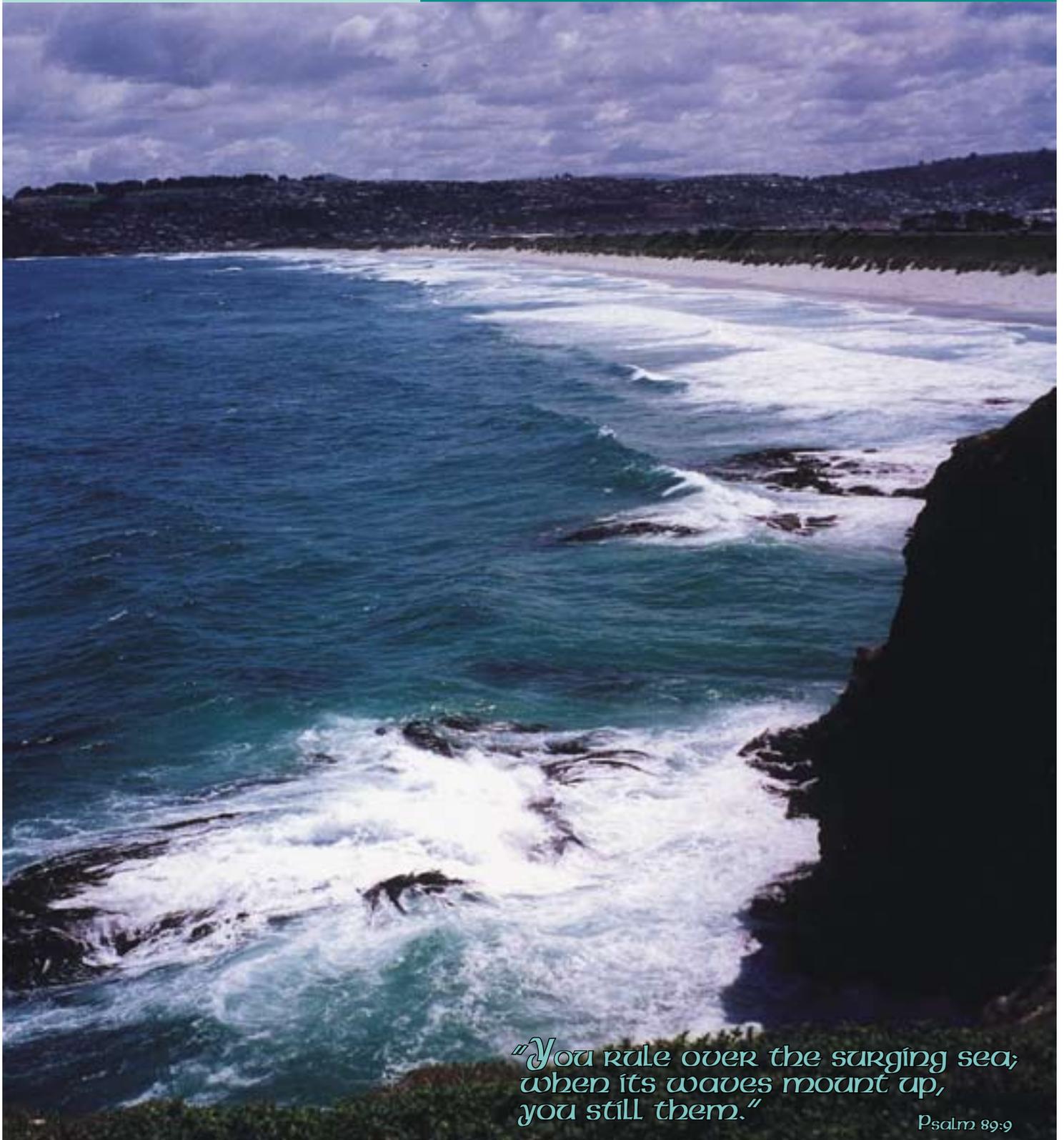


# faith in focus

Magazine of the  
Reformed Churches  
of New Zealand

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*"You rule over the surging sea;  
when its waves mount up,  
you still them."*

Psalm 89:9

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**Editorial**

It can be a real struggle for members to go to church – and that's just the once a Sunday! To go twice becomes a super-human struggle, as the attendance at the PM service shows us.

Why is this so? What could be a better time in your week than being in God's presence with His people, praising Him, confessing before Him, giving to Him, listening to Him, and being blessed by Him? Could it be because for many it has not become about Him anymore – it's about them and what they can get out of the worship service. Their attendance has conditions.

Funny, isn't it? That it can be laid on the line like this. Oh, there will be the cries of ministers who aren't gifted, organists who are too slow, churches which are old-fashioned; but the real heart of the matter is that there isn't the heart for worship. It's talked about alright, but, like so many other biblical words and expressions, it's been given a completely different meaning. The influence of the world around us and its focus on what mankind selfishly wants, has washed into Christ's Church also.

I have read somewhere that of the difficulties that arise within a congregation more than 98% is not doctrinal but personal. While people may leave one church for another spouting all kinds of theological reasons as justification, that's very rarely the case. The real problem is within them and sadly they take that baggage with them.

I wonder if it's not the same as regards those unhappy about our worship services.

Perhaps this item I adapted from *Christian News* might help you not only to answer others but also challenge you personally about attendance at the public worship service:

**Top ten reasons why I never wash!**

When you substitute "wash" for "attend church" the following oft-used excuses for not going to church are seen in a completely different light:

10. I was forced to wash as a child;
9. People who wash are hypocrites – they think they are cleaner than everyone else;
8. There are so many different kinds of soap - I can't decide which one is best;
7. I used to wash but I got bored and stopped;
6. I only wash on special occasions like Christmas and Easter;
5. None of my friends wash;
4. I'll start washing when I get older and dirtier;
3. I can't spare the time;
2. The bathroom is never warm enough in the winter nor cool enough in summer;
1. People who make soap are only after your money.

Remember this, whatever your excuse is for not going to church, it will have to pass the judgment of God.

*“Let us not stop meeting together,  
As some are in the habit of doing,  
But let us encourage one another –  
and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

**Hebrews 10:25**

*Cover photo: A south Dunedin beach*

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of NZ unless they expound the Biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of NZ. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

# Wt Msg R U Sndng?

## The pros and cons of texting

### Peter Kloosterman

Do you give texting a second thought? Recently, discussions have surfaced in the news about some of the problems associated with texting. Parents are you scratching your heads; wondering why texting has taken such a hold upon your child? Are you teens, wondering why adults are making such a big deal about texting? Let's chat: about the character of texting, the dangers of texting, and some observations to help maintain/re-gain Christian integrity in texting.

### The character

Ask yourself, "What message am I sending?" I am not talking about the texts and photos. I am talking about a bigger picture: times when you are talking in a group or interacting with your friends. What does your attention to a cellphone signal to those around you?

Suppose you are talking with a friend and during the conversation your friend pulls out a magazine and starts reading it. You would consider this rude. Similarly, if you are talking with a person about something that happened to you and he or she interrupts with questions that are off-topic, you recognise the person's disinterest and the conversation ends. Something has been communicated. A message has been sent. In all conversations, there are understood rules that apply; matters of common courtesy that determine how we talk with one another: eye contact, facial expressions, and other factors called body language.

Here is the big picture. Your conversations are interrupted or distracted by sending and receiving texts. Texting allows quick and private interaction anywhere, anytime. No boundaries. This character has both benefits and limitations. First, consider the benefits. You save time and money in giving and receiving information. For example, you can quickly find directions if you are lost, or you can easily report crimes. Cellphones provide security for those driving or walking alone. You can determine the location of family and friends and arrange plans to meet. All this without the restrictions of time and place!

This loss of time/place restrictions carries with it some problems. Because of the recent development of this mode, there are no fixed social rules. These social conventions need to be worked out. One that needs

to be addressed is the *context* in which texting occurs. Is there a right and wrong place *and* time for texting?

Step back, look at the big picture, and evaluate the context. Texting isn't always wrong. It's often rude and that, repeated over time, is wrong. Yes, this is the message that you're sending. The occasions where conversations with others are to be nurtured and developed are lost and disrupted by the attention devoted to the all-pervasive mobile phone.

Recently I observed a family gathered for a meal in a restaurant. They were all talking together except for one child. She held her



mobile phone under the table, at an angle where she could read her messages and send replies without observation. She was texting. This wasn't a quick one-line interruption during the course of a conversation. That would be rude, but perhaps, excusable. Instead, this was an extended time period of 5 to 10 minutes. Rather than engage those who had taken the time to get together with her and her family, she pre-empted their presence with a date to her mobile phone. So rude, it was wrong. What's the message? You can gain my undivided attention only through my mobile.

Step back for a moment and ask, "What message are you sending?" Not to those connected with your cellphone, but to those

around you. Have you grasped the disruptive character of texting?

### The dangers

"What message are you sending?" applies not only to the context, but also the content. What is the subject matter being sent and received by you? There are several dangers.

The first is perhaps the least harmful. It is triviality. Texting is a monotone form of communication. Apart from capitalising letters, there is no way of establishing a tone for the conversation. There is no significant way to convey sympathy, appreciation, admonition, disgust or other emotions that are necessary for personal communication. These emotions require a graphic vocabulary when written and varied tones when spoken. Both are absent in texting. This absence of tone means that the intimate connection between what is sent and how it is received is severed. As a general rule, conversations are predetermined by the mode of communication. In other words, what we speak *about* depends on the *mode* of communication used. Important issues require lengthy discourse. This is not practical, given the length restrictions of texts. It is doubtful that texting can rise above dealing with trivial matters or conversely deal with important matters in any other way than a trivial manner. That's a danger.

The second and more harmful danger is lack of accountability. Texting is a private form of communication, roughly equivalent to digital whispering. This aspect combined with the boundary-less character means that private communiqués can develop without discretion. You can converse about secret things without restriction. The danger of this lack of accountability is that the discussions can pry into private matters that one would normally blush to speak about in public. The privacy emboldens a loss of shame so that you ask and talk about things that you wouldn't dare to mention in a face-to-face discussion. This is not a courageous conversation; this is a cop-out. This is a danger that needs to be recognised and resisted. Would you be willing to have your texts read by someone else? Should you then be sending them or receiving them?

The last danger is perversity. This arises from the combination of the previous dangers. It shows how sinful we are that

society's morality functions at the lowest common denominator. Conversations will decline towards immorality quicker and more frequently than they will rise to a God-honouring level of morality. The speed and frequency of texting heightens this danger. Sexually explicit jokes and conversations are transmitted because it is thought that, except for the recipient, no one will see or know. This danger is clearly forbidden by God's word. This kind of communication must be repented of, avoided and abandoned. Eph. 5:11 warns: *"Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret."*

The danger of perversity is not limited to sexual immorality. It includes gossip and malicious speech. This danger is not inherent in the mobile phones. It is a danger resident in the heart of everyone, due to their total depravity. These sins are a fire that burns in every breast. The mobile phone only adds fuel that stokes the fire. The ease and speed of communication via texting can quickly spread the fire. An example is seen in the race riots at Cronulla Beach, Sydney. One of the reasons this riot developed so quickly was due to the spread of information via texting. Here we have to be careful. The sinful behaviour arose from the hatred in the hearts of those who rioted. This is where the sin lies. However, the involvement of others in this riot was fuelled by the use of texting. The mobile phone can be a dangerous instrument in the hands of those whose hearts are not restrained by the word of God. This danger is heightened

by the unaccountability.

How do so many get caught in the snare of perversity? There is a pattern in the degeneration of text conversation. It starts harmlessly, texting about trivial matters. Verbal test balloons are sent to see which way the moral winds are blowing. Will the recipient hold the sender accountable? If not, the envelope of morality is pushed and if not voluntarily restricted quickly deteriorates into perversity. As a secretive form of communication it can be used to "flaunt" the warnings of God's word. Listen: Rom.2:16 ... *God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.* (see also Mt.12:36; Rom.14:12) God's word is sufficient. Beware the Danger!

Do you see a slippery slope in your conversations? What message are you sending?

### Observations for integrity in texting

Obviously, there is not a Bible verse that mentions cell phones. But there are verses that address how Christians are to relate to the products of a culture.

1 Cor.6:12 says, *"All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything."* God offers two guidelines for Christians that develop integrity. These guidelines are profitability, and not being mastered. Profitability has to do with usefulness or being advantageous. The guard against mastery has to do with the exercise of power or authority over your heart. Together these parameters are a fence that allows freedom within boundaries.

Notice first of all the context in which both of these qualifications occur. It addresses

those things that are lawful. When Paul says, *"All things are lawful for me,"* the 'all' is not an absolute. Several verses later he makes an appeal to *"flee immorality"* (v. 18). He makes a moral judgement. Obviously, if there is behaviour that is immoral or unlawful, then his *"all things"* of verse 12 must be restricted to those things permitted by God's law. Often blessings given by God and that which He permits can become the idols of the heart. This occurs when we love the gift rather than the Giver. Then that which is lawful becomes the master.

This applies to texting. Is it useful? What is the advantage? The profitability depends on the context. There are times when the use of this mode of communication is not profitable. There are contexts in which this mode of communication is a hindrance rather than an aid. In the context of God's covenant people the determination of profitability is not personal criteria, but a corporate criterion. Is your use of texting advantageous to the body of believers?

Here are occasions in which texting is detrimental to the body of believers.

Worship—worship is the occasion in which God meets with His people. Texting in such a context is idolatrous, in that it seeks to communicate with someone other than God who has called and gathered His people. Our focus is on our phone, not our Father in heaven.

Catechism classes/Bible studies—these are occasions for instruction. Texting in such a circumstance communicates something to the students and to the leader of the study. It is a non-verbal way of declaring that the information taught is less important than a text.

Fellowship—fellowship is an important part of the communion of the saints. It is a way of demonstrating our love for a brother or sister. Texting in such contexts communicates exclusion and avoidance. If you joined a conversation and those talking started speaking in a foreign language, you would quickly feel out of place and excluded. It is not useful to the group if you have private conversations in the midst of a discussion. The same applies to texting.

What does preoccupation with a text communicate? What underlies these different occasions is an understanding of whose advantage you are seeking. Is it your own? The group's? the body's? the Lord's? Whom do you serve, and where?

The second guideline is that of being mastered. This occurs when what is designed to be an aid becomes an authority. The servant becomes the master. The increase and ease

Call me crazy, but when my minister notified me that he was publishing a piece about text messaging and one of his first sources of information about the subject was me, I was quite taken aback. Surely I wasn't the right person to ask. Surely I was to be considered only a "casual texter".

That's when I got to thinking.

It's only a natural thing to have two phones. Why spend more than what's considered necessary on texting when you can get the benefit of two separate plans a month? Why only be allowed 500 texts a month when you can easily use 1000?

Texting at work? Well, how else do you keep in touch?

Texting in the shower? Rather convenient I say.

Texting in my sleep? Ok.. not the best idea I'll admit.

Texting the person sitting across the room from you? Genius.

Texting a quick one word hello just for the sake of it? Why not be considered social?

