; and established the (Presbyterian) Reformed Church of Bucklands Beach.

The New Zealand churches also maintained closer ties with the USA Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Westminster Seminary in Pennsylvania. Although in the early years, American pastors from the CRC of North America helped us out wonderfully, in Australia as well as in NZ, the first minister called from the USA was

a man from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Raymond O. Zorn. Others followed after him. The list of ministers who have served the New Zealand churches has a larger proportion of USA-born and/or USA-trained men than Australian churches ever had. Together with other circumstances, this means that the New Zealand churches moved through these fifty years in a slightly different direction to their sister churches in Australia.

It depends on what the church means

Looking back, did we understand correctly the Lord's will for us? The question is not whether a different decision (such as joining up with the Westminster Fellowship within the Presbyterian Church) would have been of greater spiritual benefit for the Dutch migrants. Questions like that cannot be answered. All we can ask is this: did we understand correctly the Lord's will, as we found it in Scripture? Was it lawful for us to add



Rev Bill Deenick (Emeritus)

to the divisiveness within the *Una Sancta*, the Lord's Body, in New Zealand?

Much depends on how we see the *Una Sancta*. We could say that the One Holy Christian Church is the totality of all who sincerely seek to follow the Lord Jesus by faith in Him and in his Word; no matter how they are incorporated within churches and denominations. If that is the *Una Sancta*, then what we did was not necessarily either right or wrong. If, by establishing the NZRC, we helped some to be better followers of the Lord Jesus and to live closer to him: well, great! On the other hand, so far as the establishment of the NZRC hindered the unity and cooperation among those who believed in Jesus, that would not be so great. But in a broken world there are no perfect solutions for anything; so why should we raise the question in the first place?

However, if we say that every step and every decision ought to be made according to our Lord's instructions, not only here and there locally but also for the regional and nationwide church, then we face different questions. Then we were called

to establish, as best we could, a New Zealand church that endeavoured to follow the Lord's directions for the church's faith and order as best it could.

Since 1962, my work has been limited, nearly exclusively, to what has happened on the Australian front. It is not for me, then, to have an opinion about how faithful you have been in your church life to the Lord's will for his people. But it is beyond any doubt that in establishing the NZRC we set out to do what we believed to be the Lord's will for us. We did not find it easy but we were convinced that there was no other option, and we hoped and prayed that what we did might be a blessing to Jesus' church in this country.

II. How further?

But what about the future? I have been asked whether I could also open some vision to the RCNZ's future. Do we need the Reformed Church in New Zealand still and, if we do, how do we need it? Are the reasons why the NZRC was established at that time still valid? That is not necessarily so. Or, to put it differently, do the same reasons still exist and are they still valid for maintaining their separate existence now, half a century later?

Although I can only speak from beyond the Tasman, I may be able to contribute to your thoughts on this because in New Zealand you face essentially the same issues as we do in the CRCA. Essentially, although there are significant differences, although I know too little about the developments in New Zealand to speak about them with any kind of authority. Still, from an Australian perspective, I might be of some help to you as long as you fill in for yourselves where and in how far my insights apply to New Zealand.

Fifty years is quite a long time in church history. In these fifty years the Lord God could have given renewal and reformation in the churches around us, and also changed things in other ways. To what extent has this happened?

At a world level, many things have changed. For one thing the ecumenical movement, which was in its heyday fifty years ago, has lost nearly all of its impetus. We do not hear much about 'church unions' any more. In Australia the Methodists, the Congregationalists, and most Presbyterians joined in forming the Uniting Church, but that happened many years ago. In New Zealand there was talk about a similar union but that never came about, and I doubt that you still hear about it. In Australia not all Presbyterians were happy with that union, and a good many continued as a Presbyterian Church. Faithfulness to their doctrinal standards may well bring these Presbyterians closer to us.

However, with church unions no longer being on the agenda and the various denominations being quite relaxed about their mutual independence, that does not necessarily mean that today's churches, fellowships, and halls ignore each other. On the contrary, they seem much closer and friendlier in their mutual relationship than in the past. They also mix more

freely than they did. That seems to be the case worldwide, and I suppose that you notice that too.

But a great deal more has happened during these fifty years. We have seen the rise and (to some extent) the decline of the charismatic movement; yet all over the place we still have thriving charismatic, semi-charismatic and crypto-charismatic communities. As another historic phenomenon, we have seen the Roman Church go through stages of confusion and of evangelical revival in many places. No matter how the Roman see pontificates, priestly authority appears to be in decline and biblical authority on the increase.

Moreover, in general 'denominationalism' in the sense of loyalty to any one denomination has diminished even further. At least that is so in Australia. The local vicar of St John's Anglican Church in Healesville tells me that more than half of his parishioners have no Anglican background at all. He preaches evangelical sermons and people with a Baptist, Salvation Army, Uniting and Roman background are happy to hear him preach and to join his church. His Anglican vestments in various colours, his candles, his altar and the kneeling at the rail for Holy Supper do not seem to bother them much.

Many years ago, in the fourth issue of the first volume of *'Trowel and Sword'*, February 1955, I satirised the way in which New Zealand Christians moved from church to church. I then wrote something like this.

"Just imagine that my New Zealand father, who happened to be a Roman Catholic, married my mother who attended a Methodist Church. Consequently I was 'christened' in the Methodist Church. Later, by attending an Anglican Sunday school, I became connected with the Church of England, where I have been confirmed and became a communicant member. Later, I married a Presbyterian girl and that made things slightly more complicated but for the sake of family unity, I decided to join the Presbyterians. Without any difficulty I was accepted in the Presbyterian fellowship and we were quite happy there until there were some very deplorable troubles with the local pastor. After that, we could no longer stay there and, for a while, we did not know what to do until some very good friends invited us to their Baptist Church. We found there a warm reception and a good spiritual home. They made that possible because they had a kind of open membership and we did not need to be re-baptised by immersion.

As for my brothers and sisters, they too are somewhat all over the place denominationally. One of my brothers is a missionary in China for the 'Open (Plymouth) Brethren' and one of my sisters regularly attends the meetings of the Salvation Army, the Army Hall being just round the corner from where she lives. Only one of us, a sister and a remarkable woman, has stayed in the Methodist Church all her life. She is an out-

and-out Methodist and in her opinion there is in all the world but one church, the Wesleyan Methodist."

That seemed a fair picture at the time for New Zealand church life. As long as people were still Christians and found good fellowship somewhere, what difference did it make where they worshipped?

Have things changed since then? Hardly, except that we could comfortably insert the Reformed Church somewhere and say that one of my brothers moved from New Zealand to Australia, married a Dutch girl, and now has become an elder in the local Reformed Church. Although for some obscure reason they now refer to themselves as Christian Reformed. Some of their children seem to be happier in a local charismatic set-up, however; but tongue-speaking seems to be on the way out there. They have been re-baptised by immersion, though, and they found that a wonderful experience.

Fifty years ago, we found all of this very strange. In our Dutch background, movement from one denomination to another was quite uncommon and often a traumatic event for those involved. When we came here we did not deny that Methodists, Anglicans, Salvation Army people, Baptists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals and even some Roman Catholics could still be Christians but in the matter of the church we believed them to be altogether wrong, disobedient to what Christ and His apostles teach us concerning the church.

Do we still say that; and do our young people still say that? Or rather, should we still say that and should also our young people still say that? Have the NZRC maintained their commitment to the Reformed faith with its order; and, if you have, should you continue to do so no matter how the world around you has changed, leaving you standing in isolation?

I could try to answer these questions for the CRCA; but even then you would have to take into account that I can only speak for myself and from what I observe. Several of you have been in Australia for longer or shorter periods, and you may have a much brighter or a much darker impression of the life and work of the CRCA.

I wonder, though, how useful it would be for you to hear what my impressions and hopes are concerning the Australian church. Would it not be more helpful if I tried to give you some vision and express some hope for the future of the NZRC? But how could I, having been away for 40 years?

