

faith in **focus**

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of New Zealand

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“These all look to
you to give them
their food at the
proper time.”

Psalm 104:27

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Editorial

There is an old story about a king who wanted to build a big palace and all his subjects loved him so much that each wanted to help. The cost was very great, and all who had money gave whatever they could, from the thousands of dollars of the very rich to the few cents of the poor. But money was not enough.

So all the men and the boys gave their labour for nothing. The craftsmen used their skills, and the others did the heavy work of the labourers, preparing the foundations and carrying all the materials to the site of the new palace.

The roof of the palace was to be built on top of great wooden pillars and so great trees were cut down, trimmed, then rolled, and pushed to their correct position. The difficulty was to erect these massive pillars. There was no rope big enough or strong enough to do the job.

This is where the women and girls came in. They wanted to help but they had no money, nor did they have the strength to do work like the men and the boys. But they all had long hair. So they cut their hair; the grey hair of the old ladies; the long thick tresses of the other women; and the golden curls of the girls. Off came their hair and it was twined into a thick rope that could be stretched for a hundred metres. With this the heavy pillars were lifted into position and so the palace could be built.

This pictures what the church is meant to be. Could a single hair or one labourer have done it? It was when all the hair was joined together and the men and the boys worked together that the palace was begun. As individuals there may not seem much we can do, but when we do give – in all the ways we can give – then our being together in Jesus' Name means we can do great things.

*"All the believers were together
and had everything in common."*

Acts 2:44

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

The Lord's at work!

Understanding Pentecost properly

Sjirk Bajema

What an event Pentecost must have been! Imagine having the whole church disturbed by Christ's death and resurrection, then moved to the events we read of in Acts 2. It would surely have been something special to be a part of!

But what actually did happen? And why isn't it happening now? Or is it?

Ah, we have that question thrown at us time and time again! For there are many churches – churches that use the name Pentecost in their title – who are convinced that what happened that day is, or should be, still happening. And we all know Christians of that persuasion, don't we?

I remember arriving at the bus stop in Geelong, where I was about to start my theological studies. A local man kindly gave me a lift. A very talkative chap, he shared his testimony how he had come from being a member of the Salvation Army to an ardent Pentecostal. He was a strong proponent of all the revelatory gifts being found and used in the modern church. When he found out that I was going to study at the Reformed Theological College, his own beliefs were revealed when he exclaimed, 'You shouldn't be reformed – you should be revived!'

Notice what they do? They stir us up: get us thinking that we're missing out on something. Something that some of them boldly say has been missing from the Church for nearly two thousand years!

Well, let's not leave it up in the air. Let's not be left thinking that we are somehow lacking. Rather, let's turn to God's Word itself.

And which text could better open up this whole issue than Acts 2:4? And in looking at this verse, we note three things that comprehensively answer the Pentecostal view. Three things that also clearly show the Lord is at work – and that's what matters, isn't it?

As we look at the three aspects, we'll use the recurring picture of a heart. And I choose a heart, in the first place, because of what it is: the very centre of your being. Around it everything revolves and depends. So the heart is what really matters. And on Pentecost Day, the early New Testament Church received their heart! This is what we read about that day: 'All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4).'

The Lord's work is for the whole church

The key word here is 'all.' All, everybody! What Luke describes here is something so big that everyone in the Church receives it. No distinctions! No different levels! Indeed, if there had been differences, Luke would have told us. He has no hesitation doing it elsewhere!

So why not here? If the Pentecostal belief that only some Christians receive the Spirit is true and so only some are able to do these amazing things, then why the whole church here?

And why the double emphasis? The repetition of 'all' as in verse 1, which tells us that they were all together. That's an important consideration. For what the Lord gave on Pentecost Day was to be granted to the whole Church! The text doesn't speak about an individual's walk with his or her Saviour and Lord. There's no mention here about a two-stage Christianity, with only the holier ones being zapped with the Spirit. This is something much bigger. Here is the divine plan at work for us all!