All good answers on my part, but as I sit here typing this I realise that my phone has been next to me the entire time. I can't help but think that I'm very capable of spending way too much time and money on the thing... even if it was thought necessary at the time.

To be honest, all this leads me to think about giving up or at least cutting back on texting. Surely it's not that hard. Is it?

of electronic communication has produced an addiction to information. To use the words of Paul, access to information is certainly lawful. There is nothing wrong with such access. In fact, there are many blessings associated with such access. Yet, while it is lawful, who is the master? Information is like a fire. It is beneficial when kept within its boundaries. A fire in my home is a blessing provided it remains in the woodburner. Take it out, and it is detrimental if not deadly. What was designed to serve can quickly engulf and consume. The servant gains control.

So it is with the information age. Kept within its proper realm, information can be an excellent servant. But allow this servant to gain the devotion of your heart, and the servant becomes the master. Like a fire burning out of control, the quest for information becomes insatiable. Instant access is the false-gospel of this addiction. There is a desire to know all, and to know it all right now. The fire engulfs many hearts due to the boundary-less character of the mobile phone. Texting interrupts with a sense of immediacy. You need to respond or risk being left behind or worse, left out. This is why there are alarms to alert you to the need for recognition and response. It is the master beckoning for your attention. Do you find it hard to resist attention to this summons? Has that which is lawful become the master?

The lawful use of technology requires integrity. Biblically speaking, integrity is a voluntary restraint for the purpose of maintaining your relationship with God and with others. Strive to demonstrate integrity in texting. Use it in a way that will be profitable, and keep it as a servant rather than a master. How?

Firstly, guard your heart. Integrity begins with an awareness of the liabilities. The liability of your heart to take that which is good, and devote yourself to it rather than God. You cannot serve two masters. When firefighters combat a raging wildfire, they light backfires. When this happens, the controlled backfires consume the fuel and oxygen needed for the wildfire to continue. In this way the wildfire is contained. This analogy helps to illustrate how to guard your heart. The temptations of the flesh are wildfires burning that will quickly consume your life. Philippians 2:4 says, "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." Serving others out of a love for God is a backfire that will suppress the wildfire of serving self. The fire of self-indulgence might be using the tool of texting for its fuel. Counter this with the question of God's word. Is sending or

receiving texts serving those around you? Are you texting because you want to help them, or because you want to help yourself? What message are you sending?

Secondly, guard your head. This relates to the transmission of immoral texts and images. These leave a lasting impression on the mind. It is not easy to get out of your mind the evils you hear and see. These must be countered. When you receive them (not if), how will you respond? Do not be mastered by evil, but overcome evil with good. Philippians 4:8 encourages, "Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise dwell on these things." Use the servant to foster these virtues.

Lastly, recognise the need for grace. To be discerning requires the mind of Christ. Romans 12:2 says, "Do not be conformed to this

world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." This is the call of discipleship. It will not come easily or naturally. It comes by grace working. That is what God has promised in 1 Cor.10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it." Being a disciple requires discipline. But even this self-control is promised as the fruit of the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:22ff).

Everything we say and do communicates who or what has the devotion of your heart. What message are you sending?

*The Rev. Kloosterman is the newly installed minister of the Reformed Church of Masterton.*

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## World in focus

### Few make use of Civil Unions in New Zealand

The Civil Union Act will have its first anniversary on 1 April, but since it was passed, only 156 male and 170 female same-sex couples have had a civil union. A further 68 opposite-sex couples have taken up the option.

Some 22,000 marriages have been conducted in the same period.

The low take-up on civil unions surprised many of the country's 600 marriage celebrants, who spent quite a bit of time and expense to register. Numerous homosexual celebrants set up special websites to solicit business and have aggressively marketed their services.

According to the Sunday Star-Times, few have received an inquiry and many are unlikely to renew their registration.

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

### India's Supreme Court denies tribal posts to converts

The Supreme Court on 28 March quietly ruled that conversion of tribal people to Christianity could disqualify them from running for some elective offices if the posts involve religious functions. This ruling emerged from the court's verdict upholding a law that excludes Christians from running for the office of headman in Elaka Jowai, Meghalaya state. Dr. John Dayal, president of the All India Catholic Union, said the court has deeply injured minority rights. "The issue is both one of separation of church and state and of the right of minority religion believers to seek whichever secular political or administrative office they wish to," Dayal said.

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

### Appeal dropped in Church feud

The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), which split from the main church six years ago over a sex scandal involving a senior minister, announced it was willing to hold talks with the main Free Church.

Last year the Free Church (Continuing) launched a legal action in the Court of Session in an attempt to gain control over the church's assets.

However, Lady Paton dismissed the action and ordered the Free Church (Continuing) to pay the costs of the case. The Free Church (Continuing) said it would appeal the decision, but later offered to drop its appeal against Lady Paton's ruling as a "goodwill gesture," to prompt talks with the larger body.

The offer to begin reconciliation talks has been rejected.

+ Free Church of Scotland, The Mound, Edinburgh EH 1 2LS, Scotland

+ Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), Principal Clerk of Assembly and Press Officer, Rev. John MacLeod, Portmahomack, TAIN, Ross-shire IV20 1YL

### Decline in Presbyterian (USA) giving causes huge budget cuts

Leaders of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) announced mission budgets must be reduced by US\$9.15 million between now and 2008.

A total of US\$2.7 million has to come out of the unrestricted 2006 budget, and US\$3.51 million more in unrestricted dollars from the 2007-2008 mission budget. The restricted portion of the 2007-2008 budget must also be reduced by US\$2.94 million.

The current unrestricted and restricted budget is US\$113.9 million. The General Assembly Council will vote on the budgets at its 26-29 April meeting.

The 2006 cuts are based on declining unrestricted giving by Presbyterian Church (USA) congregations and presbyteries. Unrestricted receipts received in 2005 were US\$13.9 million which is US\$2.1 million less than the US\$16 million budgeted. That unrestricted line in the 2006 budget, also US\$16 million, has been revised to US\$13.3 million.

+ Presbyterian Church (USA), 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202 (888) 728-7228

### New museum in Geneva dedicated to Reformation

A new museum, believed to be the first in the world dedicated exclusively to the Reformation, has opened in Geneva, Switzerland. The International Museum of the Reformation so far has attracted more than 20,000 visitors in its first 10 months.

The museum is housed in Maison Mallet, built in 1722, next door to the cathedral of the Protestant Church of Geneva, founded by John Calvin.

The museum collection includes a first edition of *Calvin's Institutes*, which Calvin wrote in 1536 at the age of 27; an original copy of the *Knox Bible*, produced in 1555; the first Bible published in French; the collected papers of Theodore de Beza, who became "shepherd" of the Geneva flock after Calvin died in 1564; letters by all the 16th Century French kings recounting the struggles of the Reformation during its infancy in France; and sketches drawn by Calvin while he was teaching at his first religious academy in Geneva.

+ International Museum of the Reformation, 4 rue du Cloître, CH-1204 Geneva, Switzerland <info@musee-reforme.ch>

### Kirk preparing way for civil partnerships for ministers

Forward Together, an evangelical group with the Church of Scotland, is challenging a report by the Kirk which seems to be preparing the way for openly homosexual ministers to enter into such a union and continue their calling. Forward Together says the prospect of civil partners living in manses would dismay the majority of church

members as well as many of its ecumenical partners. The group, which has more than 300 members, will be challenging the report when it goes before the General Assembly in May.

The controversial document, which was prepared by the legal questions committee, deals with pension and housing rights issues raised by the civil partnership legislation. It seeks agreement that ministers and deacons should be allowed to conduct church services that mark civil partnership without fear of punishment.

The document also requests backing for a call that no minister or deacon will be obliged to conduct such a service against his conscience.

Gordon Kennedy, a minister and chairman of Forward Together, said that "Before addressing the legal points about pension rights for ministers' civil partners, the church must reach a clear view concerning such relationships in the ordained ministry."

+ Forward Together, 2 Lanark Rd., Kirkmuirhill, ML11 9 RD, Scotland, UK

### Waldensian Church outnumbered but surviving

The Waldensians, a denomination which was rooted in a 12th-Century movement in defense of the poor and oppressed of France and Italy, has always been known as a minority among the larger denominations. On 23 Marc, at Rutgers Presbyterian Church a centennial conference of the American Waldensian Society (AWS) was held with the theme: "The Role of Religious Minorities in Pluralistic Societies." The AWS supports congregations and social programs in Italy, Uruguay, and Argentina.

The Rev. Gianni Genre, senior pastor of the Waldensian Church of Milan and former moderator of the Tavola Valdese (the Waldensian Board in Italy), states that "the Italian Waldensian Church... is, in today's Europe, the only surviving pre-Reformation dissident church.

The founder of the church was a merchant from Lyons, France, named Valdo (hence Valdese; Waldensian). Valdo sold all his possessions and dedicated himself to preaching the gospel. The Roman Catholic church eventually excommunicated Valdo and his followers.

The Waldensian Church has 140 communities in Italy and 40 in Uruguay and Argentina.

+ The Waldensian Society, 475 Riverside Dr., New York, NY 10115 (212) 870-2200

+ Centennial Conference of the American Waldensian Society, (917) 496-7972 <AWS.Centennial@verizon.net>

### Burning of Bible in Pakistan

Over 1,500 Christians staged a protest in Pakistan after four Muslim men were caught burning the Bible, calendars carrying the picture of Jesus Christ, and other Christian booklets, reports the Pakistan-based Daily Times. The

incident occurred on 4 April 2006.

Five churches have been attacked in Pakistan within two months. This Bible-burning incident disputes the claim by the minister for local bodies, Raja Basharat, that complete harmony exists between Muslims and Christians in the province of Punjab.

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

### Ferry service on Sabbath upsets pious

The first Sunday ferry arriving on the island of Harris in Scotland has ended a long tradition of strict sabbath observance on Scotland's remote Western Isles. The ferry made the journey from Berneray on North Uist across the sound to Leverburgh, ending Harris Island's Sunday isolation.

The Western Isles remain a stronghold of confessional Calvinism in Britain, and the Free Church of Scotland, and the more Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, are the focus of religious worship.

About 700 people on Harris signed a protest but the Uist islands to the south have a much larger Catholic population, which does not observe the sabbath so strictly, and many islanders on North Uist had been urging the ferry company to increase the frequency of the sailing from six days a week to seven.

But Morag Munro, the councillor for Harris West, said most locals were against the sailing. "We are investigating whether there is a legal option to protect us from this imposition," he said. "It is not just church people who are opposed, but also those who have come to appreciate a day of relaxation with their families for one day."

Strict Presbyterianism has been the dominant way of worship on Harris for generations.

+ Rev. Donald A Ross, Free Presbyterian Manse, Laide, Ross-shire, IV22 2NB, Scotland, UK

### Bishop among 14 dead in aeroplane crash

The Rt. Rev. William Waqo, Provincial Secretary of the Anglican Church of Kenya and Personal Assistant to Archbishop Benjamin Nzimbi, was among 14 killed in the crash of a Kenyan Air Force aircraft on a peace mission to Marsabit for talks aimed at ending livestock rustling and inter-clan fighting. Six members of parliament were also among the dead. Bishop Waqo is survived by his wife Naomi, who is a priest in the Anglican Church of Kenya, as well as four children, the youngest of whom is three weeks old.

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

### Eileen Paisley becomes Baroness

Eileen Paisley's elevation to the House of Lords was officially announced on 11 April, 2006. Eileen, the wife of Ian Paisley, said she will take the title of Baroness Paisley of St Georges, the Belfast city council ward she represented

from 1967-1975. Mrs. Paisley was raised to the Upper House along with former Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble and two senior Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), figures.

+ Martyrs Memorial Free Presbyterian Church, 356 Ravenhill Rd., BT 5 Belfast, Ulster, North Ireland

### Bail of Pakistani woman denied

Bail has been denied a Pakistani Christian woman, Naseem Bibi, charged with desecration of a picture of Khana Kabah, the Muslim holy place in Saudi Arabia on 3 March.

The husband of the accused stated that "On 3 March, many Muslim residents of the area gathered in the market near our house to protest against publication of the caricatures of the prophet Muhammad. They were raising slogans against US President George W. Bush, abusing him and Christianity too. Naseem rushed there and quarreled with them. They were large in number; they clutched Naseem and tortured her severely. They stripped her clothes publicly."

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

### North-East Presbytery receives Iranian church

The North-East Presbytery of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church held its spring stated meeting 6-7 April at Lifeline Fellowship ARP Church in Bionia, Pennsylvania, and at that time received the Iranian Christian Church of Washington, DC, into the presbytery. The congregation was originally established by Rev. Tat Stewart, and has since been served by others, including Rev. Milad Doss. The group meets in the facilities of Church of the Atonement at Silver Spring, Maryland, a Washington suburb.

+ Iranian Christian Church of Washington, DC, 10613 Georgia Ave., Silver Spring, MD 20902 (301) 649-7086

### New penalties for "proselytising" in Algeria

A presidential order that establishes new conditions for the exercise of non-Muslim religious practice was passed in the Algerian Ummah Council (Senate) on 13 March, and in the Algerian National Assembly (Parliament) on 15 March

A article written by Hamid Saidani titled: "New sanctions concerning the illegal exercise of religious worship - Evangelicals under high surveillance," and published in the French language Algerian newspaper "Actualite" said the penal aspects of the text are between a two and five year prison term and a fine of 50 to 100 million centimes (approx.. US\$7,000 to US\$14,000) to anyone who "incites, constrains or uses seductive means seeking to convert a Muslim to another religion...or who produces, stores or distributes printed documents or audio-visual formats or any other format or means which seeks to shake the faith of a Muslim."

+ World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), 644 Strander Blvd., #154, Seattle, WA 98188

### PKN to combine seminaries

Because of its advice to the PKN synod from its Council for Oversight of Theological Education, plans are in place for The Protestant Church in The Netherlands (PKN) to combine its three places for pastoral training into a new Protestant Theological University. The change could take effect as soon as January 2007, with programs beginning in September 2007.

The PKN now has three places for theological training. At the Theological University of Kampen, students follow a six-year course of theology and practical pastoral training. At the universities of Leiden and Utrecht, students follow a four-year study of theology at the university, followed by two years of pastoral training under the supervision of either the Institute for Theological Science (Hyde Park), or the Evangelical Lutheran Seminary. In the new system, this latter two-year phase would be converted to a full three-year Masters program.

These recommendations would accommodate directives from the Dutch government to reduce costs. All of the institutions have given their approval to the plan.

+ Theological University of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, Postbus 5021, 8260 GA, Kampen, Netherlands

### Muslims and Coptic Christians

For a third day in Alexandria, Egypt, Muslims and Coptic Christians have clashed after a Coptic worshiper was stabbed to death in church.

It was reported by the BBC that the most recent fights broke out close to one of three churches attacked by armed men on Friday, 14 April, 2006.

Officials in Egypt have blamed the attacks on extremists, but Coptic Christians say the government is not doing enough to protect them.

On Sat. 15 April, thousands of Copts joined the funeral procession for Noshy Atta Guirgis. + ASSIST News Service, PO Box 609, Lake Forest, CA 92609-0609

### Anti-Catholic resolution prompts Federal lawsuit

On 21 March, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors unanimously passed a resolution condemning the Catholic moral teaching on homosexuality and urged the Archbishop of San Francisco and Catholic Charities of San Francisco to defy church directives prohibiting homosexual adoptions.