Whether as the NZRC you have maintained your commitment to the 'Reformed faith-and-order' of your doctrinal statements does not pose such a great problem. There does not seem to be a great deal of doubt about that. From what I read in your *'Faith in Focus'* you have been able to do so with an agreeable measure of unity, and you have maintained your membership. It is true that some of your churches have remained very small, and also as a denomination you continue to be small in numbers. Your stand for unity in the Reformed faith has not made you a popular and

attractive church. While assemblies and halls that major in Neo-Pentecostal practices attract attention and members, the NZRC have not. You have not kept up with the growth of New Zealand's population. Is it then worth the effort and the sacrifice to go on in the way you have these fifty years?

I know that isn't the right way to ask the question. The verdict on the stand you take is not determined by how popular you are. If we follow, as best we can, our Lord's instructions for his church (as we understand them), what more does the Lord expect from us?

But have we rightly understood the Lord's instructions? While it is clearly the Lord's will for His people to be faithful and united in their message, what does that mean in practice? For one thing, how precisely do we define the message, and into how much detail do we define it? Moreover, is the message as formulated five centuries ago in our doctrinal standards still a good way of expressing our unity in Christ? And then there is a second question: what is more important — unity or truth? Should the unity be sacrificed for the sake of the truth?

The second question raises problems. Certainly the church should seek to be united in its message. But if there are problems on that score, is that a good enough reason to surrender the unity and to break away from those who differ from us by establishing an even more faithful church?

And what about the other question: how do we formulate the truth that the church upholds in the twenty-first century?

Things to be certain of

When you go ahead as the RCNZ you have to be quite certain about all of these things:

- I) You should be sure about the essential truth of the gospel message, and you should commit yourselves to unity in that message;
- II) You should formulate your common message in the best possible way; and that does not have to be in the words of ancient documents. Times change and challenges change. The Reformation documents addressed the challenges of the world and the church then. You now should address the challenges the church faces at this time and in this place.

On the first point, I cannot see how in New Zealand we could have followed a different way than we did 50 years ago. Surely Jesus also commands us to seek unity, but not at the expense of the truth. The gospels and the epistles clearly tell us this. In His high-priestly prayer, the Lord Jesus asked His Father to keep the apostles united in the truth (John 17). In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1:10), as well as in Rev. 2: 20ff; and in many other places, we find the same emphasis.

There cannot be much disputation on the second point either. If we are to speak to our surroundings in this century, we need to address the issues of the century. That is not easy to do, but it must be done. There is no other way. It

seems to me that in its *'Our World belongs to God, A Contemporary Testimony,'* the CRC of North America has made a good and courageous effort in that direction. That is not to say, though, that it could not be improved upon or that you in New Zealand could not seek to formulate your own contemporary expression of the Reformed Faith.

Still, apart from the essential unity that you need in your message and your order, there are a good many other challenges that you face; and I could mention some of these from my experience in the CRCA.

As far as the CRCA is concerned we have, as a denomination, maintained the integrity of our message to the world. For the last twenty years I have been most of the time a church-going rather than a preaching member. I have listened to sermons twice every Sunday, and I have not heard any heresies from CRCA pulpits. Only once, in all these years, have I approached a CRCA minister because I believed that in his sermon he had uncritically followed what he had read somewhere, and had preached an unbiblical message. He accepted that, and explained that he had not really meant what he had said. I have heard that preacher many times since and have had no problems with his sermons at all.

Does this mean then that the CRCA, in its preaching and teaching, is still a faithfully Reformational church? If we take into account that the Heidelberg Catechism tells us that even the holiest believer has but a small beginning of the new obedience that Christ expects from us, we can say that, yes, the CRCA has this first beginning of faithfulness to the Gospel. In my own church I have recently heard a series of helpful sermons on the 'five points of Calvinism' and on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

This is not to say that in the CRCA there are no problems about the art of preaching but that is an altogether different question. But if it is true that the RCRA in its preaching has remained faithful to the Word of God as understood in the Reformed faith, what about the church's membership? How faithful have the members been?

Some might argue that for our CRCA members, especially for those of the third generation, the commitment to a distinctly Reformed faith and order has become as open-ended as in most other churches. I do not think this is a fair assessment, but seeing the way older and younger members move away from the CRCA and join other churches and fellowships it is obvious that the love for the Reformed faith does not go very deep.

From statistics it appears that the CRCA still holds on to its young people considerably better than all other churches in Australia, but the difference is only relative. The CRCA membership would be many times larger than it is now if more of the second and the third generations had remained committed to the Reformed faith and its church. I cannot quote any statistics but when I consider the families I personally know about (eg. the families of most ministers and many

elders), I know that considerably more than half of their children and grandchildren have moved away from the CRCA. In fact, even from the ranks of the ministers and elders themselves, many have left for other pastures. Once, in the sight of God and His church, they solemnly pledged their commitment to the faith and order of the Reformation, yet they broke their vows and, with their families, moved to communities where there is no such commitment at all. While this does not apply to those who, for valid reasons, entered the ministry of the restored Presbyterian Church, to many others it does.

Why then has all of this happened, and why is it happening still? Obviously it has and it still does, because not only among those who left, but also in the church generally, the conviction that the Reformed faith demands a Reformed Church has weakened. In some places it no longer exists. In fact, generally the reason why people continue to remain CRCA members is because they find their local church to be a worthwhile Christian community in which they like the preaching and the fellowship.

Usually the decisive factor is how people experience a church's fellowship. Consequently, ministers and elders concentrate on that aspect of church life, which includes what we do in and around the worship service. Extending 'the hand of fellowship', passing on the Lord's peace to each other; and promoting further fellowship after the service over cups of tea and coffee become increasingly important. The same applies to the church's activities during the week. We bring people together for prayer, for Bible study, for outings, for seminars, for weekends, and for Sunday morning breakfasts. The church is supposed to be there for fellowship.

Church members who merely come to church in order to hear the Word of God, so as to be guided in their daily work, their profession, their family life, have become an exception. We do not think that is good enough. We want to get our members more deeply involved with each other. In Australia, we now call these activities 'ministries'.

Some CRCA churches majoring in fellowship and 'ministries' are doing quite well; and for many that justifies their church's existence. No matter how many members they have lost over the years, they are still there and others from outside the original fold have been won.

But then there are also congregations in which preaching the Word is still right at the centre of worship. When the minister is a gifted preacher, such congregations also fare well. A consistent teaching ministry justifies their existence as a Reformed Church.

So, the CRCA is still there and quite a few of its congregations are doing well. Isn't that good enough?

Of course, it is not. For whatever reason, various CRCA congregations are not doing very well; at all. Their membership may be too small and not specifically gifted; and consequently their fellowship is limited and unexciting. They may

have to work in difficult surroundings; the minister may have limited talents, and there are few young people. How then can they justify their existence? Would it not be much better if they joined up with a local Uniting or Baptist community? It would make the fellowship more exciting, help the young people to mix with other young Christians; create more scope for inter-action with the civil community; and show the world that we are one.

Is that then the dilemma we face?

In Australia, the main-line churches have gone through stages of change but are still as divided on what they believe and preach as they were fifty years ago. Among the Anglicans there is still a strong theologically-liberal element. In the USA there are men like bishop Spong and in Britain the new primate, the Archbishop of Canterbury, is a thorn in the flesh of Evangelicals; as is Australia's new primate, the Archbishop of Perth. Also, within the Uniting Church, the old liberalism functions as freely as ever. On that score, nothing has changed or is likely to change in the near future. Evangelicals in these churches know that, and they know about the theological professors and parish priests who do not preach Christ; but they do not see that as a valid reason to separate from them.

Thus, in New Zealand and Australia, we have to make up our minds. In a Post-Modern world, we face an increasingly non-Christian or anti-Christian environment. Should we not, as those who follow Jesus, unite as much as we possibly can? If we gave up our Reformed Church isolation, you in New Zealand and we in Australia, we could still have in Hamilton and Bishopdale, in Blacktown (NSW), Willetton (WA), and Mt Evelyn (Vic.) vibrant Reformed parishes within a somewhat United or Uniting Church. Do we then still believe that, for conscience's sake and for Christ's sake, that cannot be done? Should it not be done, precisely for the sake of Christ and his people? Should our beliefs concerning Biblical authority, the virgin birth of Christ, the five points of Calvinism, the baptism of infants and the office of elder keep us separate from fellow believers? In short, is it essential that as RCNZ and CRCA we remain strictly committed as a denomination to our Reformed faith and order?