A bit of background helps us here. What day did this happen? Was it when enough people had prayed hard enough? Was it then because some of them had been to 'tongue-speaking training classes'? It was none of these reasons, actually. This happened dur-

ing the Jewish 'Feast of the Weeks', exactly fifty days after the Resurrection, and ten days after the Ascension.

That's not an incidental timing. Those two events – the Resurrection and the Ascension – were both vitally important for the whole Church. Then – and ever since! No one argues with that, because without the Resurrection and the Ascension our faith has no basis.

Then the gift of the Holy Spirit is certainly not a matter of what level we stand within in the church: it's not whether we're carnal Christians or second-blessing believers! For without these two aspects of our Lord's exaltation, we have no Church! Pentecost is no different. It cannot be seen apart from God's work in Jesus, for every part of His Church.

Take, for example, John 16:12-14. Here the substance of who our Lord is becomes tied in with the heart of His people. '*I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He won't speak on his own; he'll only speak what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.*'

Our Lord is going. But He won't leave us! I mean, how could He? What then would be the use of all His humiliation and exaltation?



How can a seed bear fruit unless it is planted? Or can a body with no heart ever survive, unless it has a transplant? We were dead! Let's understand that fact very clearly. Before the face of Almighty God we deserved only physical and spiritual death. Yet Jesus died instead, so that we can live! And what a life He gives!

For this is no mere man, with man's limitations. The same Word which brought creation into being can certainly also make our hearts spiritually alive!

And by no small measure, either. In fact, the outpouring of the Spirit on the Church provides us with something far greater even than the bodily presence of Jesus Christ while He lived as one of us!

Some have found it a pity that Jesus was murdered while still quite young. They feel that since He still had so much potential, it was a devastating tragedy when He died. Such thinking is a terrible trap! He had fulfilled His Father's will perfectly. So what happened to Him was exactly what was planned! The heart of God – the Holy Spirit – was placed within. In the words of one commentator, *'the work of Christ in its entirety may be said to consist in securing and communicating to the church at Pentecost the gift of the Holy Spirit.'*

This can be compared with baptism, which symbolises we are washed clean in God's sight. As water baptism shows how we are in our souls with the Lord, so too the New Testament Church received its special sign to show what was happening within.

The Lord symbolises His work through speaking in tongues

We come to our second point. Speaking in tongues is the sign which shows us that this is indeed a work of the Lord. As we are baptised just once, so also this new and last age of the Church was begun with a unique sign to display what is spiritually true!

Let's pick up that picture of the heart. For we move now to see how the Body, with its heart beating ever so strongly within, affirms its truth. Think about it. How do you know if someone's heart is alive? How can you judge if there really is anything beating away underneath? Why – you can see it on the outside! The skin looks healthy, the eyes are clear. Yet, above all, that person is alive!

You see living people all the time. They're moving about. They're talking with others. They're writing with their hands. They're doing lots of other things! At Pentecost the Lord breathed His life into the Church. This was the point at which He fulfilled what had been spoken about Christ's com-

ing. Jeremiah 31 verse 33 says, *'This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it in their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.'*

And Joel showed the uniqueness of what would happen when he declared in chapter 2 verse 28, *'And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.'*

These prophecies all looked forward. And, now, they were fulfilled! As Acts 2:4 says of the Church at Pentecost, *'All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues....'* The Lord had been true to His word! No longer would He be found only in a physical tent or temple. Now He lives in the heart of His people. And unbelieving Israel would either turn and see, or be condemned in sin.

Looking even further back, we see that what happened at the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 was turned right around. Then the people's rebellion against God was punished with the confusion of different languages. Now, however, all the peoples of the world, represented by those at Pentecost, transcend the language barrier as they come together in the Lord. Later the apostle Paul refers to this. In his first letter to the Corinthians he writes, *'In the Law it is written: 'Through men of strange tongues and through the lip of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me,' says the Lord. Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers....'* (1 Cor.14:21f.)

What we have is no new permanent gift that Christians have to experience, or else doubt their standing with God. Nor even is it an added extra with which we can 'enhance' our worship of the Lord.