The resolution alludes to the Vatican as a foreign country meddling in the affairs of the city and describes the church's moral teaching and beliefs as "insulting to all San Franciscans," "hateful," "insulting and callous," "defamatory," "absolutely unacceptable," "insensitive and ignorant."

The resolution calls on the local Archbishop to "defy" the church's teachings and describes Cardinal William Joseph Levada, the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which is responsible for safeguarding the doctrine of

the faith and morals of the church throughout the Catholic world, as "unqualified" to lead.

+ *City and County of San Francisco Board of Supervisors, 1 Dr., Carlton B. Goodlett Pl., Rm 244, San Francisco, CA 94102-5184 (415) 554-5184*

## Second General Assembly of the World Reformed Fellowship

The Second General Assembly of the World Reformed Fellowship met from 7-10 March, 2006, in Johannesburg, South Africa, to address some of the challenges facing the church in the twenty-first Century. The theme of the Assembly was "Masibambisane," a Zulu word which may be translated as "carrying the burden together."

In addition to learning together and building networking relationships, the members of the World Reformed Fellowship took the following actions in Johannesburg : Established three major working groups; established WRF Regional Councils in Africa and Asia which join the previously existing Councils in Latin America and Europe; established an Advancement Advisory Council which will assist the Executive Secretary in fund-raising; elected a new Executive Committee which is charged to handle WRF business between meetings of the General Assembly; set the date and place of the next Executive Committee meeting as 9-10 March, 2007, at McKenzie University in Sao Paulo, Brazil; and set the date of the Third General Assembly as March of 2010. Formal invitations to host the Third General Assembly have been received from Australia, Indonesia, and Scotland. At its meeting in March of 2007, the Executive Committee will decide the location of the Third General Assembly.

+ *Dr. Samuel Logan, Executive Secretary, The World Reformed Fellowship, 430 Montier Rd., Glenside, PA 19038 <samuelstlogan@aol.com>*

## Victory for Ten Commandments upheld

On 24 Apr., 2006, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, which encompasses Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and Tennessee, voted 19-5 to uphold the Foundations of American Law and Government display. The case is *ACLU of Kentucky v. Mercer County, Kentucky*. Liberty Counsel represents Mercer County.

The Foundations of American Law and Government display in the county courthouse includes the Ten Commandments, the Mayflower Compact, the Declaration of Independence, the Magna Charta, the Star-Spangled Banner, the National Motto, the preamble to the Kentucky Constitution, the Bill of Rights to the US Constitution, and a picture of Lady Justice. This display is identical to the one Liberty Counsel defended at the Supreme Court last year in McCreary and Pulaski counties also in Kentucky.

Litigation is continuing in these two cases and both may eventually end up in the High Court.

President and General Counsel of Liberty Counsel, Mathew D. Staver, stated that "today's

decision begins to turn the tide against the ACLU, which has been on a search-and-destroy mission to remove all vestiges of our religious history from public view."

+ *Liberty Counsel, PO Box 540774, Orlando, FL 32854 (800) 671-1776*

+ *US Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, 540 Potter Stewart US Courthouse, 100 East Fifth St., Cincinnati, OH 45202 (513) 564-7000*

## Church condemns scrambling for positions

Rev. Charles Ahwireng, the chairman of the Akuapem Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, has said scrambling for positions and litigation in some churches were indications of the church gradually losing its prophetic voice and moral authority.

Rev. Ahwireng, who was delivering the sermon at the 79th conference of the Presbytery held at Abirew-Akuapem, called on Christendom to unite and save itself from disgrace.

+ *Presbyterian Church of Ghana, PO Box 1800, Thorpe Rd., Accra, Ghana*

## Berkhof Systematic Theology collection available on CD-ROM

The Louis Berkhof Systematic Theology Collection is now available on CD-ROM complete with page numbers from the print edition for ease of citation.

+ *Louis Berkhof Systematic Theology Collection, <[http://rejoicesoftware.com/berkhof\\_st.htm](http://rejoicesoftware.com/berkhof_st.htm)>*

## Arrest of church leaders in Yunnan

According to China Aid Association's (CAA) field investigators in China, seven foreign evangelical church leaders which included five Americans and two Taiwanese were interrogated for five hours on 23 Mar., 2006.

A conference building in the suburb of Kunming City, the capital of Yunnan Province, was

raided by over 120 security officers from five different government agencies.

The CAA said "80 Chinese house church leaders from 20 provinces were attending a fellowship meeting with Christian leaders from America.

These 80 leaders represent 25 Chinese minority groups. The five Americans are from churches in Greensboro North Carolina. Among them two are caucasian Americans and three are Chinese Americans. Since the two White American pastors are still inside China and some of the released Chinese pastors are still monitored by the Chinese security agents, their names are not available to the public according to one of the arrested pastors who came back to his home in the US."

"According to reliable reports by China Aid Association, from February to December 2005, at least 1,317 confirmed arrests of house church pastors, leaders, and believers have occurred in over 20 provinces in China. Seventeen foreign missionaries including 11 Americans in ten different provinces were arrested during this time. Most of the arrested were released after they were interrogated anywhere from 24 hours to several months."

+ *China Aid Association, PO Box 8513, Midland, TX 79708 (432) 689-6985*

## Dr. R. C. Sproul launches program on Direct TV

"Renewing Your Mind" (RYM), the teaching program of R.C. Sproul, is embarking on a new era of outreach by broadcasting on the NRB Network, channel 378 on Direct TV. RYM will feature teaching by Dr. R.C. Sproul, airing for 30 minutes at both 7:30 EST in the morning and evening.

This new broadcast has a potential audience of more than 16 million subscribers.

+ *Ligonier Ministries, PO Box 547500, Orlando, FL 32854 (800) 435-4343*

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

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# Report on the 2006 Synod of the Reformed Churches of South Africa

**John Rogers**

The Synod met from 4<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> January under the moderatorship of the Revs Douw Breed, Peter van der Walt (vice), Neels Smit (Clerk), and Leo van Schaik (second). As usual, we overseas delegates were very warmly welcomed and well looked after both at Synod and elsewhere. The Synod this year, as in the past, had a very heavy agenda. As an overall impression, I was impressed with the patience and carefulness with which everybody's concern and every matter was dealt with. And as a general lesson, I think I saw good evidence of two – and both important!: i) don't break the Church Order (CO), ever! (see immediately following); and ii) don't legislate more than you have to – unlegislating is a difficult business!

## Women in office

This was the biggie. A bit of history. In 1988 the RCSA adopted a major study of this whole question which concluded that Scripture preserves the ruling offices of the Church to men. In 2000 there were appeals against the 1988 decisions. None of those appeals were successful. However, in response to an overture, a committee was appointed to study the question: given Synod's position that women may not serve in office in the Church, what, positively, is women's role in the life of the Church? That committee came back in 2003 with recommendations that all offices be opened to women, a matter for which it had no mandate! Beats me how it got on the floor, but it did, and Synod opened the office of deacon to women. So in 2006 they got what they asked for: thirteen appeals! from individual churches, classes and particular (regional) synods. Four advisory committees worked on these over several days followed by something like two days' worth of general synod debate!

The appeals centered around two articles of the CO:

### Article 31

*A decision reached at a church assembly by a majority of votes shall be considered fixed and binding, unless it is subsequently proved that it conflicts with the Word of God or the articles of the church order. If someone complains that he has been wronged by the decision of*

*a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to a major assembly, up to the national synod. An appeal from a national synod to a general synod is possible only when the appeal is made to the Bible, confession, church order or a verdict of the general synod.<sup>1</sup>*

### Article 46

*Matters to be dealt with in major assemblies shall not be prepared for discussion until the decisions of previous synods regarding these matters have been studied, in order that matters which had already been finalized were not tabled yet again unless it be considered necessary to review such matters.*

As well as the decision re women deacons, 2003 also decided to set up a committee to study a whole range of matters surrounding this issue, both of an exegetical and CO nature.

That Committee produced a Majority Report recommending all Church offices be opened to women, and a Minority Report, taking the contrary view. Introducing the Minority Report, the Rev. Danie Snyman spoke very carefully and graciously, but he did say there were “*whiffs in the Majority Report of a new hermeneutic; not quite, but almost a Scripture-critical hermeneutic. So we come*

*to a point similar to that reached at Dort where we say we are talking about the same thing but in fact we are not on the same road: at Dort on election; here today in regard to our hermeneutic and the subject of women in office.*” (I don't mean by that that others were not also gracious and careful; they were, particularly, eg, the Rev. Braam Kruger, writer of the Majority Report, with whom I talked personally about it. As a general comment, one can only be impressed by the manner in which the debates were conducted. But I mention Snyman because he was bringing, in effect, a pretty heavy charge.)

The appeals all focused on how the matter was brought to the table in an un-Church-Orderly way, and secondly, that the decisions of 2003 contravened 1988, which decisions have not been restudied and demonstrated contrary to Scripture and hence still stand.

The first item to come back from the advisory committees and on to the table of the full Synod was the *beswaarscrif* (appeal) from Particular Synod Bosveld and it was upheld. 2003 was contrary to the CO.<sup>2</sup> As you can imagine, that left them in a pickle. Where to go from here? What to do with the other twelve appeals and the two reports from the Study Committee?! The upshot



*A view of the GSKA Synod in session.*

was another advisory committee! After much deliberation it came back with the following recommendations which became the final decisions:

- i) *The result of the decision of Synod 2006 concerning the petition of Part. Synod Bosveld is that the decision of Synod 2003, wherein the eligibility of women to the office of deacon was granted, should not have been taken, in light of CO.46.*
- ii) *The fact that the petition of Part. Synod Bosveld was successful means that all other matters resulting from the report of 2003 can no longer be handled by Synod 2006.*
- iii) *A Study Committee is appointed to offer Scripturally grounded advice to the next synod on the question of whether women should be allowed to serve in the office of deacon and/or other organized forms of diaconal works of service, or not. Relevant material, including that which was on the table at Synod 2006, as well as the content of the report to Synod 1988, should be kept in mind. This study must provide clear grounds to substantiate any recommendation it offers that a synod decision must be changed, so that a fixed and binding decision can be made on this matter at the specific synod.*
- iv) *Since some women, on the grounds of the Synod 2003 decision, have already been elected and ordained to the office of deacon and are delivering this service with conviction, Churches, in the light of*

*CO.30,<sup>3</sup> are advised to take the following into account:*

- a) *that the matter of women elected to and serving in the office of deacon, on grounds of the 2003 decision, must be handled with utmost care;*
- b) *that women already ordained in the office should receive the opportunity to carry on with their work of service while waiting for Scripturally founded resolution from the next synod;*
- c) *that Churches, in their decisions on the further handling of the calling of women to the office of deacon, should bring into account the fact that the decisive, Scripturally founded resolution on this matter will only be given at the next synod, God willing.*

There has been fallout from this decision. Before Synod ended, Prof. Fika van Rensburg advised the Synod that “congregations could still allow women in office because 2003 **had** changed 1988: it had declared that the scope of the Gospel of Christ pointed in the direction that women were called by God and could be gifted by God to serve in a special way in his Church as God thought it good. The implication of this is that in the Bible there is no vital witness against the admission of women to the offices.” His advice is that “congregations, for the sake of peace and edification, could ordain women in the office.” This, of course, got into the press and Synod was requested to speak to it;

Synod declared it to be only van Rensburg’s personal interpretation. “*The Synod affirms further that in 1988 there were very firm decisions made re women in the special offices, made on the basis of Scripture, and these decisions are still valid.*”

Not a happy situation. Even less happy is the fact that since the Synod, 32 ministers have signed a declaration in which they state their opinion that the Majority Report was right, the decisions of 2003 were overturned on a CO technicality, and concluded with the following:

We are, therefore, going ahead with guiding our sessions to officially ordain women who have been called and equipped by God as deacons and who have been elected. Some of us claim the liberty to ordain women as elders, while others, out of denominational sensitivity, rather want to wait with this.

### **Psalms for singing**

Another important matter was that of appeals against the new TT Cloete Psalm-versifications, which were accepted for RCSA use in 2003. This is a very fine argument concerning the question how much we should sing the Psalms Christologically. These brothers are concerned that Cloete’s versification does not indicate Jahweh (LORD) in its renderings and hence the covenantal nature of our relationship with God is lost; Cloete’s Ps.110 does not indicate the messianic nature of its subject. One chap reckons Ps.110 applies to Christ only, yet its pronouns are not capitalized. But, oh dear, according to others, neither are they in Totius’ version either! (Totius authored the versifications in the Psalmbook used for maybe 70 years.) These men feel this very deeply and I must say, the Synod was very, very patient with them. In the words of one, “The whole beswaarscrif can be summarised in one sentence: It is written. And our most high priest knows what is best for his Church.” As a side comment, I think we would be well-advised not to open this can of worms in the work we are doing preparing our own new Psalm versifications for our Churches. We should stick with versifying them as written and leave the Christological interpretation to preaching and our own NT mindset as we sing them, for at the other end of the spectrum, you have men who reckon only Pss 2 & 110 are Christological.

The decision in the end was to leave the status quo; they have three approved selections of Psalm versifications: Cloete and Totius (printed C-T, C-T, and so forth, through the book), and Totius revised. They



GSKA Moderamen Dr Neels Smit (Clerk), Dr Douw Breed (Moderator), Rev Pieter van der Walt (Vice), Rev Leo van Schaik (2nd Clerk)

further decided to continue work on the revised Totius texts (about which concerns had also been expressed).

### Church and society:

#### *Liaison with Government*

Deputies responsible for matters relating to Church and Society cooperate with the Dutch Reformed Church in monitoring the legislature and communicating information in regard to proposed legislation, for the DRC minister responsible for this is the only Christian minister with good access. The problem for many is that the minister concerned is known to be thoroughly liberal theologically. The RCSA also decided to join the South African Council of Churches for similar reasons, with the following provisos:

- i) *the Synod clearly states that the Reformed Churches in South Africa maintain their independence and do not, by association, accept responsibility for each viewpoint and act of the SACC;*
- ii) *the Deputies are mandated to communicate serious and appropriate issues of differences to our members;*
- iii) *the Deputies are mandated to advise the next Synod on the continuation of our membership.*

I should point out that this does not make the RCSA a member of the World Council of Churches. Nevertheless, many delegates were not at all happy with this decision and it may well only deepen the unrest within the denomination.

### Sabbath-Sunday

In 2003 Synod was asked to approve a set of guidelines designed to give members help on how to keep the Lord's Day. There was some concern over these, concerns about casuistry (detailed case by case laws). Eventually they were accepted but called perspectives (whatever that is supposed to mean). I will report on this at some length. It is rather involved, but it is a matter of increasing importance and more and more being studied by reformed Churches around the world.