It seems to me that for the average CRCA member, and certainly for CRCA young people, the issue of unity in the Reformed faith-and-order comes at the very end of their agenda; if it is there at all. What they believe to be important is that in our countries' environment of unbelief, Christians should stick together and form living communities in which the essentials of the Gospel are preached, and the believers encourage each other while reaching out to the world.

Is there still among us a hard core of leaders and members for whom the commitment to the Reformed faith and its order is not negotiable? It seems to me that there is, though its number is not very large.

They believe the church, its members, its young people and its evangelism converts should

pledge themselves to what the Lord Jesus and his apostles have taught us about the church and its order. For them, the apostolic instructions concerning the church's message, its life, and its order, as understood in the Reformed tradition, are still entirely valid and cannot be surrendered.

I believe, though, that those who conscientiously hold that position should say so more clearly and openly than they generally do, and that they should be much more determined and effective about passing it on to the next generation. The cultural and philosophical climate has little or no interest in traditions, institutions, and structures, and Christian young people cannot be expected to be greatly interested in doctrinal formulations or ecclesiastical orders. Moreover, has not every new generation and the 'cultural revolution' of every age believed its own situation to be unique and its latest discoveries to be final? Have not the devil's lies and human folly always been essentially the same? Or, for that matter, has Jesus' church ever benefited from accommodation with the world? Are not our Lord's marching orders as valid today as they have ever been?

This does not mean, though, that the church of the past has always been right. It certainly hasn't. Not in Geneva, Britain, the Netherlands, or anywhere else. We should be **open and honest** with ourselves and our young people.

For Australia, I could mention four aspects of Reformed church life that need critical attention. They are: 1 - the worship service; 2 - the preaching; 3 - the church's commitment to its young people; 4 - the church's evangelism.

1) The worship service

I am not exaggerating when I say that in the CRCA the conduct of the worship service is all over the place. Twenty-five years ago, one of our more popular preachers in Victoria (he is now no longer within the CRCA) began to promote the idea that each local congregation should develop its own character, its own way of being a church, in worship and everything else. People could then go to the church of their choice. That idea caught on in some parts of Victoria and in other places. As a consequence, we now find that, in its worship practices, one congregation may differ quite radically from another and that members, if they cannot go to a CRCA service where they feel at home, will go elsewhere within the denomination. If they cannot, they will have to suffer the local practices or look outside the Christian Reformed fellowship.

Consequently I see, on the one extreme, congregations where the people's praise consists of three or four hymns chosen by the minister from the synodically-adopted *Book of Worship* with the organ accompanying the singing. But on the other extreme there are congregations where a 'liturgical committee' decides on the songs to be selected from wherever, with the minister suggesting one or two items that are in line with the sermon and that may or may not be from the *Book of Worship*. These 'liturgical committees'

may have some expertise in music but, as a rule, they know very little about Reformational worship. Being enthusiastic about singing and being familiar with the new songs does not qualify for leadership in worship. In any case, the minister carries that responsibility. He may well seek the help of musicians and of young people enthusiastic about singing, but he cannot abdicate from his high calling in worship.

Also in other ways, CRCA worship is in considerable disarray. For one thing, a variety of people (without ever having been called or authorised by the church for leadership in public worship) say prayers, pass on messages, make comments, give testimonies, and in general mess up whatever liturgical order is left. Usually the preaching of the Word comes as the last item on the liturgical agenda. More often than not, the minister finally comes round to the preaching of

Reformational church, will need to have a good look at itself. In recent years, some positive elements have been added to our worship. We have added a variety of musical instruments to the organ and the piano, and in that way we involve more young people. A further move ahead has been that those who have trouble with hearing and seeing are more positively assisted in joining the rest of the congregation. Extending to each other the peace of the Lord also seems a meaningful addition. And there are other elements that now seem to be new but that are in fact be quite old; such as kneeling for prayer. On the other hand, in contrast to the practice in Roman and Anglican worship, the public reading of God's Word is possibly the most neglected part of CRCA worship. Generally, only very small portions of Scripture are read and while the art of public reading is a very special gift, many of our readers



Some of those at the Auckland Senior's Anniversary fellowship

the Word after we have been in church for one hour and fifteen minutes. By then most of the people, especially the young people and the children, are too tired to give the slightest attention.

In the background, I see a basic misunderstanding of the nature of **public** worship. Many CRCA worship services have become extended 'fellowship gatherings' in which everyone is encouraged to make his contribution. There is nothing wrong with such meetings, but Reformed public worship is essentially different in nature and should be conducted accordingly. In the church of the Reformation, only those take part in public worship whom the church, through its councils, has examined, found gifted, and equipped for that purpose; and who thereupon have been publicly called and authorised to do so. The public honour of Christ and the truth of the Gospel are at stake and the church cannot play around with that.

At this point, the CRCA, if it is to be a

do not have that talent. Roman Catholics and Anglicans have three or four readings and make these an essential part of worship. I know of one CRCA church in which we have six or seven prayers said by a variety of (generally-unauthorised) members but only one brief Scripture reading.

2) The preaching

When I say that the CRCA sermon is generally sound and well prepared, I mean that I hear no heresies and that most ministers come into the pulpit with a sermon they have worked on with some care. Whether the preaching in the CRCA is generally of a high standard (exegetically or homiletically) is another question. I am sure that the standard could (and should) be much higher than it is but, having been one of the CRCA preachers, I hesitate to be critical and I try to listen as one who needs the Gospel to be built up by it.

I cannot avoid one comment, however. Most sermons I have heard over the last twenty years

have been predominantly Christian-centred and not Christ-centred. We are confronted constantly with the Christian and his/her experiences, troubles, relationships and everything else about him/her. How we should go on to higher degrees of fellowship and outreach; proceed to higher stages of spirituality and service. Thomas a Kempis with his *'Imitation of Christ'* (though few may have heard his name or read his book) is still very much alive among us. For the Christian to be so much at the centre of interest is frightfully depressing, and takes away from the joy of hearing the crucified and risen Saviour honoured and proclaimed.

Twenty years ago I addressed a Ministers' Conference on the topic, *'No Slavedrivers in the Reformed Pulpit'*. Although the slaves are no longer driven by a great deal of violence, they are still constantly urged on to climb the steep road to some sort of spiritual standing and evangelistic achievement. As always and everywhere, so also among us, the freedom that we have in Christ, the freedom from all slavery, including all spiritual slavery, is in danger of being lost.

3) The church's commitment to her young people

There is no doubt that in the CRCA we are committed to our young people. That has been so for many years. Capable men and women have dedicated their time and energy to leading young people not only to faith in Christ, but also to a Christian life and witness. The CRCA youth movement is still alive, though not every where equally.

But should the youth movement also make young people aware of the specific place the Reformed Church has within the world church and the national church, and should it seek to lead them to a commitment to the Reformed faith-and-order?

I have been told that this cannot be done. It is out of the question. Young people are growing up in a world of total unbelief, and in a society with no absolutes. We should be thankful when they still take hold of the essentials of the Christian message and are willing to walk with Jesus here and now. Why should we trouble them with issues that seemed important way back in the past?

It is obvious why people say that. The work among teenagers and young adults will have to focus on primary questions, and on the first decisions that young people have to make. But is that necessarily the end of the matter for them? Sooner or later, young men and women will need, and will want, to establish their place within the 'una sancta.' Then the same old questions will come up for them that have troubled the Church for 2000 years.

Notwithstanding the coming and going of lifestyles, philosophies, and ideologies, the question of the faithfulness and the truthfulness of Jesus' church is an 'eternal' question. As such, it is to be presented to young men and women in the twenty-first century just as much in the very

first century. Is the Church's message biblically, evangelically, sound? Are the sacraments administered according Christ's instructions and his care for people? Is the Church faithful in guarding the life of those who seek to follow Jesus? Does the Church fulfil its mission in and to the world?