Let's consider the whole context of Acts 2. When is it that the entire Church is altogether in the one place, as verse 1 states? Where are the reported violent winds coming from heaven that fill modern churches today, as verse 2 says? And what about those pieces of flame that came upon each member of the whole Church at that time?

But let's not think either that the real meaning behind Pentecost isn't shown today! As the truth behind baptism isn't shown only when the water is sprinkled upon the head, but actually continues to bless us always in the faith, so, too, the Spirit Who brings the sign of speaking in tongues still moves mightily!

The Lord's work continues with His Spirit's enabling

You see, that heart which is within, and which has shown itself by what has happened on the outside, keeps going within the Body as a whole. This is its strength.

So the final phrase of Acts 2:4 says in its final phrase is still very much with us today. When it says, *'as the Spirit enabled them,'* it's clear God's working through His Church has changed in a way which means it cannot ever go back to what it was before.

Throughout the two thousand years of church history since, this is made clear. Our King – the Head of the Body – is ruling over us and in us. This is His Spirit that He sent. And it's His Word – the testimony of the Spirit – through which He makes us His subjects and rules over us.

In doing this, He makes use of people. That's the point behind Pentecost! Each one of us is now a prophet, a priest, and a king! What a tragedy that there are those who would deny the rights of son-ship to genuine children of God. They would say there is yet another step. As if the adoption itself were not enough! Romans 8:9 is quite clear that all those believing in Christ have His Spirit. We have to fight that! We have to declare that it's what God has done for you in His Son, Jesus Christ, once and for all!

You see, there has always been the temptation for the Church to hand over things to a certain few. Whether it's because of power or talent, throughout history we find times when many in congregations have become mere spectators. And they're told that's all they can be! What a terrible pity. Because that denies what the Lord did at Pentecost. His Spirit is not held back from any of His people. The continuing value of the heart lies in its power to beat within a body that is working in all its parts! This is the joy of Pentecost. Not that we have anything on our own, but that God gave us everything. And what a gift it is!

When you've been given a present, do you leave it in its wrapping? Would you say to your family and your friends, 'I don't want to open it. I don't want to see what's inside!'

You know, I've yet to see a boy or girl do that! In fact, when I've seen boys and girls get presents, often Mum can forget about using that wrapping paper again. Because it's ripped off! The kids can't wait to see what is inside! That's how it should be spiritually. This is what the apostle Paul pleads for in Galatians chapter 5. There he writes, *'So I say, live by the Spirit, and you won't gratify the desires of the sinful nature (v.16).'* And further on he says, *'Since we*

live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (v25).'

That heart which is inside is shown outside. But not just the once, as a special sign. It works throughout the entire body. Just as our human hearts cannot continue unless the body works as it should. We cannot cut and divide the Lord's work. United it stands – divided it most certainly falls! That's as true for the Church as it is for each one

of us. For while that heartbeat of faith is pumping, you cannot die. You're too busy living and growing!

So what we have with Pentecost is both a completion and a beginning. A completion because this is a decisive part of Christ's work. It cannot be repeated.

And yet it's also a beginning, because from this point on the Church can only grow to become more like what her Lord has so

wonderfully planned for her. For we are what we are by God's marvellous grace. Every one of us is precious in His sight. And every one is absolutely essential for working out His plan! Whether he be tinker, tailor, soldier, or sailor.

Dear Christian friend, at Pentecost you were there. You're in God's big picture. He has drawn you in through His Son!

World in focus

Kaduna, Nigeria

Muslim students have set fire twice to a high school chapel here since it was rebuilt last August, after Islamists burned it down three years ago. In January, Islamic students at Government Science Secondary School in Kufena, in the Wusasa area of Zaria in the northern state of Kaduna, set fire to the Chapel of Adonai, which was rebuilt last year with services restored in September. The most recent arson attempt, as well as one in December 2006, failed when Christian staff members and students at the high school put out the fires. Pastor Samuel Nuhu, a teacher at the school, told Compass that in 2004 Muslim students burned down the chapel and attacked Christian students, many of whom had to be hospitalised. Previous to the most recent arson attempt, two letters were dropped into the chapel warning Christian students and staff members of an impending attack unless they left the school. The letter included derogatory comments about Jesus.