Among the grounds of the 2003 Sabbath/Sunday decisions, was the following: *In the New Testament there is no command to stop working but there is a command not to stay away from the assembly of the congregation (Heb.10:25). Sunday is not a day of rest first, but a day of worship to celebrate Christ's victory. Yet, each believer has the duty to rest – also on a Sunday. By resting from your work the believer indicates his mastery over labour and that the life in Christ is more than labour.*

An appeal was lodged about certain aspects of those decisions. Behind their concerns was the question when the Sabbath was established: at creation – where rest, the sanctity and the commemoration of the Sabbath are emphasized; or at the institution of the Sinai covenant – where the emphasis falls on salvation from slavery. For the viewpoint one chooses has consequences for the meaning of the Sabbath for the believer of today. The 2003 Report chose the latter, believing it to be *“the most acceptable viewpoint, as well as the viewpoint with the strongest Biblical grounds. It is supported by other sections in Scripture that refer to God's salvation from Egypt...”*

The appellants were concerned that it was never argued why this viewpoint was the most acceptable with the strongest Biblical grounds. Nor was it shown that the other was weak or on what Biblical grounds. Nevertheless, the choice having been made, *“the balance that God created between the rest on the seventh day (Ex.20:11) and the salvation from Egypt (Deut.5:15) is being ignored. The content of viewpoint one – the emphasis on the sanctity and rest, given in Ex.20:11 – is even, to a large extent, left behind, as if it is of less importance.”*

Furthermore, 2003 stated that *“no command is given”* in the New Testament to stop working.... Yet, rest is the duty of every believer – on Sundays as well! The brothers felt this indicated *“an internal contradiction. If no command can be found in Scripture, on what grounds is this duty to rest based?”* Nice point!

And thirdly, because the report did *... not make it clear whether the rest on a Sunday is a command/duty, or not, the Churches are left in a state of confusion. Many questions about Sunday labour, Sunday sport (even in schools), trading on Sundays as well as about positive speaking of the Sunday hang in the air because of the ambiguous Report and Synod decision. (This point), accepted with gratitude by the Synod, does not meet the requirements of the assignment that was given: to give clear, fundamental guidelines from Scripture for the lives of the believers according to the Fourth Commandment.*

So, there was an article in Die Kerkblad in January, 2003, intended to render Synod's decision for the benefit of the people, but which was refuted in subsequent letters to the editor. *“Instead of guidelines, confusion reigns!”* Synod 2006, therefore, was requested to rescind 2003 and appoint a new study committee, taking into consideration the work already done, and properly fulfill the

assignment first given in 2000.

An advisory committee believed that the 2003 decisions did state that the *“Sabbath from the Old Testament is fulfilled and Jesus is now the Sabbath for every believer. Therefore Jesus indicated that the Sabbath is not a day of law full of burdens and enforcement.”* Which, while the latter is true, it seems to me to beg the question: was the Sabbath of the OT intended to be *“a day of law full of burdens and enforcement”*? Did it only become otherwise by being fulfilled in Christ? Nevertheless, the committee concluded therefore, that *“this choice cannot be ‘unbalanced’ or an ‘assumption’ as alleged”*; the *“2003 report stipulates that ‘with this true rest the salvation from the slavery of sin is meant’, as is confessed in the Heidelberg Catechism, Q/A 103.”*

In response to the concerns about internal contradiction in the report the committee replied that the *“task given by God and the duty of man concerning Sundays cannot contain a contradiction if it is considered that the 2003 report states that ‘Jesus is the true rest and he who believes in Him receives the true rest and is obedient to the Sabbath commandment’.”* To which I want to reply: but he always was! even as he was the true rock from which OT Israel always drank (1 Cor.10), even as we must. *“What the gravaman sees as an internal contradiction seems actually to be the mystery of the relation between talent and task (indicative and imperative) as it clearly finds expression in God's covenant relationship with us.”* Perhaps there's something lost in translation here, but, as is, this statement is also a mystery to me!

In conclusion, the advisory committee reckoned that

*... if the report is read in its entirety and considered in its total context, there can be no confusion, because the moral appeal to the Church of the New Testament is still to use time in such a way that there will be time for work and rest, as well as time for serving God and one's fellow man, and for the elders to have empathy with fellow believers. The 2003 report also wants to emphasize the festive character of Sundays that can create no confusion with believers about the way to spend the Sunday: Sunday is not just a transposed Sabbath. It is a new day, a festive day.*

All very confused reasoning, it seems to me, but Synod bought it and the appeal failed. Add to that statements like the following and one gets an uncomfortable feeling that the clear Word of God (if it is



Rev H ten Brinke (GKNV), Rev H Horsman (NGK), Rev G Knight (OPC), Dr E der Boer (GKNV), Prof J Maris (CGKN), Rev R Sikkema (URCNA), Rev G van Schie (CRCA), Rev J Rogers, Dr A Wilson (FCS,SA).

clear on the point; but I think the meaning of Scripture is not really being argued here; that is what I fear is being avoided) is being replaced by nice-sounding 'moral appeals' and 'empathy will fellow believers' (almost a reverse pharisaism?): "The church in the world, outside the promised land, has the task to configure the Lord's intention with the day of rest. Concerning the commandment not to work; the believer, in the compass provided by Christ and the freedom of the Holy Spirit, ethically weighs the amount of work that is necessary."

### Retranslation of Liturgical Forms and Creeds

This is an ongoing project, being done in conjunction with the two larger Dutch Reformed Churches, the aim being to have forms and the creeds in Afrikaans of today and not in theological language, bearing in mind they are for reading and hearing.

### Ecumenical relations

The RCSA sustains sister Church relations with a number of Churches. In fact, they are very busy with ecumenical relations. The ecumenical deputies recommended the RCSA seek a sister-Church relationship with the **RCUS** – ex German Reformed Church. In fact, the RCSA is traveling the world, seeking to establish relations with churches in Spain and France, trying to establish contact with Hungary. You name it, someone from the RCSA will appear. They are seeking to speak

to the **Protestant Church in the Netherlands** as well – that is the *Samen op Weg* churches. When the Revs Henk Stoker & Ben Fourie left NZ after our Synod, they went on to Indonesia and Timor and made contact with eleven congregations there. Some of this is financed by the two other larger Dutch Reformed Churches through a mutually funded Interclerical Commission for Ministry of the Afrikaans-Speaking Abroad.

The Christian Reformed Church of the Netherlands has been a sister Church from 150 years back. The **Free Church of Scotland** has also had a close relationship with the RCSA for well over 100 years. The FCS is working cooperatively with the RCSA in a ministry among ex-South African youth in London. There are reportedly 500,000 South Africans in London (1.5m in England), many of whom, it was reported, have either lost their faith altogether or have become cynical and feel guilty about that. Two theological students have been sent to London and their work has been blessed. The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia are another sister Church.

The sister-Church relationship with our Churches was reaffirmed and gratitude was expressed "for the cooperation between the RCSA and the RCNZ, for the trouble the RCNZ has gone through to integrate our ex-members and other ex-South Africans, and for the fact that this small denomination has sent a delegate to our Synod." Also, "The Synod mandates the Deputies for Ecu-

menicity Abroad to help the RCNZ wherever possible with the outreach to and integration of ex-South Africans in New Zealand;" ... noted "that the RCNZ has encouraged the RCSA not to undertake a Scripture critical path; ... Deputies will be delegated to the next RCNZ Synod."

Two Churches were newly welcomed as sister Churches at this Synod, the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of the USA.

The relationship with the **Reformed Churches of Botswana** was reaffirmed. They consider the missionary work in D'kar among the Bushmen to be very important. I visited this work. You will see an article in FF in the near future, Lord willing.

The **Confessing Reformed Church of the Congo** was established in 1984 through broadcasting work of the Rev. Eric Kayayan, whose work is considered exceptional and very influential through much of francophone Africa. Some radio listeners in the Congo were greatly influenced by Eric's preaching and wrote to him in 1982. He showed them how to establish a Church, sent two brothers to France to study; they returned in 1984 and the Church was established. Eric then selected another six men and sent them to Potchefstroom; five returned to the Congo and the Rev. Tikwa Shimbi (who speaks French, English, & Swahili) remained in South Africa and is working among Congolese people and others from Nigeria, Togo and so forth. I sat next to Tikwa and he told me the following: his congregation (in Johannesburg) has 150 confessing members and 80 children. The CRCC comprises 200 congregations/groups of believers with 40 ministers, eight trained somewhat to our standards or higher. Two of the five trained at Potch have since gone to France to do their ThMs. Others have been trained by Dutch missionaries to a lesser level, not with Greek or Hebrew. When there is no minister, a responsible man will preach but not administer the sacraments; these men are given some training, seminars and sometimes sermons for reading Services. The CRCC became a member of the ICRC last year. Tikwa spoke of immense growth in Mbashi and elsewhere. He requested continued help for the work of the Lord in the Congo – ministers, businessmen, tradesmen, etc. Fifty congregations in the RCSA support the churches in the Congo at the present time. This is a Church we to pray for.

The relationship with the **CRCA** is on hold because of concerns re women in office, liturgy; and the matter of homosexuality is beginning to be more openly discussed and

defended, so it was reported. (Although note the news item in the February FF to the effect that the Classis involved has called upon the congregation concerned to conform to the CRCNA Synodical position on this matter.)

The **URCNA** does not presently see its way clear to establish relations with the RCSA. The Rev. Ray Sikkema spoke of similar concerns that we had over their 2003 decision re deacons “because in the CRCNA that decision in the 70s led eventually to women in the office of elder.”

### Theological school

They are very proud of their Theological School and apparently, measured by scientific research and publishing (on average, three items in academic journals per professor pa), it is the most rigorous faculty of the entire Potch University. PU is now a campus of North-West University, the other campus of which is only something like 10% of the size of PU but has equal votes on the council. Not a happy situation and how long they still have real control over the teaching philosophy at PU remains to be seen. The present rector of PU is a Dutch Reformed woman – seems pretty switched on and pretty reformed, at least so far as her educational philosophy is concerned. Generally, it seems she is regarded as a good rector and, in the current political situation, being a woman is useful! The present agreement between the NWU and the Theological School still acknowledges the independence of the School.

### Church structure

Finally, a very significant decision was made on the Friday afternoon when I was absent, but as the moderator joined us in Botswana a day later, I was able to talk to him about it. A bit of background. One really has to speak about the RCSA as a family of Churches in which there are five levels of Church court; Session, Classis, Particular (Regional) Synod, then the National Synods: (Afrikaner) National Synod, Middelande (central, mainly black) Synod, and the Soutpansberg (black, Venda, in the north) Synod. There also used to be a Cape (coloured – whatever its actual name) Synod, but that was incorporated into the Cape Particular Synod some years ago. This may account for the fact that they simply call the synod I have attended a National, and not Afrikaner National, Synod; then there is the General Synod (comprising delegates of all three National Synods) which, to my knowledge, has never met because of all sorts of difficulties.

Well, this time there was a proposal simply to dismantle the three National Synod

structure and that all the Churches should unite at classis level. They bit the bullet, by about a two-thirds majority. Of course, it is subject to acceptance by the Middelande and Soutpansberg synods, but there has been discussion with them before this proposal was drawn up.

This is a pretty brave move and if it works, it will be something that has not been achieved by either of the other two Dutch Reformed families of churches. It was a hot potato and a debate which was a pity to miss (but I was not my own man at that point). As soon as I arrived I had people asking me what I thought about it. There already is one black Church in the Bosveld Part Synod (whose minister was a delegate at this synod). Bosveld would be perhaps the most conservative synod. It was within this synod that the concerns were felt the deepest and yet it was a man from this synod who turned the tables, so I was told. He simply said he did not know how it would work out or really what the effects would be, but he believed they must do it because it was right. There are deeply felt fears for their identity as Afrikaners. I guess, when you boil it all down, as an outsider looking in, the Church is all they have left. The country has gone (out of their hands); the PU will go if things continue on their present course. Others are concerned for other reasons as well. For example, the black Churches may sometimes comprise only quite a small number of members (maybe twenty or so); yet they will have two delegates at Classis even as a white church of maybe 1,000 people.

But thus they did something that is not supposed to happen in South Africa. They were (Church) politically liberal while at the same time, with the decision re women in office, they were theologically, or ecclesiastically, conservative. And there are many difficulties to overcome. For example, what language should be used to ensure that everybody understands proceedings clearly? do decisions of previous national synods bind all the constituents of the new classes & synods? what effect may differences in theological training have? the possibility of conflicting decisions between each national synod (Soutpansberg, particularly, has concerns about this, eg, re women in office. In fact, Soutpansberg is making resolution of some of these a precondition to integration). Some of these things could be quite thorny and we need to pray for our brothers & sisters in this respect. They even have a suggested programme: integration at classis level in 2007; at regional synod level in 2008; and at General Synod level in 2009.

### Conclusion

So, all up, it is going to be three very interesting years in the RCSA. We have our concerns about certain decisions they made last time and they accepted our expression of that graciously. Very many of them feel exactly the same way. Concerns were expressed at the Synod about finances and quite poor giving of the people; “we need to learn to tithe,” one brother said in this discussion. On the other hand, as one talks around the traps, it is obvious that there is very generous giving being done and wonderful Gospel and diaconal work going on as a result (see future articles). We need to pray for our brothers and sisters in South Africa and in the RCSA.

Let me finally say that it was a privilege to go to South Africa again. I always feel very welcome and at home there. And again I thank the Churches for sending me.

- 1 By way of explanation, you need to understand that there is fifth level of Church court in the GKSA, the General Synod, which takes in the (Afrikaner) National Synod, Middelande (central, mainly black) Synod, and the Soutpansberg (black, in the north) Synod. There also used to be a Cape (coloured – whatever its actual name) Synod, but that was incorporated into the Cape Particular Synod some years ago. (Although, come to think of it, I don't recall seeing any distinctly coloured faces at the National Synod in three visits.) This may account for the fact that they simply call this synod a National, and not Afrikaner National, Synod. To my knowledge a General Synod has never met for reasons I explained in my last report. More on this later.
- 2 I haven't quite got the terminology figured out here. Formally, in Afrikaans, these petitions were called *Beswaarskrif*(te; plural). I think in their system that is something between an appeal and a gravamen; if I have got it right, it is used to challenge a doctrinal decision of synod.
- 3 Article 30 reads; “Church assemblies shall deal only with ecclesiastical matters and shall do so in an ecclesiastical manner. Major assemblies shall deal only with matters that could not be finalized in minor assemblies or that concern all the churches in question collectively.” This is the information I have on a paper provided at Synod; I wonder if the reference should actually be to Art.31.

## National Youth Camp – 2007

To help with the organising of this camp we would like to locate the location of any trophies which have been used at previous national camps.

If you know of the whereabouts of any of these. Could you please contact Ryan Nugteren at [dutch\\_kidd@hotmail.com](mailto:dutch_kidd@hotmail.com), providing details of the trophy and how it has been used at past camps.

## A feminine focus

Sally Davey

### a BRIEF, BUT BRILLIANT WITNESS

#### Betty Stam

Perhaps you are in your mid-twenties—just beginning to taste all the joys of adult life. Maybe you're in love—you've found the man you want to spend the rest of your life with. Maybe you're even married, and beginning to experience the solid happiness that comes from secure, committed, married life. Perhaps you've just had your first baby—and can hardly believe what a blessing God has given you. All your thoughts are of the future: what you will do to make sure this little one has the happiest childhood, the best Christian education, and the brightest start in life a loving parent can provide. At this stage in your life, would you be willing to trust God in everything, if He asked you to give your life into His hands? Could you pray this prayer, and mean it?