4) The church's evangelism

On CRCA evangelism and its involvement with the community 'in such a time as this,' I am even more hesitant to speak. Only, on what seem to me to be two foundational points I may have something to contribute:

- a) Evangelism should start at home. In my experience there is a tendency to talk much about evangelism and about calling sinners to Christ, while in fact many of those who are our first responsibility are neglected. Our first evangelism should be among those who are our primary responsibility: the baptised younger and older people, not a few of them confirmed members as well, who have wandered away from Christ and who in fact live at various stages of unbelief. In my experience, there are considerable numbers of younger and older covenant members who have drifted and are drifting away with nobody seeming to worry much about them, except possibly some family members. Every Reformed Church has a disturbing number of 'lost members' on its rolls and very little, if any outreach with the message of Christ is done among them. It is no use pretending that we are concerned about those who have for generations lived in unbelief and modern-day paganism, if we ignore those who are our first responsibility. Every Reformed church should begin to make that its first priority in evangelism and should not leave it entirely to ministers, elders, and family members. It is a congregational responsibility;
- b) This is not to say that there is not also a Christ-given mandate for reaching out into the paganised communities in which we now live. To be sure, there is. Others have written about it with authority and, what is more important, have been active and, by the grace of God, successful in it. I can only praise God for their efforts and for the fruit on their work.

Still, in the context of these notes on the legitimacy of the churches in which we serve, we cannot avoid the question: does, at any stage in evangelism, the 'church-question' have to come up? Do we have to confront people with the question which church they should join? Will people who come from outside any church tradition be interested in why there is a Reformed Church? Should they be? Should they be confronted with questions about church organisation and the reliability of the pulpit? As long as they feel at home and comfortable in a church's fellowship and are spiritually guided and uplifted by it, is that not good enough?

Obviously, for those who turn to the Lord Jesus from outside the Church, fellowship within the

Church is of crucial importance. Yet, at some stage, they will be confronted with the divisions within the Christian world. The Church's divisiveness is so flagrantly obvious, as is also in many places the perversion of its Christian message, that 'converts' cannot be artificially shielded from that reality.

Thus in evangelism, sooner or later, the 'church question' will have to come up. We could say, 'Well, you will have to find out for yourselves which church is the best for you; which church you believe to be faithful and reliable in its message and practice'. But even then, when they ask for guidance, we cannot avoid explaining that Christ's instructions concerning the Church are still valid. Reformed Church evangelism cannot be evasive about the 'church question'. There is 'good news' about, there are instructions concerning the Church, and we have a commission to tell sinners about these.

In sum

Let this then be the conclusion: If we say that, for the years ahead us in this twenty-first century, the RCNZ has a legitimate place and calling, does it have much of a future as well? Will there still be a RCNZ in the year 2053?

Thankfully, the LORD our God has not given us a mandate of prophecy. In the New Testament we have all the prophetic teaching we need. From God's Word we know that, unless the Lord Jesus returns before then, with God helping His people through his Word and Spirit, in 50 years' time there will still be (in this country and beyond the Tasman) a Church that proclaims Christ, crucified and risen. That Church, not withstanding all its weaknesses, will continue to preach the Gospel of grace and will pass on Christ's instructions for human life in the world and in the church.

And may, by God's great mercy, your great-grandchildren and mine still be part of that Church as it seeks to be faithful to its Saviour and King.

An adapted version of this was the keynote address given by the Rev. Deenick on the occasion of the Reformed Church of Auckland's 50th Anniversary

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

World in focus

MOPS International reaches out to military mums of preschoolers

MOPS International (Mothers of Preschoolers) has a new Web site to reach out in ministry to military moms. Resources include tips and ideas for families during deployments and a forum where military moms can share ideas and resources and offer prayer and encouragement to all moms. More than 3000 MOPS groups are meeting the needs of military and civilian mothers of preschoolers in every state of USA and 20 other countries.

+ MOPS International, 2370 South Trenton Way, Denver, CO 80231
www.militarymops.org/

+ PCANews - Presbyterian Church in America, 1700 N. Brown Road, Suite 105, Lawrenceville, GA 30043 (678) 825-1000

Hungarian Cabinet offers 850 million Forints in subsidies to churches

The cabinet reached agreement with church leaders on 6 April on the distribution of 850 million forints (US\$3.9 million) in subsidies to support religion and church institutions, "Magyar Hirlap" reported. The money will go primarily to those churches that lost funding through the Socialist-led government's new policy of distributing funds to religious groups through income-tax contributions rather than on the basis of census figures. According to the agreement, the Catholic Church will receive 730 million, the Calvinist Church 44 million, the Lutheran Church 11 million, and the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities 7 million forints. Eleven smaller churches will also receive subsidies, the daily reported.

+ Reformed Theological Seminary, Budapest, TX Raday u21 Hungary

Presbyterian Churches in Iraq escape major damage

Word has reached Presbyterian media officials from Iraq that the five Presbyterian churches there escaped significant damage and are carrying on with their ministries. In a 24 April E-mail from Cairo, Victor Makari wrote, "First-hand report indicates that the Presbyterian churches in Baghdad and in Mosul are managing fairly well under the circumstances.

"The Arab Evangelical (Presbyterian) Church of Baghdad was able to gather for services on Good Friday and on Easter." Makari said that the Rev. Nuhad Tomeh, the PC(USA)'s mission co-worker with the Middle East Council of Churches who is co-ordinating MECC relief efforts in Iraq, told him that the Good Friday service at Arab Evangelical church was broadcast live on Iraqi television.

Presbyterian missionaries came to Iraq in 1836. Iraq has five Presbyterian churches with an estimated 3,000 members. Iraqi Presbyterians, however, tally membership by numbers of families. The oldest church, in Mosul, founded in 1840, has just five to ten member families. National Presbyterian in Baghdad, founded in 1952, has more than 300 families. The Assyrian Presbyterian Church, Baghdad, founded in 1921, has 36 families. Kirkuk's National Presbyterian Church, founded in 1958, also has 36 families. The only church in the south, National Presbyterian Church in Basra, established in 1940, has 32 families, down from 110.

+ Presbyterian News, 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202-1396

Protesters approve Dutch church union

Eleven synod members who had misgivings about the forthcoming Dutch church union now say they will approve the union. These eleven, who count themselves members of the Reformed Alliance (GB) within the Netherlands Reformed Church (NHK), issued a declaration at a trio-synod in April.

The time has passed, they said, where they feel of two minds. A few years ago, members of the GB were saying they could not leave, and they could not stay. Now, these members said, they could no longer responsibly oppose a decision for unification.

They said they felt the trio-synod had done its utmost to provide a place for them so that they could remain within a united church. They noted that since the church order now protected the historical continuity of the church and the agreement with the confessions, they would vote for unification.

The three Dutch churches in union are the NHK, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church. They expect to become the Protestant Church in the Netherlands by the end of 2003.
+ News Exchange, Reformed Ecumenical Council, 2050 Breton Rd. SE, Ste 102, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

Eritrean Protestants arrested at prayer meeting

Eritrean security police arrested two full-time evangelists and another 54 members of the Rema Church last night in Asmara, hauling them off to a local police station for holding illegal prayer meetings in two homes of their members. The jailed Christians, 21 women and 35 men, remained under detention 8 May at the No. 7 Police Station in the capital's Kahawta district, where local sources said they were undergoing severe punishment at the hands of police authorities. Since mid-February, Eritrea's local police have subjected more than 300 independent Protestants to heavy beatings, humiliation and death threats to punish them for holding religious meetings without government permission.

+ Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799-7250 (949) 862-0314

Saudi Arabia jails two African Christians in Jeddah

Two African men jailed in Saudi Arabia's port city of Jeddah for "Christian activities" were told yesterday that they are slated for deportation back to their homelands. Girmaye Ambaye, 44, of Eritrea, was arrested at his sponsor's office on 25 March. Ethiopian Endeshawe Adana Yizengaw, 32, was taken into custody on the street near his home on 27 April. Saudi police first revoked residence permits for the two men, active in the ministry of

CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCHES

singles convention

Attention all singles who want to share a time of Christian fellowship and enjoy a holiday in our nation's Capital Canberra. That's right planning is well underway and we like to see as many of you there to share this time with us, so put in for your holidays and start saving now.

When: 3rd Jan - 10th Jan 2004

Where: Greenhills Murrumbidgee Conference Centre, 1437 Cotter Road, Cotter (Canberra) ACT, Australia.

Cost: \$300-\$350 dollars (to be determined)

Activities: Generally include- Topical bible studies, Sports, Sight seeing, formal dinner, leisure time etc.