Compass Direct News, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799-7250

Maharashtra, India

A mob of Hindu extremists from the *Bajrang Dal* on 3 March beat two Christians who were distributing tracts at the Kandivli railway station in suburban Mumbai, in Maharashtra state. Pastor Nigel Pereira of Harvest of Grace Church told Compass that Bobby D'Souza, 24, and Sandip Mohite, 21, were distributing Christian literature when a group of 55 to 60 people snatched the leaflets from their hands and began hitting and kicking them. The extremists dragged the two Christians to the Kandivli police station, beating them en route, and filed a complaint against them alleging

forcible conversion and denigration of other religions. D'Souza and Mohite were later taken to Bhagwati Hospital for treatment. Abraham Mathai, vice-chairman of the state Minority Commission, told Compass that Pastor Pereira planned to file a complaint against the *Bajrang Dal* after receiving a medical report.

Compass Direct News, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799-7250

Madhya Pradesh, India

About 15 Hindu extremists on March 2 attacked a Christian meeting in the Patakhera area of Madhya Pradesh state's Betul district, vandalising and looting the facility. The Christian Legal Association (CLA) reported that the extremists stormed the meeting of the independent church led by the Rev. Avinash Kanchan and started beating the believers, twenty-five women and five men. They slapped Pastor Kanchan, beat him with shoes and manhandled some others, though no one received serious injury. The attackers threatened the Christians, damaged a motorcycle belonging to Pastor Kanchan and took away his mobile phone, watch and Bible. Kanchan reported the incident to the Patakhera police, but when a CLA representative spoke to the police, an officer claimed no one had filed a complaint.

Compass Direct News, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799-7250

Orissa, India

A mob of about 400 people stirred up by Hindu extremists belonging to the *Bajrang Dal* on 28 Feb. ransacked a Gospel for Asia Bible school in the village of Kutabaga, in the Jharsuguda district of Orissa state, attacking students and staff members. Five persons were hospitalised from injuries

in the attack, with one student in critical condition. The mob, armed with sticks, axes and swords, damaged Believers Church and cut electric wires on the campus, which includes the 240-student Believers Church Bible College and office buildings. The roofs of some buildings were damaged. Many extremists left the campus after authorities arrived, but soon another group of Hindu extremists from the *Sangh Parivar*, a loose association of Hindu militant groups, came and began shouting the slogans, 'Hail Lord Rama,' and 'Hail Lord Bajrangbali.' At press time, no arrests had been made.

Compass Direct News, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799-7250

Maharashtra, India

A Hindu mother who asked a missionary to help heal her mentally handicapped daughter has pressed charges of 'forcible conversion' against him after his prayers failed to improve the child's condition. Lakshmi Shetty, a widow, requested an independent church leader identified only as Pastor Fernandez to cure her daughter. She had begun attending Sunday worship at the pastor's house in Badlapur, said Dr Sajan K. George, national president of the Global Council of Indian Christians. On 26 February, under pressure from others, George said, she filed a complaint against Pastor Fernandez in Badlapur, a suburb off Mumbai, for allegedly coercing her to become a Christian. 'Pastor Fernandez is innocent and the charges are baseless,' George said. 'The pastor now lives in fear of being arrested.'

Compass Direct News, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799-7250

Chhattisgarh, India

A mob of around 80 Hindu extremists accused a pastor of forcible conversion,

manhandled him and forced him to leave his home after issuing a death threat on 25 February in Chhattisgarh state's Rajnandgaon district. Dr. Sajan K. George, national president of the Global Council of Indian Christians, said extremists allegedly belonging to the *Bajrang Dal*, youth wing of the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* or World Hindu Council, surrounded the house of India Mission Church Pastor T.N. Jose in Surgi village at about 7 p.m. on 25 February. They asked him to move out of the village by the following day, warning that otherwise they would cut him to pieces. The extremists forced him to sign a statement that he had come to the village to convert people to Christianity and that he was leaving on his own will. Fearing for his life, Pastor Jose moved to his relative's house in a nearby town. The following day, however, the extremists kidnapped his sister, who runs a medical clinic in Surgi village, and locked her in a room. They said they would not release her until they found out where the pastor was hiding, but she was released the same evening. Local Christians have informed the police and demanded protection for the pastor and his family.