*"Lord, I give up all my own plans and purposes, all my own desires and hopes, and accept Thy will for my life. I give myself, my time, my all, utterly to Thee to be Thine forever. Fill me and seal me with Thy Holy Spirit. Use me as Thou wilt, send me where Thou wilt, work out Thy whole will in my life at any cost, now and forever."*

You see, one young woman—a married woman, deeply in love, and with a little baby girl, prayed these very words every day. And one day, God asked her to mean it—utterly, and literally. And she did trust Him.

This young woman was Betty Scott Stam, a 28-year-old American missionary in China in 1934. She had grown up in China, the daughter of missionary parents: Dr and Mrs Charles Scott. It was a happy childhood—the family did everything together. When they returned to the U.S. so that Betty could attend college, they spent six months travelling and studying in Egypt, the Holy Land, Greece, Italy, Switzerland, France and England. They learned about the history of their culture together. It was a wonderful time—they even saw the tomb where Christ was buried, and the hill of Calvary. After four years of college

she attended a Keswick conference, and "surrendered" herself to the Lord in a way she believed she never had before, though she had been a Christian for years. To her father she wrote, "I have never realized that such victory was possible. The Way is just Christ—and complete consecration to His will in our lives." She dedicated herself, gifts and all, to Him to use as He willed.

#### Betty Stam's gifting

Betty certainly had poetic gifts. She conveyed her thoughts, and most particularly her faith, with wonderful expressiveness and clarity. This was her poem, "My Testimony":

*And shall I fear  
That there is anything that men hold dear  
Thou wouldst deprive me of,  
And nothing give in place?*

*That is not so –  
For I can see Thy face  
And hear Thee now:*

*"My child, I died for thee.  
And if the gift of love and life  
You took from Me,  
Shall I one precious thing withhold –  
One beautiful and bright  
One pure and precious thing withhold?  
My child, it cannot be."*

She wrote this poem when she was considering the call to missionary service; considering, particularly, all that she would perhaps need to give up. At Moody Bible Institute, where she went to prepare herself for mission work, she thought mainly of China, but feared she was selfish, since she loved it partly for her parents' sake: they lived there, and her heart was also there. Briefly she considered Africa, especially the need of lepers there. But still she was drawn to China. In one other poem she expressed, to her father, the distress of soul and mind that she experienced before she surrendered everything—even her inner motives—to God's control. The last stanzas tell of the joy and peace that were hers once she did so:

*I'm standing, Lord:  
There is a mist that blinds my sight.  
Steep, jagged rocks, front, left and right,  
Lower, dim, gigantic, in the night.  
Where is the way?*

*I'm standing, Lord:  
The black rock hems me behind,  
Above my head a moaning wind  
Chills and oppresses heart and mind.  
I am afraid!*

*I'm standing, Lord:  
The rock is hard beneath my feet;  
I nearly slipped, Lord, on the sleet.  
So weary, Lord! And where a seat?  
Still must I stand?*

*He answered me, and on His face  
A look ineffable of grace,  
Of perfect, understanding love,  
Which all my murmuring did remove.  
I'm standing, Lord:  
Since Thou hast spoken, Lord, I see  
Thou hast beset—these rocks are Thee!  
And since Thy love encloses me,  
I stand and sing.*

#### Her meeting John

In her early twenties, Betty had learned commitment to Christ's ways rather than her own. But God also gave her human joys. It was at Moody Institute in Chicago that she met John Stam, the son of a Dutch immigrant father, who had been converted to Christ on arrival in the U.S. to seek his fortune. Peter Stam was given a New Testament in Dutch and English by a friendly woman who prayed that it might speak to his heart. Keen to learn English, he studied it; and believed. Peter was an active, loving Christian, and gave his life to all kinds of evangelistic works—including prison ministry, visiting in hospitals and among the poor. His son John received a great example, but also good instruction in the faith from his parents. Deciding finally on missionary service, he went to Moody Bible Institute.

It was at the weekly prayer meeting of the China Inland Mission (the great mission work founded by Englishman Hudson Taylor in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) that Betty met John. The host of the meeting, Mr Isaac Page, loved the moving letters of 17<sup>th</sup> century Scottish Presbyterian Samuel Rutherford. They were already precious to John, and he recalled later that "never shall I forget the look in Betty Scott's eyes as I repeated those wonderful verses on Immanuel's Land." (We know these words as the hymn "The Sands of Time are Sinking"). Betty was quiet and retiring, and certainly did not seek John's

attention. But in her he recognised the deep devotion to Christ that he shared. This is what attracted him. However, they were both committed to the will of God, and to missionary service. Neither imagined that would necessarily include marriage. Here is how their biographer, Mrs Howard Taylor, explained their situation:

*"... the call to China was more and more urgent [to John]."*

*'A million a month pass into Christless graves over there [he wrote to his father]. God can use us if only we are empty, broken vessels in His hand. Oh, how much more do we need preparation of heart and spirit than of the mind! Pray that I may have that.'*

Another question was also exercising his mind. For a great love had come into his life. John had never, in the years at home, preferred one girl friend above another. He had kept entirely free in heart and outward relations. He expected not only to go to China unmarried but to remain so for at least five years, as his hope was to engage in pioneering evangelistic work. The forward movement of the China Inland Mission appealed to him, and he was ready to offer for the mountain tribes of the west or the Moslems of Sianking. But now he faced a new situation. What did this great love mean? Was it a crowning gift that God was bringing into his life?"

John's father, in summing up the attitude of these two young people, was sure that "Those children are going to have God's choicest blessing!" He added, "When God is second you will get second best; but when God is really first, you have His best."

### Going to China

Betty was already accepted by the CIM for China. She was due to leave at the end of the academic year, but John had another year of study left. When Betty sailed for China, it was left for them to pray and seek God's will further. There was no engagement at this stage. It was a long year, but during this time John decided it was right for him to go to China; and he was accepted by the CIM. He was much-loved by his classmates, and was chosen to give the Class Address at their graduation. Reading it is a moving experience. It is obvious that John had a comprehensive concern for the lost: though he was heading for overseas missionary service he saw the need for witness just as much at home. "Now is the time," he urged, "to reach men whose minds are swept of old beliefs, before Communistic Atheism,

coming in like a flood, raises other barriers far harder to overcome, and before this generation passes into Christless graves." This was a realistic assessment, given the trends of the early 1930s.

When John sailed for China, he first arrived in Shanghai. By strange coincidence, Betty was also there, having gone for medical treatment. What joy! Now, as their futures in China were certain, they believed there was nothing to prevent their engagement. The Mission gave their blessing, and shared their joy. But it was a year before they mar-

ried. These were troubled times in China. There were bands of bandit soldiers about, and Betty had to learn to stay calm in some trying situations. She was with one young mother whose sick baby was deprived of her medicine for too long on the way to hospital. About the baby's death, and her parents' attitude of faith, Betty wrote: "here in this work you just have to trust everything to God, including your children, and know that He will do exactly what is best, and according to His will." Of Betty at this time John wrote to his parents: "I was especially glad to see



John and Betty Stam



Helen Priscilla Stam



Helen Priscilla Stam, the 'Miracle Baby', at one year old.

the cool way in which Betty was taking it all. I do thank God for her. But the above will help you to pray more understandingly for her—for us both when we get out into the work. One never knows what one may run into. Be we do know that the Lord Jehovah reigns. Above all, don't let anything worry you about us."

The CIM decided that John was to serve in Suancheng in an itinerant preaching ministry with an older missionary, a Mr Birch. He went there to make a beginning to his work during the summer of 1933. But on October 25, John and Betty Stam were married, at her parents' home in Tsinan. Reuben Torrey, son of the famous evangelist, married them. This what Betty's mother wrote:

"We all thought she looked especially lovely, as she moved with ease and grace in our midst. On her lips was a sweet, happy smile, while she kept her eyes steadily on

the face of the bridegroom... And he, waiting at the altar, had eyes for her alone. We have witnessed many Chinese weddings, even among the Christians, when the bride never once glanced up into the face of the bridegroom, keeping her head bowed as if in sorrow or trepidation, and could not but feel that the willing, trustful attitude in this case made a deep impression on our Chinese friends, especially among the students."

#### **Working together**

Soon, they were back in Suancheng with the Birches, settling into their itinerant work, traveling often through the mountains and visiting small villages.. Though still learning the language, John preached as he was able. They visited unbelievers, new Christians, and those who had endured bravely through times of persecution. Some Christians had only parts of the Bible. In September of 1934

John and Betty's happiness abounded: they became the proud parents of an especially beautiful little girl, Helen Priscilla. And their work went on. John and another missionary, E.A. Kohfield, were very keen to see new districts progress, and he decided to settle in Tsingteh, a place that had been turbulent because of Communist military activity and a local famine. Assured by the local magistrate that he and his family would be safe, John moved to the area. He was cautious, and prayerful. The local CIM superintendent was happy with the move as well. Mrs Birch, farewelling the little family, wrote: "John was one of the finest Christian men we have ever met. It was a privilege to have his fellowship in the work. The Chinese were especially fond of him. Everyone, young and old, Christian or heathen, liked him. The Christians thought he would become an ideal missionary, because, first of all, he was full of the love of Christ, and secondly, he loved the Chinese so well."

Soon after John and Betty settled in Tsingteh, there was a sudden attack by Communist forces on the town. It came on the 6<sup>th</sup> December, a winter's day. It was early morning, and Betty was bathing Helen when the first messenger came to warn them. The shooting began before an escape could be made. John and Betty knelt in prayer with their Chinese servants. When the Communists came thundering at their door, they opened it with quiet courtesy. Betty actually served the soldiers tea and cakes. John was tied up and taken off for questioning, and soon the soldiers came back for Betty and little Helen. Apparently they had discussed in front of her parents whether they should simply kill Helen outright, to save them trouble. But her life was preserved. They stopped the night in Miaosheo. There, John wrote to his CIM fellow missionaries, and entrusted his letter to the local postmaster. It is a remarkable letter. Despite the stress of the moment, there was not a note of self-pity or fear.

#### **Their death**

The next morning John and Betty were led out by the Communist soldiers who had taken them, and beheaded by sword outside the town. They were painfully tied up and their outer clothing was removed. The Communists shouted ridicule at them and urged the locals to come and watch the execution. But what of little Helen Priscilla? Her parents had to leave her in the house they had slept in. There was only time to make her cosy in her little carry-cot, with a few dollars hidden in the blankets that covered



#### **Dearest Sister, I said... "I do"!**

Your brightness turns grey  
turns dark  
turns darkest

Do you know the hidden valleys?  
I invite you to the hills...

My Sister, it's our Father  
the One you love with all your heart - do you?  
the One you talk with, plead with, cry with - do you?  
the One whose Words you cherish - do you?  
the One you obey at any cost - do you?

it is He who turns black tears to peaceful smiles -  
my Sister, ask Him!

He knows your heart  
renews your heart  
and fills you with a brighter brightness than before!

What an awesome Father you have - do you?

Give your all, dear Friend, keep nothing  
... don't keep "you"

And be encouraged - shout Hosannas!  
for our Lord comes.

Live for That day! - do you?

Oh, I pray we'll *live* "I do!"

Elrike Bakker



her. Truly, they could do nothing other than entrust her to God. John and Betty died full of faith, and in a way that deeply moved the unwilling onlookers. All that night and into the next day, the town of Miaosheo was quiet—seemingly deserted. No one dared approach the house John and Betty had slept in, as the Communists were still only 3 miles away. But hiding in the hills were some refugees, including a Chinese evangelist, Mr Lo. For two days and nights they hid in the open, and Mr Lo's child became very ill from exposure. But on hearing of the execution of two young foreigners, in harrowing circumstances, he could not leave. When he went back into the town, no one dared talk. Just as he was about to leave, an old woman mentioned that a foreign baby was still alive. Furtively, she pointed to the house. Wondering what he would find, Lo went into the house. There were many traces of the bandit army. Suddenly he heard a little cry, and there, in an inner room, was Helen, still safe in her carry-cot. After 30 hours, she was still alive and well. Taking her with him, he went out to the hill where the execution had taken place. There he found his young friends' bodies. Mrs Lo took the baby, and her husband set to the task of wrapping the bodies and burying them. Then they all fled into the mountains with Helen and their little sick child. On foot, and as secretly as possible (they were in great danger because of

the foreign baby) they walked over 100 miles over the mountains to reach the Birches. Just as lunch was being served Mrs Lo staggered in, carrying a bundle. "This is all we have left," she said brokenly.

### The life of Helen

By this time Betty's parents and the CIM all knew of the tragedy, and Helen's deliverance seemed a complete miracle. What a special little girl! And what brave and generous rescuers. Helen was cared for by the local missionaries until her grandparents, the Scotts, came to collect her. Her home was made with them; and then later Betty's sister and her husband adopted her. What became of her? Helen grew up in the Philippines, as her new family were missionaries there. Later she went to the U.S. for college, just as her mother had done. After graduation, she served in student work for her denomination. She has always avoided the publicity her parents' witness could have attracted, and took her adoptive aunt and uncles' name. For many years, and until her retirement, she served as an editor of scientific journals.

This unusual story, of a young mother's faithful witness cut—famously—short by martyrdom; coupled with that of a long, quiet, unobtrusive life lived by her daughter; makes me think of the ways God's purposes are lived out in the lives of His children. His great plan of redemption is being worked out,

in history and through many generations, in different ways. Some are called to glorious, public, yet unimaginably painful testimony. Others are called to live long, patient, un-spectacular lives of service to Christ, seemingly without obvious fruit for their labours in stubborn and resistant times. None of us knows for sure what the ultimate effects of our witness will be. But God knows; and one day, we will all stand before His throne and together rejoice in what He has done. I can hardly wait! But can you imagine what rejoicing there will be when, one day, God will take this old lady, Helen Priscilla, home? Can you imagine the delight of her mother and father on seeing their dear child again—this child last glimpsed, lovingly, in her carry-cot in December 1934?

*Blessing and glory and wisdom,  
Thanksgiving and honour and power  
and might,  
Be to our God forever and ever.  
Amen.*

(Revelation 6:12)

**Note:** *The details in this article are taken from Mrs Howard Taylor's biography of the Stams, The Triumph of John and Betty Stam. It was written only months after their deaths. It is a moving and deeply edifying story.*

## The Gates of Jerusalem

### The Old Gate [Jeshanah Gate]

#### Patricia van Laar

2 Cor. 5: 17: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come."

The third gate in our trip around the walls of ancient Jerusalem is the Old Gate (Neh. 3:6–12). This name conjures up several lines of thought: the Old Covenant, to which the New is firmly attached, or the old folk (aged), not to be discarded in the service of the church. Neither of these will be pursued here. Instead, we shall continue a reflection on some lessons on the Christian life, and a view of the Lord (not the only one) that may come from this portion of the Scriptures.