Transport: Own, Air, Rail or Bus.

We will keep you posted as more information becomes available. If you want to know what Canberra has to offer you can visit www.visitcanberra.com.au

We asked that you remember the planning committee in your prayers, that we may honour God and serve you well in the preparations we make for this convention.

On behalf of the planning committee,
David Vander Reyden - contact number 02 45765469
(ndavidv@bigpond.com)

Jeddah's Ethiopian-Eritrean Christian congregation, then placed them under arrest. "I think in two days I will reach Ethiopia," Yizengaw told Compass by telephone from Bremen's Cell 4. Ambaye may not be deported to the Eritrean capital of Asmara for several more days because his paperwork is still in process at the Governate of Mecca. Saudi authorities have questioned at least a dozen members of Jeddah's Ethiopian-Eritrean congregation in recent months and warned them to stop attending the church.

+ *Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799-7250 (949) 862-0314*

Missouri Synod panel lifts Benke suspension

A dispute resolution panel has lifted the suspension of Dr. David Benke, who has returned to work as president of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod's Atlantic District. Benke was suspended last June by LCMS Second Vice President Wallace Schulz in response to complaints filed by 18 LCMS pastors and three congregations. The complaints said Benke's participation in "A Prayer for America," a post-Sept. 11, 2001, event at Yankee Stadium, constituted unscriptural worship with non-Christians, sin against the First and Second Commandments, public defence of false doctrine, and violation of the Synod's Constitution and Bylaws.

+ *The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295*

Bad times in Bangladesh

The murder of evangelist Hridoy Roy just after midnight on 24 April is one of many violent attacks against Christians in Bangladesh, as tensions have increased dramatically since the election of a radical Islamic government in October 2001. Some Christians have had their rice crops destroyed by Muslim militants, and Christian girls have been threatened with rape. The

coalition government has consistently denied any alliance with Muslim extremists, but provincial officials of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party have been linked to the harassment of Christians in the Natore district of northern Bangladesh. The rise of Islamic extremism can be traced in part to the 64,000 "madrassas," or Muslim schools, established in recent years.

+ *Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799 (949) 862-0314*

Teamwork speeds Bible translation in Papua New Guinea

"Finally, after many years of slogging it out one-on-one, it's been very exciting to see the Lote community taking more and more responsibility in the Lote translation program (of the Bible)," said Mary Pearson, who with her husband, Greg, is translating the Word of God with the Summer Institute of Linguistics, the technical arm of Wycliffe Bible Translators in Papua New Guinea.

Greg Pearson and Leo, the primary Lote translator, have been training 8-10 assistants to do first-draft translation. They finished the books of Matthew, Philippians and Galatians, and continue to work whether or not Greg is with them in the village — a milestone that could significantly speed things along. About 56 percent of the New Testament is in one draft stage or another," according to Mary.

+ *Michael Ireland, ASSIST News Service PO Box 2126, Garden Grove, CA 92842*

PCA projects 67 Presbyteries

Starting with only one presbytery in 1973, the Presbyterian Church in America today numbers more than 60 regional judicatories and will consider forming new courts in Texas and Georgia. South Texas wants to divide out Central Texas around Austin, keep South Texas as the name for San Antonio and the border region, and Houston Metro for the eastern portion of the current judicatory. Central Georgia proposes to form a new court by splitting off Savannah River Presbytery.

+ *Presbyterian Church in America, 1700 North Brown Rd., Suite 105, Lawrenceville, GA 30043 (678) 825-1000*

Toronto church asks for 15 months to respond on homosexual policy

The First Christian Reformed Church in Toronto, Canada, has responded to a demand to withdraw its policy on homosexual members. Last October this congregation of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) distributed a pastoral letter explaining seven decisions it had made to include homosexual members more fully.

In January 2003, the CRCNA regional governing body, the Toronto Classis, requested the First CRC to rescind its new policy and to respond in writing in time for the May classis meeting. First CRC has now issued a letter asking for 15 months to prepare an appropriate response. In the letter they note that they believed their question was an internal pastoral one, and therefore they had not shared their decision-making process with other churches. They had spent two years of struggle to "address our own painful pastoral issues." They wrote about the many responses to their first letter. "While we have had some encouraging assurances, we were taken aback by the vehemence expressed and anguish experienced within the denomination."

In the 15-month period they ask for, they plan to create a document "that articulates our position, with God's word as our guide, and to compose a pastoral framework of ministry with people of same-sex orientation that would be in harmony with Synod's call for ministry, would honor the Great Commandment, and would restore to dignity those who have often been marginalized in our church." [Christian Courier]

+ *Reformed Ecumenical Council, 2050 Breton Rd. SE, Ste 102, Grand Rapids, MI 49546*

Southern Presbyterians review digitisation project

The Presbyterian Church in America Historical Center is digitising *The Southern Presbyterian Review*. Many of the dozen articles posted thus far concern the call to the ministry. All articles currently online are linked from the homepage, at www.pcanet.org/history.

Also online as of today is an author-title index. <http://www.pcanet.org/history/periodicals/spr/authortitle.pdf>

+ *Wayne Sparkman, Director, PCA Historical Center, 12330 Conway Road, St. Louis, MO 63141*

Books in focus

"By Far Euphrates"

by Deborah Alcock

Reviewed by Hugo Van der Werff

This is a moving historical novel that describes a little of Armenia in 1894. What is Armenia? Armenia is an ancient Asian kingdom centered around present-day Turkey and Iran, near Mount Ararat. Between 1894 and 1915, the Turks massacred most of the Armenians because of their Christianity and their refusal to convert to Islam.

Many people were tortured and murdered for the sake of Christ, their Saviour. This book seeks to give readers a little insight into the misery that many Armenians had to endure for their faith. Tales of orphans and widows, stumbling around the cold dark streets where blood flowed down the gutters looking for loved ones and searching for food. Stories of heroism and an unshakable faith that often caused death, of believers resting in the sure hope and knowledge that a much richer, purer life was to follow.

This novel traces the activities of an Englishman in Armenia, Jack Grayson. Jack, a young man, was stranded in Armenia with no money while travelling through the Middle East. He was very instrumental in giving aid to fugitives and helped out in American mission houses where Christians were safe from the sword of the Turk.

Why should you read this book? This book is beneficial in shaking one from the comforts and pleasures of modern life, realising once again that many have suffered bearing Christ's name. This book will give you a fresh appreciation of the relative carefree existence that we, through God's blessing, possess.

Deborah Alcock in her preface writes; "The Past is the past, and we cannot change it now; but we can still save from death, or from fates worse than death..."

Available from Geneva Books \$23.30

Focus on home

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

A note from your pastor: In some ways this has been a traumatic weekend. Although it is far too easy for me, and perhaps you, to think about anything but the death and resurrection of Jesus. After all, we have been through this weekend many times before. For some the weekend is a chance to have a few days "off" work. For others it has meant work has been even busier. However, the death of Jesus was real. It was extremely painful. It was no easier for Jesus to think about His impending death than it is for us to think about our own death. And compared with how Jesus died, our death will not be as harrowing as His. While our death is a very serious matter, we do not die to pay the penalty of our sin. After all, that could never be. Only the Son of God was capable of doing that. As a result, the Christian makes this glad profession of faith: What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to Him, Christ, by His Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for Him. Rev. John Ter Horst.

Annual Ladies' Presbyterial. You have been invited by the Aberdeen and Hukanui Ladies Fellowship to attend the Annual Meeting of the Auckland Ladies' Presbyterial. This will be held on 24th May 2003 beginning with morning tea at 9.45 - 10.30. The special guest speaker for the morning will be the Reverend Bill Wiersma and he will be speaking on a 'mystery' topic. We are sure you will enjoy the afternoon program, which will finish with afternoon tea.

Bishopdale

The Men's Group will meet tomorrow evening at 7.15 pm at the home of Don Capill. We will be discussing "A Man and His Reading". If you haven't been coming along but want to join in you are very welcome. Each study is self-contained, so feel free to come along at this point.

J.H.