Compass Direct News, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799-7250

Maharashtra, India

A mob armed with sticks beat five Deliver Church Bible College students on 19 February in Kolshe, near Panvel in Maharashtra state. From fifteen to twenty youths used the sticks and their fists to beat Elisha Amolik, 22, Suresh Sonu Masiha, 21, Mishak Kiran Samuel, 20, Bramhanand Pradhan, 22 and Kartik Ekka, 20, who were distributing tracts on the Mumbai Goa highway at Panvel. Pradhan and Ekka sustained severe head injuries, and the other students suffered internal injuries. Doctors at Nagar Palika Hospital refused to treat them without the previous filing of a police complaint, so the students received treatment at a private hospital in Panvel. The students reportedly had prior permission to distribute the literature. Abraham Mathai, vice chairman of the Maharashtra State Minority Commission, told Compass the Hindu extremists had the tacit support of the police.

Compass Direct News, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799-7250

Karnataka, India

Making accusations of 'forcible conversion,' Hindu extremists beat pastors and other believers and vandalised a prayer

hall on 17 February in the Hiriyur area of Karnataka state's Chitradurga district. Dr Sajan K. George, national president of the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC), said the attack took place at a two-day meeting in a prayer hall in Harishchandra Ghat. The attackers, allegedly belonging to the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (World Hindu Council or VHP) and its youth wing *Bajrang Dal*, assaulted pastor Amul Raj, two guest speakers identified only as Pastor Alanghamani and Pastor Ravi, another guest identified as Sridhar and other Christians. No one was injured in the attack, but 'Pastor Raj is still receiving threats on the phone,' George said. He added that GCIC submitted a memorandum to the National Commission for Minorities on 1 March stating that at least 28 anti-Christian attacks took place in the state in 2006.

Compass Direct News, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799-7250

North Korea

The reclusive communist nation of North Korea tops the list for persecution for the fifth year in a row, followed by Saudi Arabia, Iran, Somalia and Maldives. The five worst countries are unchanged from last year's World Watch List. Yemen (No. 8 last year), Bhutan (No. 6 last year), Vietnam (No. 7 last year), Laos (same) and Afghanistan (No. 11 last year) hold spots 6-10. Media attention was focused on North Korea in 2006, but nothing has changed for the North Korean people. The North Korean regime launched missiles and tested nuclear weapons in 2006, which meant increased pressure for Christians. Open Doors uncovered information which indicates that more Christians were arrested in 2006 than in 2005. Between 50,000 and 70,000 Christians are currently suffering in prison camps. Many of them are tortured. Others are still putting their lives at risk by trying to flee to China.

Open Doors, PO Box 27001, Santa Ana, CA 92799

Pennsylvania, USA

The Abington School District (in Philadelphia) – ironically the same school district that was a party in the 1963 Supreme Court decision, *Abington Township v. Schempp* which invalidated any school-sponsored devotional study of the Bible in public schools – didn't stop having a district-wide celebration of Halloween. Officials at one school, Willow Hill Elementary, required that students wear a costume at school on Halloween if they wanted to

participate in the festivities. For one ten-year-old, that created a quandary. He and his mother weren't comfortable promoting Halloween and its pagan elements, but he didn't want to be sequestered from the event. So, instead of dressing up like a devil or a witch, like other students did, he chose to come dressed as Jesus. He met the requirement of dressing up in a costume, while not promoting beliefs contrary to his faith. He quickly learned that while devils, witches, and skeletons dripping blood (costumes worn by other students) were OK, the Lord was not to be 'tolerated.' The student was told that his costume violated the school's unwritten 'religion' policy. School officials told his mother that the costume would be OK if he removed his crown of thorns and didn't identify himself as Jesus, but as a Roman emperor instead (and perhaps missing the irony that the Romans were persecutors of Christians and that crucifixion was the emperor's ultimate method of execution!). ADF legal counsel Matt Bowman has filed a complaint in U.S. District Court, alleging that the school district engaged in 'view-point discrimination' when it censored the young man's costume.