Most English Bible translations use the name Old Gate, but in the NIV it is called the

Jeshanah Gate, with "Old Gate" as a footnote. [The NIV uses the word untranslated, because of a difficulty in the grammar of the Hebrew.]

The New Bible Commentary suggests (but does not assert) that this gate could possibly be the one called elsewhere in the Bible the 'Corner Gate,' which is not included in Nehemiah's account in Chapter 3, although it is placed on some wall outline maps. This reminds us that although the story of the walls, gates and towers is factual, not an allegory, there cannot be a cast-iron placing of their position. Ascertaining exact sites is a task of archaeology, and as long as the present city of Jerusalem is inhabited, preventing the possibility of exhaustive excavation, even archaeologists are unable to determine precisely the site of the gates, or

trace an exact outline of the walls. A second map (in this issue), which differs in several aspects from the first one published in the April issue, illustrates this fact. Some commentaries produce a third, slightly different again. It is impossible to say that any one of these is absolutely accurate.

#### The repairs

Repairs to the third gate are recorded as the beams being laid, the doors set in place, and bolts and bars attached. This is similar to the repairs of many of the other gates. *Young's Literal Translation* uses the word 'strengthened' rather than 'repaired,' and according to my reading elsewhere, the idea of making strong and firm is present in the Hebrew word. The destructive fire of the city, no matter how extensive, had evidently left

some kind of remnant of the walls and gates that could be put to use, even if it were just a portion of the gateway itself.

Nowhere in my reading have I found any proposed use for the Old Gate. Probably it did not have a specific use, as the Sheep and Fish Gates evidently did, but was in a convenient place for all, as an entrance to and exit from the city.

**The builders**

Jehoiada, son of Paseah, and Meshullam, son of Besodiah, were responsible for the gate repair. The name Meshullam occurs at least 21 times (some a repetition of the same man) in the Bible, including the mention in Neh. 3: 4, of the one involved in the wall near the Fish Gate. These two Meshullams were differentiated by their father's names, an important distinction for the second one; as the other, sadly, is later recorded as having a daughter who married into the enemy camp (Neh. 3: 4, 30 and 6:1, 18). The first

readers knew these various men, but most were soon lost to sight from human memory. To us they are merely names. After all, one might think, they were only building a gate in a wall. Individual names were not that important. But God sees it differently. No one is lost from or overlooked in God's sight. He notices all faithful work done by his servants. Here their names are recorded in the Word of God; He eternally remembers them. He has a scroll (book, A.V.) of remembrance of all who fear Him (Malachi 3:16).

**The wall**

Many were involved in this part of the wall. Space precludes a close look at these, but your own reading and contemplation will be fruitful. The goldsmith and the apothecary (perfume maker), usually associated with Temple worship, probably would not have known such hard physical labour, but they played their part faithfully. Rulers' sons were not too proud or too lazy. One was

helped by his daughters, too (verse 12). The women have their place. These particular daughters were doing what was normally a man's work.

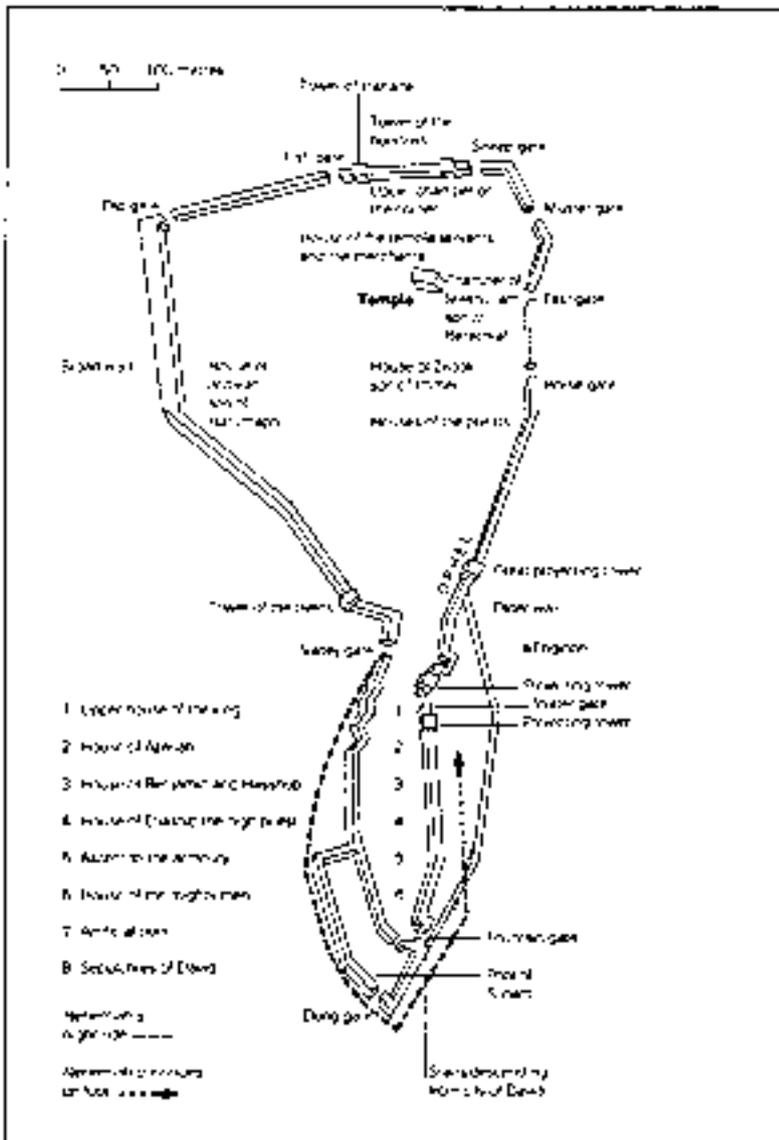
Some maintained the work at home (v.10): Jedaiah made repairs opposite his home. Others left their homes to come (men of Gibeon and of Mizpah). Each had his own section, each filled a space. Most of us build in our own regions, under our local authorities, by surrender and obedience of the Christian to his Lord. Others may be called to go to far away places. God holds the plan for each of us. So this section of the wall was built by many, from all walks of life, from high and low, both men and women.

Now, let us return to the Old Gate.

**A name of significance**

No one can insist on a unique special meaning for this gate. One can only meditate on various ideas from the designation 'Old' Gate. My reflection connects to our two previous gates, for the Old Gate brings to mind the old being renewed spiritually by the Lord. This thought may be developed from 2 Cor. 5: 17: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come." Verse 18 continues, "All this is from God, who reconciled Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." How significant this is! The Old Gate is made new, repaired, strengthened. Strengthened to fulfill the purpose of the Fish Gate, and possible only because of the Sheep Gate. Ephesians puts it another way (4: 22): "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds, and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

How wonderfully it all fits together. Until we are made new in Christ, it is impossible to serve God. We cannot fish for Him until we are renewed, strengthened, made firm. We are privileged to do His work, but only through the Lord Jesus. *The life of the new man in Christ* is the one we must live. His servants must display the characteristics of the "new man" before we can serve effectively. Ezekiel 18:31 instructs God's people to "Rid yourselves of all the offences you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit." Ephesians 4:23-5:20 continues by enumerating the things to be put off, sins of the flesh, and things the new person must put on, the fruits of the Spirit.



But the Old Gate also reminds us that the old still exists in us all. The old gate, damaged and broken, was not discarded when Nehemiah's men came to rebuild. It was repaired, strengthened and still put to use. So we are left in our "bodies of death;" we are not suddenly transformed the moment we become Christians. Paul knew this better than any of us. The resulting struggle, if it were not for the Lord, would have left him in complete despair. *"What a wretched man I am,"* he wrote. *"Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

While we live, there will always be this tension between the old and the new. As long as we have breath, or until the Lord's return, we are still in our old bodies, subject to the destruction engendered by the fall. We are made new spiritually, but are still part of the old creation. God has not removed us from His world. This is the sphere in which we must serve until the day we die.

Do we despair at the power of the old in our lives? Only the grace of Christ can rid us of our pride and arrogance, our deceitfulness and 'cover-ups,' our anger and resentment, our temper and our evil actions. Usually this is a gradual process throughout our lives, the spiritual work of sanctification, for which all the praise be His. In every life, it is a continuing process of the Holy Spirit.

#### Old become new

Yet sometimes in special circumstances, in some area of our lives, there may be the mercy of God, be a dramatically swift change. A few years ago, I went to hear a missionary speak whom I had heard in my teens. When he stood up at the meeting and I saw him again for the first time in decades, the thought flashed into my mind, "What a gentle face that man has." He exuded what had obviously become in him an outstanding fruit of the Spirit—gentleness. (Gal. 5:23) Then I suddenly remembered what he had told us all those years ago. His white hair was then a fiery red. He told his young audience that his temper had matched his hair. One day, his mother said to him, "Hayden, if you don't learn to control your temper, you will finish up in prison. The way you behave, you will end up killing someone." Hayden knew his mother was right. But he knew he could not control it. He threw himself on his knees before the Lord, and prayed for help. God's answer was in this case immediate, and far more than Hayden had asked. God did not enable him to control his temper. He removed it altogether! Hayden no longer even *felt* the anger towards others that had

controlled his life. As I pondered this all those years later, I saw what perhaps Hayden himself may not have seen. Not only had the Lord removed his terrible temper altogether, but He had given him a 'double portion' of the spirit of gentleness that now showed so clearly in his old face, developed over decades of close living and faithful service to his Lord. The old had gone; the new in Christ shone out.

This was a dramatic deliverance, one that some others have also experienced with different problems. Yet this is not usually the Lord's way. In my own experience it is not common, but occurs in times of specific, desperate need. As long as we live, there is the struggle against the flesh. Paul was conscious of the conflict between the old and the new, when he spoke of being in two minds—to stay, so that he could continue to serve his Lord, and for the blessing of the saints, or to depart to be with Christ, which he declared *"is far better."* (Phil. 1: 20 - 23). He knew that for him *"to live is Christ,"* remaining in the body for the sake of the church, but *"to die is gain,"* being with the Lord Who meant everything to him. Like David in Ps. 27, he would love to "gaze upon the beauty of the Lord," but this must wait God's time for fulfillment. Small wonder, then, that Paul was able to exhort another local church, *"Present your bodies to Him, as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to Him, which is our spiritual worship."* (Rom. 12: 1).

The Old Gate was left in place for the life of the city. But even this did not last forever. Where is it now? We have this assurance: One day the old will pass, completely and forever. Until that time, the old remains, renewed and strengthened like that old gate in Jerusalem, to honour, serve and worship the Lord on this old earth. One day—a new heaven and a new earth—and new bodies, spiritual bodies.

#### The greatest of all

But above all we must remember the One Who makes it all possible, and Who Himself also took a human body for the love of His people. He became flesh, like us. In His love and humility, He took, as it were, the form of an 'Old Gate' and dwelt among us. But not touched by the destruction that overtook man—*"Yet without sin."*

Look at Him in Gethsemane. He was not missing from his place, but fulfilled to the utmost the work His Father had given Him to do. He took our sins upon Him in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. (1Pet. 2: 24.) But now, His body is the resurrection body, highly exalted. This is our hope. For we too will, some time, put off this body of flesh, this body of death, and be changed to His likeness. Then, before Him every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

*"Behold I make all things new." Rev. 21: 5.  
Come, Lord Jesus.*

## Upper Primary School Teacher Vacancy

Calvin Christian School is seeking a teacher who believes in the vision of Christ-centred education in a school which has a mainly Christian student population from outside the Reformed Church.

We are located in an area of Auckland where our small class-sizes and biblical curriculum has found a warm and growing response.

We are specifically seeking a teacher to teach Grades 5/6 till 8 (ages 9 till 12 years approximately). Experience at this level would be advantageous.

We are a confessionally-based school, a member school of the Independent Fellowship of Christian Schools, and operated under the auspices of the Calvin Christian School Trust Board.

Write to:

The Chairman  
Calvin Christian School Trust Board  
17 Phoenix Place, Papatoetoe, Auckland  
Email: [sjirk@xtra.co.nz](mailto:sjirk@xtra.co.nz)

## Missions in focus

Janice Reid

# D'Kar – Mission to Bushmen

By Rev. John Rogers

When they were in NZ last September, I had asked the Revs Ben Fourie and Henk Stoker if they could arrange for me to visit some missions their Churches were involved in or supported after the Synod. Perhaps I should have expected it, but Ben Fourie had organized a small-scale safari into Botswana with three four-wheel drives. We were away a week. There were ten of us; our three drivers, Ben Fourie and his son, the Rev. Ray Sikkema of the URCNA (who last year spent three months in Masterton), three other RCSA ministers and myself. My driver said to me as we drove into Botswana that the first 50km are new, the rest is revision. He was pretty right. Apart from some sugar-loaf type hills for a few kilometres out of Gabarone, Botswana is dead flat.

We drove north-west from Gabarone, which is only just over the South African

border, 605km to Ghanzi, a few kilometres north-east of which is D'Kar, a settlement with about 1,000 people and another 500 in the surrounding district. Ghanzi and D'Kar form the centre of quite a number of cultural awareness groups and organisations seeking to empower the San<sup>1</sup> in general, increase educational opportunities and foster economic independence. These actually began as deaconate works of the Church, for there is a lot of poverty. However, so Henk told me, *"in some way they lost the Church and became development organizations totally independent from the Church, although Church members are involved still. In 1997 they grew so big that they had to split up and form branches over Southern Africa"* and now work under the general umbrella of the Kuru Family of Organisations and in cooperation with UNESCO.

The Reformed Churches in Botswana, established in 1994, comprise four congregations, one predominantly Tswana and three Bushmen, one of which is in D'Kar with a bit over 100 members. The mission among the Bushmen in D'Kar has been operating since the 1960s and was run by a Christian Reformed (Netherlands) man for many years. Since 1998, the Rev. Hendrik du Plessis of the RCSA has been working there, along with his wife, Miriam, and two children, Pieter (12

and Suné (10). I had actually met him at the 2000 Synod. All the other men on our trip, as well as others in the Churches generally, speak very highly of Henk's absolute and selfless dedication to this work and these people. When he first arrived in 1998 the Church building was being used as a store-room, so he had to do a Nehemiah and toss Tobiah's junk out of the temple.

Apparently, back in the 1960s a Namibian farmer became very interested in missionary work amongst the Bushmen. About this time independence came to Botswana and many white farmers felt uncertain about their future there. This Namibian chap exchanged one of his farms in Namibia for one in D'Kar. It was then that mission work began. In 1989 the title deed of the farm was transferred to the local Reformed Church in D'Kar, to the Trust Board of which Hendrik is an advisor. Further to that, in the nineties the Dutch Government bought the Dq̄e Qare Game Farm for the Bushmen and this also has since been placed under the control of the Church. One chap told me that at present these are the only lands the Bushmen legally own. Their traditional lands, the Kalahari, are all under government, which is to say, Tswana, control as a national park and subject, therefore, to all sorts of restrictions. The Bushmen feel oppressed by the Tswana, especially since diamonds have been found in the Kalahari, the proceeds of which do not fall to the Bushmen!