Wedding: It is with much joy that we announce

the wedding of Ansulette van Splunder and Ivor Kay. Unless there are lawful objections their marriage will take place at 3 pm on Saturday 10th of May at All Saints Anglican Church, 48 Wakefield Ave, Sumner. Rev John Haverland will officiate. All are welcome.

Another Cultural Evening is planned for Saturday evening on the 14th of June. This will take the usual format of a pot-luck dinner followed by songs and other items. Please start thinking about what you could cook and what you could present on that evening!

Rev Frank van Dalen is known to many of us from his regular visits to New Zealand when he has spoken about his work in Pakistan with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Churches of America. Currently he is based in the US and is involved in training and assisting missionaries. We extend a warm welcome to you as you lead us in worship this morning.

Buckland's Beach

It is the 'ANZAC' weekend – somewhat swallowed up for those of us who have used this extended weekend to meet together at CAMP MORLEY. Nevertheless, it is a time when we as a nation do well to reflect on the importance, and ultimately, the price, of freedom. Give thanks for this country – for what we are and what, by God's grace, we have. Above all, pray for what this country needs.

It is also appropriate to pray for post-war Iraq. Pray especially for the Christian Church in that country (5% of the population) which is especially vulnerable in a land where a powerful Muslim (Shi'ite) majority are likely to demand Islamisation of the country.

Christchurch

Ladies' South Island Presbyterial. This year it is Nelson's turn to host the presbyterial. They have sent us a tentative date of Saturday 13th September (which doesn't seem to clash with any other events in our congregation). Please mark this date on your calendar if you are thinking of attending. You may also like to give some consideration as to accommodation - motel, holiday home, billeting. Keep an eye on the bulletin for more information.

Congratulations to Mr. & Mrs. Fietje, who had the opportunity to spend time at camp with members of their family this past week in celebration of their 50th anniversary, which is coming up next month.

Dovedale

From Your Pastor: Everyone needs times of holiday and rest. This is just the way the Lord has made us. From the very beginning, he instituted one day in seven to be the day of rest. God could have made the world in one day or instantly. But He chose to make the world in six days and rested from His labour on the seventh. In the New

Testament period, our day of rest and worship is the first day of the week, the day on which the Lord rose in victory from the grave. As we rest from our normal labours on Sundays, we anticipate also our eternal rest in heaven, and we get to focus our attention upon the Lord and what He has done for us. Workaholism is a major problem for many in our society, and we must make sure we honour God's ways and not fall into that trap. Preserving our Lord's Days is one way we can do this. Also it is important to take times of holiday and more extended rest when we need them. Sometimes we have to force ourselves to do this, but it is necessary. Work will always be there when we return and we will accomplish it more effectively if we are refreshed! Boys and girls, enjoy your time of school holidays. Look out for Mum and Dad and help them in their busy schedules. I always like to hear parents say they ENJOY the school holidays because they get to see more of their children during the day. Let's make the most of these times. They are part of the Lord's blessing to us – MF.

Opportunity: Like to see more of the youth? We, the Dovedale Youth Group, have been getting together for Bible studies at different people's homes from church. This is an excellent opportunity for older and younger people outside of youth group to get to know us a little better. If you're keen to bridge those "generation gaps", why not try having us over to your house one Sunday evening? Just contact Gideon and he will arrange a date.

Dunedin

Congratulations to Arnold and Marlene Storm with the birth of their son Lucas Vincent, born by emergency Caesarean last Wednesday, six weeks early. Both Marlene and baby are doing well. They will be in hospital for a week to enable doctors to monitor Marlene's health.

Hans and Lisa Vaatstra have been at the Ministers' and Wives' Conference held in Otaki last week. At the conference Dr Cornel Venema (son of our former minister, Richard Venema), from Mid-America Reformed Seminary, offered a series of lectures on such topics as *The Millennium of Revelation 20*, *The Practice of Hospitality* and more. Rev Frank van Dalen also gave a number of lectures with a mission focus.

Foxton

Congregation welcome pot luck and entertainment evening: Please mark your calendars for Saturday 24th May for a fun filled evening to welcome our new minister John Zuidema and his wife Trudy, with entertainment supplied by our social committee. If anyone else would like to supply an entertainment item you would be most welcome. Please contact Allan Thomson. Could each family supply a main course and a dessert. See Rose for details as she has a booklet of

selections. Please bring your own cutlery and crockery.

Hamilton

Special collection Lord's Supper. At today's Lord's Supper we will be having a special collection for the work of "Mission without Borders", which is a Christian programme involved in helping people mostly in the eastern European area in prisons and orphanages, and working with under-privileged and abused children and solo mothers, very common in this war-ravaged area. This is a very good form of outreach in this area. Information pamphlets are on the notice board if you would like more information.

Congratulations to Gerry and Janny Lagas on

their golden wedding anniversary this coming week.

Palmerston North

Congratulations to Michael & Renee on the birth of Nathan Albert on Friday morning. May the Lord grant you strength & wisdom as you raise your children for Him.

Youth Group 2003 – It's new and it's starting on the 10th of May. We need youth from 15 years and up to come along to the studies and socials and have a time of fun and fellowship as we serve God together! Coming up on Saturday the 10th of May from 5:30pm, we've got a pot luck dinner at the Vrolijk's house, 490 Stoney Creek Road, followed by a study and some games. All you need to bring is yourself and a plate of food for dinner.

Please contact either Josh and Monique on 354 5440, or David Bryant on 357 8826, if you'd like to come. See you all there!

Wainuiomata

50 Years – Reformed Church of Wellington. You are invited to celebrate this milestone with us. Function and lunch: Saturday, 17 May 2003, 11.00 am at the Brooklyn Function Centre, 383 Ohiro Road, Wellington. Also a Thanksgiving Service, Sunday 18 May 2003, 3.00 pm at the Congregational Church, Cambridge Terrace, Wellington.

Congratulations go to Gerry Leibbrandt and Frances Zorn, who announced their engagement this week. May the Lord bless them now and during their preparations for marriage.

Ministers and Wives Conference, 2003

The ministers and wives of the RCNZ gathered for their three-yearly conference at Otaki from 5th – 10th May. It was a full house, with everyone being able to attend, if only for part of the time. Thanks to the sessions for releasing their ministers to be able to come to the conference. Our speakers were Rev. Cornell Venema, from the Mid America Reformed Seminary, and Rev. Frank Van Dalen, of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. We also had talks from Rev. Bruce Hoyt, and Rev. Hans Vaatstra, on their recent mission trips to Myanmar and Papua New Guinea, and there was a flying visit from Rev. Johan Plug, of the GKN Lib. Churches.

We had talks on several theological topics from Cornel Venema, with a couple of very practical topics too, the calling of the minister's wife, and the practice of hospitality. Frank Van Dalen spoke on practical aspects of mission work, including missionary attrition, and selection and training of

missionaries. Rev. John Goris, of Wellington, gave the daily devotions in the morning.

But the talks and lectures are not the only benefit of the conference, the fellowship being easily as important as these. There were six couples who had joined the ranks since the last conference, and it was a great opportunity for them to get to know everyone. The "regulars" benefit greatly too from being able to get together like this. We had great weather, and the camp was catered for by the camp staff, so all we had to do was relax, be stimulated and enjoy.

Wellington Presbytery was responsible for organisation this time, but it's over to the South Island team to arrange the next conference in three years time. We look forward to meeting up again then.



The ministers and their wives of our churches



Rev Cornell Venema, guest speaker at the ministers' and wives conference



Some of our ministers in conversation during the breaks

The Reformed Church of Auckland's 50th Anniversary

The first week in April was a blessed time of remembering God's goodness to the Reformed Church community in Auckland over the past 50 years. On Tuesday, the 1st of April, 2003, a Seniors' Morning was held in the Reformed Church of Mangere. This was a much-appreciated time of fellowship—some folk catching up with others they had not seen for many years. Amongst those whom many had not seen for a long time was our distinguished guest the Rev. Bill Deenick, our founding minister.

There was an Open Day held in the Reformed Church of Avondale on Saturday the 5th of April, 2003. Here we were able to hear from a number

of speakers—an early office bearer, a pioneering wife and mother, a second-generation son, a South African member, and one who had come into our churches by conversion, topped off by a keynote address by the Rev. Deenick.