Alliance Defense Fund, 15333 N. Pima Road Suite 165, Scottsdale, AZ 85260 (480)444-0020

World estimates of persecution

An estimated 200 million Christians worldwide suffer interrogation, arrest and even death for their faith in Christ, with another 200 to 400 million facing discrimination and alienation. Open Doors supports and strengthens believers in the world's most difficult areas through Bible and Christian literature distribution, leadership training and assistance, Christian community development, prayer, and presence ministry and advocacy on behalf of suffering believers.

Open Doors, PO Box 27001, Santa Ana, CA 92799

Eritrean oppression expands

In May 2002 some 20,000 Protestant Christians found themselves in churches that had become illegal when the Eritrean government banned all Christian churches other than the Eritrean Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Mekane Yesus (Evangelical Lutheran) denominations. Initially the Orthodox Church supported the repression. However, during 2004, youths and then priests from the Orthodox Church's Medhane Alem renewal movement started to get arrested. The Patriarch protested, so the government

intensified its attacks on the Orthodox Church.

In August 2005, to counter the Orthodox Church's growing opposition, the Eritrean government deposed Patriarch Abune Antonios and put him under house arrest. To get more control over the church, the government appointed Yeftehe Dimetros as church administrator. On 5 December 2006, it then ruled that all tithes collected through the Orthodox Church be deposited in a government account from which it would control church finances and pay priests. The government will also set a quota for priests and any 'extra' priests are to present themselves for military service.

World Evangelical Alliance, 529 14th Street NW, Suite 420, Washington, DC 20045 (415) 568-0344

PC(USA) plans to sue for Tulsa property

Conceding that efforts to reconcile with its second-largest congregation have failed, Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery on March 6 declared Kirk of the Hills Presbyterian Church to be in schism. The declaration came in response to a report from an administrative commission that was appointed by the presbytery in September

2006, shortly after the congregation voted to follow the lead of its session and pastors and affiliate with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC).

In August, Kirk of the Hills pastor Thomas W. Gray explained on his blog why the congregation was leaving: 'We at the Kirk are holding to what Scripture clearly teaches,' he said. 'The PCUSA has left this critical foundation. We, therefore, no longer recognize the authority of the PC(USA) over any congregation that chooses to hold to the traditional authority of Scripture, as once held by the PC(USA).'

Two weeks before the congregation's 30 August vote to 'disaffiliate' from the PC(USA), Gray and the church's associate pastor, the Rev. Roger Wayne Hardy, renounced the jurisdiction of the PC(USA) and sought reception by the EPC.

At that time, the Kirk session also dissolved the congregation's existing corporation and reincorporated as an independent corporation. The session, acting as the corporation board, then hired Gray and Hardy as pastors and filed suit in civil court to gain ownership of the church's property.

The presbytery, again on the recommen-

dation of its administrative commission, authorised its trustees to sue in the civil courts for ownership of Kirk of the Hills property.

Presbyterian Church (USA), 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202 (888) 728-7228

Church shopping could become normative

Go to church and mail a letter, pick up your dry cleaning and groceries? For hundreds of village post offices in Great Britain threatened with closure, it could be an answer to their prayers. Britain's Sunday Telegraph newspaper reports the Church of England is soon to issue guidelines to parishes throughout the United Kingdom recommending that churches across the country be used as post offices.