The Bushmen who live in D'Kar are of the Naro tribe. Twenty years ago their population was about 15,000. Today it is thought to be around 50,000. Their language has twenty-eight clicks and Hendrik speaks that language fluently. There is another tribe, the Qgoo (the Qg is some sort of click; pronounce it Khoo and you will be near!), which was down to only 10,000 twenty years ago but has recovered to about 30,000 now. Hendrik is presently learning this language. It has 85 click combinations and, together with the rest of the alphabet, has 120 letters! These two languages are not dialects. They are, so I was told, as different from each other as English and Chinese. He is learning it by listening to tapes of the language being spoken. He plays these through his computer and by watching the speech portrayed on the screen, like a seismograph, and slowing down the speech at times so as to listen to it very carefully, he can detect exactly the differences between clicks and



Rev Hendrik du Plessis and four Bushmen elders to the Reformed Church of D'Kar

sounds and tell what one must do with the mouth to make the clicks!

As well as Hendrik's work as a missionary, there is also a Bible translation project underway, under the auspices of the Christian Reformed Churches (Netherlands) and in some sort of cooperation with the Kuru Family of Organisations (KFO). From the KFO's 2004 Annual Report;

*The Naro Language Project is working under the Reformed Churches in Botswana and is a close neighbour to KFO in word and deed, although not officially a member of the Kuru Family of Organisations. It is our mission to translate the Bible for the Naro people and to create ways to help people to become literate in the mother tongue as a step to Setswana, English and other languages.*

Every month the Naro language team produces a magazine, the 'Naro Nxara' (the Naro Read) of which 400 copies are distributed. It has sections at different literacy levels and provides news, stories, puzzles, Bible verses, educational and health issues (AIDS is a terrible problem in Botswana; the second most affected nation in Africa). Further,

*'Daily Manna' is an A5 booklet that goes with us through the year and has a verse from the Bible for every day. It motivates (people to read it, I guess; JR) because the verses are short. We have a different theme every month which also means that a particular word is coming back in every verse, eg., love or peace. 200 are produced each month.*

Hendrik is involved with the translation project only in an advisory capacity. Otherwise he is fully committed to missionary work as a ministry of the D'Kar Reformed Church – producing sermons, Bible studies in their language, visiting them. From an email from Henk;

*My main objective is to spread the Word as wide as I can. The majority of Bushmen can't read or write. Now I am the process of producing tapes with the Gospel on them. I am translating a book named "Hundred Bible Studies" in their language. I am also in the process of translating Sunday School material and so forth with the aim of putting it on tape to distribute on the farms. I don't want to restrict myself only to D'Kar with its one thousand people. There are thousands living in small groups*

*on the widely spread farms. Thankfully, many of them have a tape recorder. The Bushman likes to buy a tape recorder when he gets money. So at the farthest outskirts you will find tape recorders and it can be a handy tool to spread the Gospel. My aim is to reach them as far as I can with our Church material on tape, to give it to them to listen to it regularly and then, from time to time because of the distance, visit them and test their progress. The aim of it is, of course, that they come to make a real profession of faith in Jesus Christ and be baptised and accepted as members of the Church.*

I asked Henk about the maturity of the

local Church members and he told me that while his elders are only partially literate, they really do run the Church in D'Kar independently, and have done so for many years, not in reliance upon him or the RCSA, although Henk himself is supported financially by various congregations of the RCSA.

This is certainly a work we could support with confidence. And if any young people are planning their big OE, why not stop off in Africa – or make it your main destination? Then go on to Botswana. Henk could use builders and any number of tradesmen. He dreams also of a Christian School in which the Bushmen children could be taught in their own language. At present they are taught in Tswana.

Ghanzi itself (you will also see it spelt



D'Kar village



Inside the Reformed Church of D'Kar

Ghantsi), with a population of 40,000, has about forty independent churches, many of which are quite syncretistic. Hendrick du Plessis tries to befriend the ministers of these churches and gently “teach them the way more perfectly.” There is a Bible School in Ghanzi, which Christians from anywhere may attend, at which Henk teaches systematic theology. If anyone felt called to such a ministry, it could be a very great blessing.

<sup>1</sup> I asked Hendrik about the names Bushmen and San. This is what he told me. “Collectively you can call them the San. Actually there are two main branches. The Khoe languages and the San Languages. That is where they derived the name Khoesan. The name San is actually unknown to them. We do not know where the name came from. There are approximately 17 Bushmen languages and 57 dialects amongst them. The dialects are related but some of the languages are very far from each other, like Chinese and English. The other languages are closer, like French and English.” (But one would hardly call those dialects! JR)

## MIF prayer notes

**Wally & Jeannette Hagoort** continue their ministry at Mapang Guest House and also with the Reformed Churches in PNG. Please pray for safety and good progress as building continues at the Leadership Training Centre. Pray for spiritual growth and maturity among those local believers who attend several Reformed fellowships which have developed over the past two years.

**Janice Reid** has been holding regular seminars with volunteers of the local station in Denpasar (Bali), as well as refocusing the station’s programmes to make them more effective in reaching out to the poor. She expects to attend an HCJB conference in

Singapore this month. Please pray for safe travel, and safety in her ministry.

**Jared Berends** expects, Lord willing, to leave Mongolia in June and then get married in July. He and his new wife plan to spend some time in New Zealand after that, but believe the Lord would have them continue missionary service in the future. Pray for Jared during this time of goodbyes and transition.

**Heidi Posthuma** was very sick back in April and spent some time in hospital, but she is much better now and returns to New Zealand, DV, this month. Please pray for her adjustment to New Zealand culture, and for her plans for the future.



*Telenews* is published to assist the members and congregations of the OPC in praying for their missionaries. From time to time, it may contain sensitive information, the broader electronic dissemination of which could put saints' lives at increased risk: please **DO NOT** post it on the Internet. Thank you.

### TELENEWS

Special Edition: May 4, 2006

**G**reetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whose resurrection we have been born again to a living hope. This is Mark Bube, reporting for this special edition of *Telenews* from the Committee on Foreign Missions of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

With sad hearts, we regret to inform you that the Rev. Matthew D. Baugh, OP missionary to Haiti, was killed in a motorcycle accident this morning. He died on the way to the hospital. His wife, Shannon, was with him in the transport.

No information is yet available regarding funeral arrangements, etc. Lord willing, Associate General Secretary the Rev. Douglas B. Clawson and his wife, Pat, together with Matt’s mother, are leaving for Haiti tonight, and should be in Port-au-Prince tomorrow morning.

Matt is survived by his wife, Shannon, and five children: Andrew (10), Laura (8), SaraGrace (6), Jessica (5), and Margaret (2). Please keep them much in your prayers.

*Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.”* John 11:25–26



THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN MISSIONS • P.O. Box P, Willow Grove, PA 19090 • 215/830-0900 • FAX 215/830-0350 • E-MAIL bube.1@opc.org

## Focus on home

# Gleanings from our bulletins...

### Andrew Reinders

#### Avondale

Today we congratulate Neil & Nikki Hunt with the baptism of their daughter, Mieke (which means, wanted child). It is certainly our prayer that they will be given the wisdom and strength to raise her, as they are doing with Brianna and Jamie, in the knowledge of Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

Sunday, March 26, the Christian Reformed Church of Blaxland voted with a view to extending a Call. On Monday evening, March 27, I received a telephone call from the Chairman of Session to say the congregation in Blaxland had voted in favour of extending a Call. Over the next few weeks Corrie and I will need to think and pray. We now have two Calls, one ongoing Call from the Reformed Church of Avondale, and one from the CRC at Blaxland. We would appreciate your prayers in relation to this Call.

An Invitation: Dear fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord. We would like to invite all members of your church to the 1-day conference “Being a Calvinist in Israel” held at Mangere Church Hall on Saturday 22

## Focus on home ... continued

April from 10.00am to 3.00pm (doors open at 9.30). Last year, the session of the Reformed Church of Hamilton wrote urging you to follow their example and support the only Reformed Congregation in Israel. We told you that this congregation was in urgent need of their own building and place of worship. We have been offered the opportunity to receive an Elder of this congregation, David Zadok, who is currently studying for the Ministry of the Word at Westminster Reformed Seminary in California. David will be visiting New Zealand and Australia in the last 2 weeks of April. He will be able to talk about the work of Grace and Truth, ministering to Jewish Christians and Arab Christians on the basis of the Reformed confessions as well as doing outreach work. He will also be able to speak on Christian Zionism and dispensational tendencies among mainstream evangelicals; and what the biblical view is towards modern Israel, evangelism among the Jews and how we can and should pray for "the peace of Jerusalem." David has served in the Israeli Defence Forces as a Major for 9 years and as a civil consultant to the military for 7 years. He is currently studying for the ministry of the Word at Westminster Seminary California, Escondido. He is married to Etti and has 2 young daughters. David has been involved with Grace and Truth just about since its beginning. David is an Israeli, a capable, warm speaker, committed to the Lord, and very personable. He is also intimately acquainted with the G&T building project, having served as Chairman of the Building Committee until he left for theological studies two years ago. If you are interested in the idea of promoting the needs of the House of Grace and Truth in New Zealand, David would be glad to come. For more information on Grace and Truth congregation please visit <http://www.GandT.org.il>. If you want to hear David Zadok in advance, go to <http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?speakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=David%5EZadok>, ><http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?speakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=David%5EZadok>. With brotherly greetings in Him, Jim Kloeg, Deacon, Reformed Church of Hamilton

### Bishopdale

Pastoral. It will be our great privilege to witness the professions of faith of Rochelle Schinkelshoek next week, Nicole Huls on 30 April, and Anita van Ameyde on 14 May during the morning services on those dates.

### Christchurch

Wedding Banns. Jason de Vries and Rachel Tepper have signified their desire to be united in marriage in this church on Saturday 1 April 2006. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place at 1.30 pm on that date.

90th birthday. On the 28th March, D.V. we will be celebrating our Mum & Oma's (Mrs Dirkze's) 90th birthday. We are very thankful for the godly example she has been to us & for her constant love & support. We would like to invite you to come & celebrate with us over a "cuppa & cake" on Tuesday 28th March between 10.00 am & 12.00 pm at the church hall. Please no presents, just your presence! The Dirkze family.

### Dovedale

Service Recording. All services and sermons at Dovedale are now recorded in a **digital format**. This represents a giant leap forward in the convenience and quality of the recordings, but does change the accessibility of material. The **services** are recorded to a hard drive DVD recorder, which means that they are digitally stored automatically for 3-4 months. If a particular service is requested as a copy, this can be produced on a DVD which will give you high quality sound and video. The **sermon** is now also recorded onto the MP3 format, which in simple terms is a compressed audio file format, which you can listen to on a home computer or ultimately on CD. It is envisaged that these sermons will be available in the future on the Reformed Churches website. All this is very exciting and secures another resource for those not able to attend worship, or wanting to utilise this material from further afield. If you have an interest to know more or are wanting some particular material, please speak with me. Richard Maffey.

### Dunedin

Pastoral Notes. We give thanks to God for the profession of faith of Joshua Geerlofs today. A warm welcome to family and friends worshipping with us on this joyful occasion.

Pastoral Notes. Our heartfelt sympathy is extended to the van Dyk family at the passing away of Mrs Hetty van Dyk on Thursday afternoon. Let us be thankful that Hetty's suffering is now over. By God's grace she has finished the race, kept the faith and her deep desire to be with the Lord in glory is now a reality.

### Foxton

Bible in schools:Volunteers are needed to help teach Bible in Schools at Shannon School on Thursday mornings from 9-9.30am. If you might be interested in doing this then please see Sylvia van Echten for more information.

### Hamilton

Pastoral. Arie Kranenburg died on Monday 3 April 2006. He was a foundation member of the Reformed Church of Hamilton. The Funeral Service will be held at St Andrews Presbyterian Church, Dee Street, Mt Maunganui on Monday 10 April at 10.30 am.

Session Notes 12 April 2006. Pastoral Assistant. Discussion took place on the idea of a Pastoral Assistant. The thought put forward was that a congregation of our size would benefit from a part time or full time person to assist the Minister in his duties. Job function could include visiting the elderly, youth work, evangelism and training of young men. It was decided that this was a worthwhile discussion, but that our first priority is to find and employ a Pastor.

### Hastings

From the Pastor. It was with joy that the session could make the decision to invite Renée Ford to publicly affirm her faith in the Lord Jesus and her desire to serve the Lord in her daily life and thus become a communicant member of our congregation. Lord willing, we will hear Renée do that next Sunday using our "Form for Profession of Faith." If anyone has any lawful objection please speak to your elder or the pastor.

From the Cunninghams. The warmest of Christian greetings to you and everyone in Hastings, Just to let you know, I've received and accepted a call to the Christian Reformed Church of Cobden. The position is 'Home Missionary Elder', which really just means not fulltime (4 days a week in this case), does not necessarily require an ordained man, and has a stronger focus on evangelism (if that's possible). Classis Maroondah have a meeting this month, and we hope that I'll do my final exam at the following meeting. I'm not sure whether they're 3- or 4-monthly. In His Name, Nigel.

### Hukanui

Dear Hukanui Church family. We have greatly appreciated your prayers at this sad time. Your words of comfort and acts of kindness have

been a blessing to us. We would especially like to thank all those who worked together so willingly to make the day of the funeral go smoothly. It was a huge effort by all those involved and we are sincerely grateful. We are blessed to be part of this caring church family. We are holding onto God's promises of care and everlasting love. Thank you for sharing with us in our time of loss. Family Voogt

Evangelism Opportunities: Henri Pennings and Evan Chatfield head out into the city every Friday night to hand out gospel tracts and talk to people about our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. If you have the opportunity, meet with them at 'Stripe and Moulding,' 509 Grey St, at 7:00 pm and join them in prayer for in this urgent task. They also need our ongoing prayers, so please pray for them that their work may bear fruit as the Holy Spirit changes hearts and lives.

### Palmerston North

Mainly Music Family Night. Come Along to Our Mainly Music Family Night on Saturday 8th April at 5:30pm at the church. We will be having a rainbow theme. The cost is \$5 per family; pizza and drinks will be provided. Please RSVP before Wednesday the 5th of April by writing your name on the list on the servery.

[www.χρηστιαν-απολογετιχσ.οργ/μχασ/](http://www.χρηστιαν-απολογετιχσ.οργ/μχασ/) Hi there. You may be interested in the Manawatu Christian Apologetics Society (MCAS), a new Palmerston North based group aimed at helping Christians to better understand and defend the Christian faith intellectually, through reasoned and informed discussion. Please see our website for more details and how you can become involved.

MCAS has the following goals:

- To help believers better understand Christian truth and how to present it as a reasonable and coherent worldview.
- To encourage the preparation of short or long talks, book reviews or other items with the goal of learning and presenting them to others. This will encourage reading and studying of material with a definite goal in mind.
- And many more...

What to do now: If you are interested in attending, please email us at: [manawatu@christian-apologetics.org](mailto:manawatu@christian-apologetics.org). The first meeting will be focussed on what we are trying to achieve, goals, the website, whats and whys of apologetics, your role, informal and formal meetings and much more. Subsequent four-weekly formal and informal meetings will be as described on our website. Do you know others who are interested?