We are most thankful that the Rev. Deenick had the strength to be able to come—also to preach on three occasions. He enjoyed himself immensely, as did all who participated (apparently he has been invited back to Hamilton at the end of the year!).



Rev Deenick in conversation with Mrs Fem Bloemenal



Some of those who came to listen to Rev B Deenick



Group photo of the gathering with Rev J W Deenick in Mangere



Who is that man in the middle?



Auckland seniors gathering



Open Day held in the Reformed Church of Avondale

**The
Reformed
Church of
Auckland's
50th
Anniversary
and Open
Day**

Missions in focus

The Reformed Faith is growing in Myanmar!

Bruce Hoyt

It used to be called Burma. But since the socialist military government took over in 1962, the government has tried to break ties with its British colonial past. Not only did they change the name of the country and its leading city, Rangoon (now called Yangon), they even changed to driving on the wrong side of the road. The right side really is wrong in Myanmar, since almost all the cars and trucks have right side steering. I was frequently a passenger in the front left side of a taxi which squeezed in and out of traffic much too close to my side for comfort.

I arrived in Yangon at about 9:15 Friday morning and was met at the airport by Mrs. Moses, her sister, her sister-in-law, and Pa Siang, an assistant of Pastor Moses in the little blue covered pick-up owned by Mr. Ruby, the owner of Ruby Inn. It was a 10-minute drive from Myanmar's only international airport to Ruby Inn. I was the honoured guest in the front left seat beside Mr. Ruby. The others were crammed into the back with my luggage, Myanmar taxi style. After dropping off my luggage at Ruby Inn, we had to hurry to the centre of Yangon in another taxi to arrange for my flight with Pastor Moses to Kale Town on Saturday.

The Myanmar Transport Office was an old dingy concrete building with poor lighting and plenty of dirt, like most official buildings in Yangon. But we were too late. The bookings closed at 10:30 a.m. The two taxi rides had taken over an hour. We would have to come back Saturday morning before 10:30 to book a flight for Sunday. No, you can't book a Sunday flight on Friday, bookings two days in advance are not done in Myanmar. No, you can't book by phone. No, the Myanmar Transport Office doesn't have email. Someone must come before 10:30 with the foreigner's passport plus \$260USD for the foreigner and \$27USD for his accompanying Myanmar 'guide' (foreigners are rich, so they must subsidise the locals). That person will have to stay at the office until about 4:00 p.m. in order to collect the tickets in person. That's how long it takes to book tickets for the 15 or so domestic flights—all done in triplicate carbon copies with a pen, as well as making

entries in several registry books. (I'm not sure who reads all those registry books!)

Back to Ruby Inn to get some rest after a 13 hour flight from Auckland. Thankfully it was air-conditioned. It was not, however, sound-conditioned! That day (just for my arrival!) was the beginning of a week-long festival in all the Buddhist monasteries. During this celebration the sacred Buddhist writings are read for 24 hours a day from the Pali texts (a dead language only a few educated monks understand) over powerful loud-speakers. The droning sing-song can easily be heard for several kilometres around each monastery. A pity that Ruby Inn was only about half a kilometre from the nearest monastery! Took me a while to get to sleep and then I was awakened several times dreaming that I was hearing the howling of wolves.

The trip to Kale

Sunday morning I was up at 5:00 a.m., since check-in time for my 8:15 flight to Kale was 6:00 a.m. Pastor Moses arrived to pick me up in a taxi at about five minutes before six. We arrived at the airport ten minutes after six. We spent 15 minutes in the queue for our flight and another 10 minutes getting through security. (Pastor Moses knows some officials so we didn't have to wait long.) The plane finally arrived at 8:30. Rather decrepit it was. One seat hinge was broken, so I sat at a twisted angle. One reading light above was hanging by the wires. Two luggage compartment doors fastened only on one side. But presumably the engines and wings were OK since the co-pilot walked around and gave them the once-over.

We didn't fly directly to Kale. We stopped at two cities somewhat out of the way to let off and take on passengers. And finally we arrived in Kale at about 10:45 a.m., where I was scheduled to

preach for the 10:00 a.m. service! Pastor Piang's congregation was patiently singing until I arrived (and my, how they can sing! puts all the RCNZ churches to shame). I was ushered directly into the pulpit and preached my first sermon through a translator. Thankfully Pastor Moses knew enough Reformed and Biblical terminology to translate without a pause. I presume he translated accurately since several pastors and elders in the audience, who could understand English, gave no indication that anything was wrong.

That evening the sun set at 6:00 p.m. It was very dark by 7:00 p.m. when I was to preach again in Pastor Piang's church, the United Reformed Church of Hmun Tha (a small village suburb of Kale). The little wooden-walled church building was packed with 50 or so folks standing on the porch, and some on the ground outside. We would say that this church was large enough to hold about 60 people. They regularly have over 100 in attendance (the Myanmar people are small and sit on low benches close together—no fire regulations in Myanmar). That evening there were about 200 people in attendance.

Everything went well until about 15 minutes into my sermon on "The Value of Being Far-Sighted". Suddenly, whether one was far-sighted or short-sighted didn't matter. The lights fizzled and went out. It was pitch black. The truck battery had run out! Lights in most buildings in Hmun Tha are run on a truck battery which is connected to a power inverter to produce 240 volts which is then connected (via the old twisted-wire technique) to two wire leads strung from the rafters and into several 20-watt fluorescent light-fixtures hanging from the rafters.

Not to worry, I had my trusty Maglite in my pocket with an extra set of AAs, just for such an emergency. Holding it over my Bible and sermon notes, I carried on preaching and the folks carried



Family home of my translator Pa Siang in Kale



An elder's home in which he cares for 40 orphans

on listening. A few enterprising women pulled out some candles (they obviously were also well-prepared) and lit them so that I could see a few faces around the church near the candles. A couple of deacons went home (most members live just a few blocks from the church) and brought a replacement battery. So after 10 minutes of Maglite preaching, I was again preaching not only on the Light but also in the light. The rest of the week the deacons were careful to have fully-charged batteries for the evening services.

I have many more stories to tell, but they will have to wait for another article.

The week in Kale went well. During the week I preached 8 times to growing crowds, which finally reached 750 the following Sunday morning. Most of these were people from other (non-Reformed) denominations.

Leadership training

For four days I lectured and answered questions for 5 hours a day through a double translation into the Chin and Burmese languages to about 60 office-bearers on the topic of "Reformed Church Government". The questions the men asked showed they were grasping the material and applying it to their ecclesiastical situation. In particular, in view of the teaching that Christ alone has authority over the universal church and that the office-bearers have authority only in their own local congregation, these men made the decision in their Synod later that week to abolish the office of "President and Founder".

In the Protestant churches in Myanmar it is very common for one zealous man to start a denomination and request support from Western churches. He is the President and Founder. He

controls the denomination, to a greater or lesser extent, by his distribution of the Western money he receives. I was happy to see that the Synod of the United Reformed Churches of Myanmar (URCM) was willing to take this important step towards Biblical church government. I was even more pleased to see that Pastor Moses, who had been the President and Founder for nine years since he started the URCM, was willing and even relieved to step down from this position.

As you may guess, the President and Founder has a position of power which few are willing to give up. In other denominations the President and Founder has a better home than other members, a car, a phone, and perhaps a computer. I was pleased to see that Pastor Moses lived in a home very much on the same level as others. He has neither a car nor a phone. Although he does have a computer, it is used in connection with the Ministerial Training Institute, presently operating from his home since they have no building for classrooms or to house the students. He also accommodates Pa Siang, his pastoral assistant and fellow teacher in the Ministerial Training Institute, as well as a couple of relatives who board with them. All of this in a small wooden house we would consider only big enough for a family with two children.

The social conditions

People in Myanmar are quite poor. The most common housing consists of a wooden floor raised about two feet off the ground, to avoid the mud during rainy season. The walls are made of a woven bamboo material supported on wooden frames. The folks who are better off have corrugated iron roofs and wooden walls. Very few have glass windows, just shutters which open to let the light in and which are closed in the evening to keep a few of the mosquitoes out.

But despite their poverty, the believers I worked with are happy in the Lord and seeking to advance the cause of the Reformed faith in Myanmar. They have aggressively developed new congregations in three areas of the country. They have grown from five families in 1993 to 25 churches in 3 classes (presbyteries), which total about 2000 members at present. Many of these have come out of liberal Presbyterian and Baptist churches, some from charismatic churches, and quite a few are converts from animism (tribal religion). They have also won a few converts from Buddhism. They have at present five mission posts, two of them in Buddhist areas.

Many of the young (20-35) men are active as elders and deacons, and several are evangelists who are working in areas of Myanmar where there is no church. Seventeen young men who have finished high school are seeking to be trained as evangelists and pastors. There are also three men in their early 20s who want to do further study at a good Presbyterian seminary in India.

What they ask for

Which brings me to present the requests I received from the office-bearers at the synod of the URCM.



United Reformed Church building in Kale

1. They told me their greatest priority is for support of the Ministerial Training Institute and for the 17 students who are ready to begin their training this June. They need a building for classrooms and housing for the students. Cost: \$6000USD. They also request support for the 4 staff. Cost \$650USD/month.

2. The 17 young men who are eager to be trained are not able to be supported by their families because of their poverty. Cost for their support: \$30USD/month per student.

3. They also requested support for the three young men they wish to send to Dehra Dun, India, for more advanced study at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary. This is a sound seminary that provides good training in Reformed doctrine and practice. (I know the Principal since I studied with him when I was in seminary.) After graduation these young men will be able to assist in the Ministerial Training Institute to train other young men for the ministry of the Word.

4. To provide training for these young men and for their office-bearers, they asked if we could send one of our ministers to teach every 6 months. During the winter (November through January) this could be done in Kale, and during the summer it would be in Yangon.

5. There are many diaconal needs which could be met by any of our congregations. These include funds to complete church buildings, assistance for needy families who have sick parents, support for the two families who care for orphans in their own homes. In the one I visited, an elder with 6 children of his own cares for 40 orphans in a small two-storey house with about 80 square metres of floor space. The ladies asked if some of our

women's societies would be willing to assist with seed money for the women to start small home-based businesses to supplement their husband's income.

6. The youth could be helped to get jobs if some of our young people would be willing to go to Yangon for a couple of months to teach computing skills and English.

As you can see, there are many ways in which we could give valuable assistance to our fellow Reformed brothers and sisters. And there are opportunities for all of our congregations to become directly involved in short-term mission work by sending our ministers, sending deacons to assess the potential for diaconal assistance, and by selecting some of our most committed youth to help their youth.

And there are opportunities for individual families to become directly involved in missions by giving the \$30USD/month required to support a young man training for the ministry in the Ministerial Training Institute.

Here are opportunities the Lord has placed directly in front of us which would advance the cause of Christ in a nation largely untouched by the Gospel. We ought to seize these opportunities without delay. Contact me if you want to get involved. In conjunction with the OMB I will do what I can to assist your mission involvement with the United Reformed Churches of Myanmar.

The Rev. Bruce Hoyt is the minister of the Reformed Church of Hastings, and is also the present Stated Clerk of our churches.

MIF prayer notes

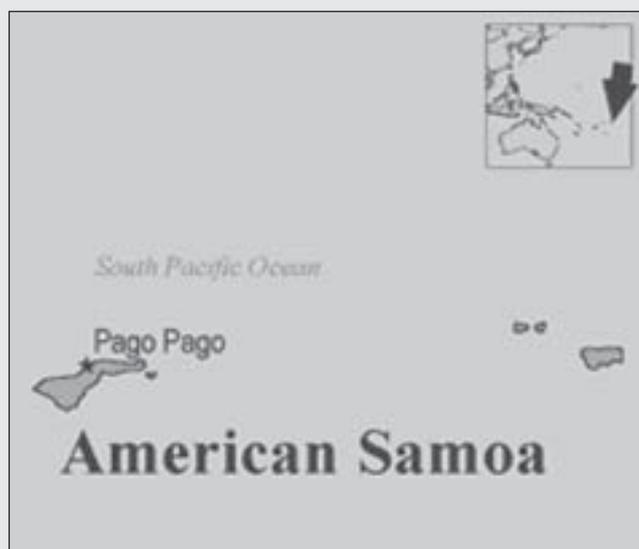
1. Jared Berends has finished his English language teaching in Mongolia and arrives back in New Zealand (Christchurch, where his parents have moved) this month. Please pray for Jared as he settles back into life in NZ and looks to the future. Pray also for the church in Mongolia: for their growth in grace, and that believers would be strong in their understanding of the truths of Scripture.

2. Stephen and Dorinda 't Hart appreciate our ongoing prayers as they minister in Papua New Guinea on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches. Please pray for fellow believers in Port Moresby and Ekorong congregations, and also for Stephen and Dorinda's strength for their work.

3. Walter and Jeannette Hagoort hope, Lord willing, to travel to Papua New Guinea soon for a brief look at the work that they could do as hosts of a Christian Guest House in Port Moresby, and in serving the Reformed church in the capital. Please pray for safe travel and for wisdom as they evaluate the opportunities for service.

4. The session of Hamilton church have agreed to send Janice Reid to Cambodia for one year as she continues to develop training resources for missionary radio announcers. It is proposed that Janice will leave NZ in mid-July to travel to FEBC Indonesia for up to two months of training, then continue on to Cambodia. Please pray for travelling mercies and effective training.

Country profile: American Samoa



American Samoa is a largely traditional Polynesian economy. The main economic activities are tuna fishing and canning. Nearly half the territory's revenue is from direct US federal grants. Its remoteness

and devastating hurricanes limit economic development. Public debt is 74% of the gross national product (GNP). Income/person is around \$2,600US. Around 93% of the population is Polynesian 93%, with the majority being Samoan, and a significant number of Tongans. The main languages are English and Samoan; there are Bibles in both of these languages.

Pray for American Samoa:

1. Samoans in this U.S. territory are relatively well-off in comparison to independent Samoa to the west, but are adversely affected by the dominant materialistic culture and wealth of their rulers. Pray for the indigenous people that they may live with wholehearted commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Praise God for the evangelical ministries and churches making an impact for the Lord. Pentecostal churches have grown through evangelism. There is also a large YWAM base in the islands.
3. Spectacular Mormon growth demonstrates the spiritual poverty of the mainline churches that have lost large numbers to this cult. Pray for new spiritual life and vigour in these churches.

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From the DA's Office ...

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1st National Youth Convention

This month we go back to the very first National Youth Convention of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, held at Woodend near Christchurch, from 27th December 1967 to 3 January 1968. What a blessing the annual Youth Conventions have been. From those small beginnings, Conventions

have been held almost every year, up and down the country, and have been a wonderful testimony to our gracious God, and have been a great encouragement to our youth in their walk with the Lord. Enjoy the photo!



Top Row: Keith Pellicaan, Harry Berends, Ernest van Rij, Peter Kruithof, Henry Alberts, Kees Kruithof, Albert Landkroon, Jack Kruithof, Harry Landkroon, Wim Bouman, Charlie Bosgra, Harry Kannegieter, Andre van Rij.

2nd Row: Willem Berends, Paul Kroon, Liz Pellicaan, Corrie Pellicaan, Bernie Bosgra, Olga de Vries, Len van der Harst, Jenny Thomson, Bert Kroon, Peter van der Schaaf, Erna Jongepier, Marty Vandenbergel, Wally Jochem, Jetta Sleggh, Bert Verkerk.

3rd Row: Bill Kannegieter, Fred Kroon, Roel Dykstra, Mimi Pellicaan, Margaret Vandenberg, April Angus, Corrie Koppe, Janneke Landkroon, Caroline Bishop, Georgette van der Vrugt, Hans Berends, Ella Ploeg, Tracy Jongepier.

Front Row: Frank Ploeger, Linda Ploeger, Jitske Ploeger, Ada van Klink, Nel van't Wout, Anton Meister, Rev Peter van Dam, Mrs Tina van Dam, Rev Tom Tyson, Helen Kreisel, Tom Kroon, Anneke Gorter, Peter Verkerk, Lina Alberts, Rudi van Egdome.

Attended Camp, but were absent from the photo: Andre Jongepier, Albert van Voornveld, Ina Eefting, Jacob Ploeg, Ross Sutherland, Eke Gorter.