It would be greatly appreciated if you could pass this information on to them. People of all ages are welcome. Many thanks!

...and there were five! Al and Sonja are delighted to announce the arrival of Jemima Faith, born Thursday 30<sup>th</sup>, weighing 7lb 9oz (3.45kg). God is Good!

You and Your Family are invited to an English Country Dance at Harmony House on Friday the 5th of May 2006 commencing at 7 pm. Entry: gold coin per Family. Last Year's English Country Dance was thoroughly enjoyed by all, so now we are having another one! We will be learning various dances like The Duke of Kent's Waltz, The Hole in the Wall, Barbarini's Tambourine And others you may have seen in movies like *Pride and Prejudice*. Please come in modest period costume (or Ladies in a long skirt and Gents in a shirt and tie) and bring a plate of finger food (drinks provided). Dance Etiquette: There is a possibility of there being more Ladies than there are Gents. If such is the case, the Ladies may not be able to dance every dance whereas Gents should be prepared to do a lot of dancing. Unless you are married or engaged we will be changing your partner between each dance, so be prepared to dance with everyone. Please take an invitation from the foyer.

### Pukekohe

Wedding invitation: Warrick and Lydia wish to extend a warm welcome to everyone to witness and celebrate their marriage at St Mary on the Hill (Anglican church), Pokeno. Unless there are lawful objections this will take place at 3pm on Saturday 29th April. Everyone is also invited to an after-dinner dance from 7:30 pm at the Pukekohe Cosmopolitan Club, Nelson St, Pukekohe.

Report of the session meeting (Tuesday 4 April 2006) Fred and Jolien Grosscurt met with the session for an interview regarding their desire to profess their faith. The session was very glad to allow them to do this. It will take place on Sunday 21st May in the morning service.

Wedding: It is with joy that we announce the wedding of Joshua Phillips and Marlies Grosscurt. If there are no lawful objections this will take place at 1:30pm on Saturday 1st April at St James Presbyterian Church, 30 West Street, Pukekohe.

### Silverstream

Session Notes. Profession of Faith: Session is pleased to announce that Andre Knol, having been examined by the Elders, will be professing his faith before the Lord and the

congregation during the morning service of April 9<sup>th</sup> (D.V.). If there are any objections, please make your concerns known to your elder as soon as possible.

Pastoral Notes. We continue to pray for the family of our departed brother, Job Van Maastricht. We thank the Lord that so many gathered during the week for Job's funeral, and that we could hear again of the Lord's comfort in life and death.

We give thanks for the safe arrival of Kristen Alice Holtslag, to Edwin and Evelyn. Both Evelyn and the baby are doing well. We pray also that the Lord may grant Edwin and Evelyn all they need to raise Kristen and the other children in the fear of the Lord.

### Wainuiomata

Profession of Faith. This morning we welcome Briony Keast and Jason De Vries into full communion with the people of God. We trust that as a congregation we will be a rich blessing to you and that you will also contribute to our needs as the body of Christ.

### Wellington

Wedding Banns. Jesse Dyson and Hannah Moore indicated their desire to be united in Christian marriage, and unless valid objections are raised their wedding will take place on Easter Saturday, 155<sup>th</sup> April, D.V.

Ladies' fellowship of Silverstream. The Ladies' Fellowship of Silverstream invite the ladies of the Wellington congregation to come and hear Gary Veenstra (from Wainuiomata) on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> of April at 7.45pm in the Silverstream church. Gary will be speaking on "Aging & Coping with Aged" and also "Handling the Grieving." Please RSVP to Marianne by 15th April so I can let them know how many are coming.

Ladies' Presbyterial in Hastings. On Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> March, 7 women from Wellington joined over 85 other women from the Presbyterial in Hastings for the Annual Ladies Presbyterial. The speaker was Rev. Gary Clark, from Caleb ministries in Auckland. He spoke on 'Relationships and How to Build Them.' Relationships are important because God made us relational beings. In fact our relationships affect all parts of our lives. Research shows that:

1. The strength of our social ties has an impact on our health.
2. 90% of people who fail in life, fail because they can't get on with other people.

We need relationships so that we can share our joys, sorrows and burdens. As Christians we also need to build effective relationships

to help us stand against the pressures of the world, to help us be more like Christ, and to fulfil the great commission found in Matthew 28.

Lasting and meaningful relationships are formed when we reveal ourselves to others and they reveal themselves to us. We need to take the first step, and listening is vital. When conversing with someone 7% of the information is conveyed by the words used, 38% is conveyed by the tone used and 55% is conveyed by body language.

To help us build relationships, he gave us some principles to use. When he presented these Gary used memory aids, so they are not as difficult to remember. We also had plenty of practice. Perhaps you could find one of the women who went to the Presbyterial and see if she can show them to you.

1. Be a good listener.
  - a. Look at the person.
  - b. Use visual approval such as eye contact and appropriate facial and physical expressions.
  - c. Use Verbal approval such as acknowledging sounds which show you are listening such as yes, ok, etc.
2. Ask suitable Questions.
  - a. Offer your name and ask them theirs.
  - b. Ask about where they live. e.g. Where do you live? Where do you come from?
  - c. Ask about what they do with their time. e.g. What do you do for work? What are your hobbies?
  - d. Ask about where they have travelled or where they would like to travel.
  - e. Ask about what sports and other interests they have.
  - f. Ask their opinions about things like current events.
3. Use conversation expanders. These are questions that require more than just a one-word answer.
4. As you get to know them, move into the ministry areas. This may happen on the first conversation, but probably not. People need to know we care, more than they need to know what we know.
  - a. Ask about any challenges, frustrations and concerns they have.
  - b. Ask them about their goals and dreams.
  - c. Ask them about their achievements.
  - d. Affirm them. If you think they are doing some thing well, congratulate them on their achievements.
  - e. Ask them how you can help them. Offer

to pray for them if it is appropriate.

It was stressed through the whole session that you need to take your cue from the person you are speaking to. If you broach a subject and they are obviously not very willing to talk about this, you know that it is time to change the subject; as it may be a sensitive area that they are not willing or ready to talk about. We need to be tactful and sensitive to other's needs.

Gary's talk was done in two sessions with lunch in between. The Hastings ladies did a wonderful job on the catering with wide variety of salads, fresh fruit, and quiches for lunch as well as lovely home baking for morning and afternoon tea. It was a thoroughly encouraging and enjoyable day and we would strongly encourage all ladies to attend next year in Masterton. Don't let "It's not really my thing" be your excuse: you may be surprised, as some of the ladies who went were!

Brooklyn Anzac Parade. The Cadets and Calvinettes invite you to join them in the Annual Brooklyn Anzac Parade. Our pastor will be giving the message for this year's ceremony. Cadets and Calvinettes are to wear full uniform. We will meet at the Brooklyn Fire Station at 9.30am on the 25<sup>th</sup> April. See you there.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

*Dear Editor,*

I would like to express my appreciation for the insightful article in *Faith in Focus* (March 2006) by Sally Davey on 'The Three Wives of William Carey,' especially in regard to Dorothy Carey. Few ministers' wives (and I have been one for 30 years) could read this without feeling considerable empathy for this woman.

A couple of points that could be added:

1. Dorothy Carey was born about 1756 when the Industrial Revolution, bringing machinery, trains for travel and distribution of newspapers etc had barely started. As was pointed out, it was a simple, peasant, rural world.
2. In England in 1861, life expectancy at birth was 41. Consequently when Mrs Carey went to India in 1793 at the age of 37, she was not a young woman, full of the zeal and energy of youth: she was already in late middle age. It is little wonder that she was unable to adapt.

She must have been traumatised by the experiences, by the pressure from her husband and others, and the high expectations placed upon her by well-meaning Christians. It is little wonder that she had a breakdown.

There is no doubt that being taken out of the comfort zone can be a means of developing gifts and a deep reliance on the Lord, but too much of that can bring tragedy, as in this case.

Is this simply an interesting story from the past, or does it have lessons to teach us today? I think the latter.

When a man applies to be received as a student for the ministry/mission field, does the relevant committee meet with his wife to assess her attitudes and life skills? If not, why not?

If an applicant for the ministry/mission field is obviously very gifted, but there are areas of concern with him or his wife, what is the attitude towards him? Some of the comments I have heard (not in the PCEA) about such men are as follows:

"If he feels he is called, who are we to say he is not?"

"The college will sort him out."

"The Lord does not call without equipping, so if he is called, then at some stage the Lord will also equip him."

"If he is called to a particular task and does not go, then the task will not be done as he is the one appointed to this by the Lord."

Much wisdom is needed by our church office-bearers in handling these situations.

Thank you again for a thought-provoking article.

*Yours sincerely,*

Anna F. Ward  
26 Roxburgh Road,  
Wantirna, 3152 Australia

*Dear Sir,*

I appreciated my brother Berwyn's article on smacking in the Feb issue, but I was somewhat appalled at the reply letter by H. Westfold from Wellington in the latest issue. Something of a rant the whole way through, but then the ending!

"With kids who don't understand any other language, I've long said, as a last resort, 'Tan their arses!'"

First of all, I'm no language sissy, but "arses" is rather crude language in our for-all-ages denominational magazine. (Dotting out "arses" to "a...s" doesn't change the meaning or connotation—people still read

the word in their head.) Perhaps an “Editor’s reply” would have been appropriate at this point?

But more importantly, this is exactly the kind of tone that makes the unbelieving world so anti-Christian, and exactly the kind of thing the media wants to hear from us “nutcase Christians who love to hit their kids.”

Furthermore, as Christians, smacking is not for “kids who don’t understand any other language” or for a “last resort”, but it is a careful, loving, godly method of discipline. To use it as a last resort is brutal and worldly. It leads people (our next-door neighbour does this very thing) to never smack, except when they’ve finally had enough and they

lash out in anger—”as a last resort”. This is far from a considered, Christian response. Part of the reason I’m writing this email is because Mr Westfold implies he’s on the same page as the original article. The original was quite balanced; the “Tan their arses!” approach is definitely not.

**Ben Hoyt**

## Report on 35th Annual Executive Meeting of Cadets and Calvinettes

On Friday, 24 March 2006 counsellors from most of the Clubs and the Board met at Camp Adair, Hunua, South Auckland for the annual executive and training weekend. Due to some hiccups at Auckland and Wellington Airports some members did not arrive until early the next morning.

The meeting was held in good harmony with a great amount of sharing between the Clubs. Each Club gave a report about their Clubs and also shared some ideas about fundraising for the mission badge, national camps etc. The mission badge for 2007 was voted on and the majority of the meeting supported The Henry Murray School for the Deaf in Zimbabwe. The Wellington Board was also thanked for their service and the Board has now moved down to Christchurch. The Cadet and Calvinette Movement in New Zealand is in good heart and thanks was given to our Lord and Saviour for provid-



*Blind guides leading the blind.*



*Cadet and Calvinette Clubs met with the Board at Camp Adair for their annual Executive meeting.*

ing counsellors and the children.

The afternoon saw the Mangere and Pukekohe Clubs teaching us some new games to take back to the Clubs and this proved to be a fun time for all those who participated. We were required to become two flocks of sheep, blindfolded and led by a shepherd's whistle across the field for one of the games. This was really fun to watch. We had our annual soccer game and team number 2 won. After dinner we had a talk by Mr Petrusma who

came over especially from Australia to give us more information on the New Life Orphanage in Myanmar which is our mission badge for this year. We were all greatly encouraged by him and the talk was most informative. Rev Noppers then gave a short devotion and there was opportunity for fellowship.

On Sunday morning we attended the Mangere Reformed Church service and a lovely lunch was provided by the ladies of Mangere and Pukekohe. Many thanks for all

their hard work.

We praise and thank God for this opportunity to get together. A big thankyou to the Mangere and Pukekohe Clubs for a well organised weekend. The food was great and appreciated by everyone. Thankyou to all the local churches for supporting the Movement and we hope and pray that it may continue to go from strength to strength.

**Yvonne Walraven**

## Walkin' the Walk RCNZ Family Camp 05-06

*Hi there!*

We're heading into winter which means Family Camp is now long gone, so high time to write a report and let you all know what happened.

The 2005/06 RCNZ Family Camp started on Boxing Day last year and finished on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January. We had 164 campers this time with numbers slightly down, but then the National Cadet and Calvinette Camp was on at the same time in Nelson (which I hear was a great success), and of course the dreaded fees had gone up.

Again, we had two of our ministers lead us the in the studies. Rev. Leo de Vos led the morning studies, "Setting Your Affections Above," using Colossians 3:1-4 as the basis:

*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

Leo then tied these four verses into what followed in the rest of chapter 3, focussing on Christ, marriage and family life, which was followed by interesting discussion in our smaller study groups and the 'summing up' back in the Chapel.

Our evening devotions, entitled "A walk through Philippians," were led by Rev. Ralph Adams. Ralph encouraged us all to live by the example of our Lord Jesus Christ in all aspects of our lives.

Henk Heersping and his team did a fantastic job in the kitchen keeping the hungry

volleyballers and soccer players going, so we were blessed with our daily food to feed the body and also with much spiritual food to feed the soul.

The Kids' Club devotions were run by Derek and Rosalind Cressy, who did a fantastic job teaching our little ones how to have Christ-like behaviour within the home and among friends. Role playing was used to emphasise points so that the kids remember how to respect others and their property, and teaching the kids about honesty, with lots of Bible stories, singing and fun.

After their morning tea the Kids' Club continued with Hetty van der Werff and her capable team of helpers, teaching the craft work of their choice—and "choice" it was, with kids making toy fire trucks to fish mobiles, planes to 3D pictures. Paint, glue

and fuzzy things everywhere!

The annual Talent Quest showed the immense breadth of talent our denomination has; from Freddie Minnee running rings around four grown men, to Kevin Durant eating whatever the youth decided to feed him, to jokes from John Leenders keeping us on the edge of our seats. The Kids' Club sang beautifully for us all, followed by a small children's choir. There were violins, flutes, and trumpets. All in all it was a good night's entertainment, finished off nicely with an oliebol or two.

We also managed to raise enough funds to buy **four** rickshaws for the work of Rickshaws for India: check out [www.thehungrypeople.org](http://www.thehungrypeople.org) for more info on this good work.

This year a website has been set up for the past and upcoming family camps, so go



and have a look at [www.rcnzfamilycamp.org](http://www.rcnzfamilycamp.org) If you have any old pictures or stories of past camps please send them through: it would be great to get some historic info on the site for all to see.

North Islanders beware! I hear that at the upcoming camp a contingent from Christchurch will join us. Will they take the volleyball cup off Palmerston North (the cup holders) a second time? Naaaah!

Have I talked it up enough? Are you coming this December? Of course you are! The RCNZ has some 3500 members. I encourage you all to come and join us at Finlay Park in December 2006. Let's see if a tenth of our denomination (350) can attend, or maybe even get to the glory days when over 500 campers came for fun, fellowship with the saints and best of all, a time of spiritual growth!

So on that final note, I now hand over the reins to the Auckland Presbytery Family Camp team to start making preparations.

For the Committee, **Al van Seventer**