Officials will meet with the Post Office's rural division this week to discuss plans in which stamps could be issued from vestries and pensions out of bell towers. The newspaper says the proposed scheme may be extended to include other local services, such as dry cleaners and grocers, to churches that face closure, particularly in rural areas. The Government's consultation period on the future of the post office

 	
<h1>preachingthekingdom</h1>	
<p>Gospel preachers don't only preach the good news of individual salvation</p> <p>They preach the good news of the Kingdom</p> <p><i>This year's conference will explore the rich themes of the Kingdom and will show preachers how they can strengthen their ministry of the Word by preaching the Kingdom.</i></p> <p><i>When Jesus first came his Kingdom came in power, when he comes again, his Kingdom will come in glory</i></p>	<p>Thurs 27 & Fri 28 September</p> <p>Reformed Theological College</p> <p>125 Pigdons Road Waurnd Ponds Victoria 3216</p> <p>T: 03 5244 2955 E: admin@rtc.vic.edu.au</p>
<p>Reformed Theological College Preaching Workshop 2007</p>	

network, was launched after it announced in December that 2,500 premises could shut.

'The guidelines are expected to say that, if churches want to provide local services that will require alterations to the fabric of the building, they must get permission from the diocesan consistory, the church court,' the Sunday Telegraph reported.

The Anglican Communion Office, St Andrew's House, 16 Tavistock Crescent London, England W11 1AP

Missionaries return to Guinea

Missionaries with Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) returned to Guinea on 7 March after evacuating the country last month due to violent strikes and political turmoil. Calvin and Jamie Hofland and Jotham and Marie Ippel arrived in the Guinean city of Labe after a 14-hour drive from Kedougou, Senegal, where they had been since they evacuated on 20 February. Their colleagues Brenda Vander Schuur, Dave Campbell and Bill Steele remain in the nearby country of Gambia and are scheduled to return next week. Other missionaries assigned to Guinea, John and Ann Span, have been temporarily relocated to Bamako, Mali to provide more stable schooling for their sons.

Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave., SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560 (616) 241-1691

Dr. Herman Ridderbos

Rev. Dr Herman Ridderbos, one of the foremost developers of the redemptive-historical approach to Biblical theology, a hallmark of Westminster Theological Seminary, died 8 March, having celebrated his 98th birthday on 13 March. Among his more widely distributed writings were 'Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures,' 'Paul and Jesus,' and 'Paul: An Outline of His Theology.' Reportedly Ned Stonehouse once said this of Ridderbos, 'Wherever the Dutch language is read Professor Herman Ridderbos is recognized as an outstanding New Testament scholar and theologian.'

Christian Observer, 9400 Fairview Avenue, Manassas, Virginia 20110

Reconversion movement expands in India

Hindu extremists have extended to the northern state of Himachal Pradesh a movement to bring Christian converts back to the Hindu fold through dubious "reconversion" events. In what can be seen as the beginning of the movement in Himachal Pradesh, a Hindu group on 28 February

organised a religious ritual to reconvert 151 Dalit Christians in the Arya Samaj temple in Shimla, the state capital, according to the 11 March issue of a publication that serves as the mouthpiece of the extremist *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*. But the Rev. Dinesh Chand, a leader of the All India Christian Council in Himachal Pradesh, said he had learned that most of those said to be 'reconverted' had never received Christ in the first place. When tribal peoples denied that they had become Christians, organisers told them to come to a temple for 'purification, and declared their 'reconversion.' With roots dating back to 1875, the often politically-motivated reconversion movement has now gone beyond the six states where it was known.

Compass Direct News, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799-7250

Ministry outreach rejected by members of the US House

On the 21 March Faith and Action Live broadcast, President Rev. Rob Schenck, spoke about his organisation's current annual Passover/Easter ministry outreach to Capitol Hill in which Faith and Action hand-delivered to each congressional and

senatorial office the gift of a cover letter, a gospel tract, and two movie tickets valued at US\$5 each for *Amazing Grace*, the recently-released film biography of British abolitionist William Wilberforce.

Faith and Action has so far had more than 30 house members refuse to accept these gifts because their offices claim the gifts run afoul of new House regulations that limit the value of gifts to being under US\$50 dollars, that the gift must not be from a lobbyist, or that the gift is a large package.

Schenck contrasts these refusals with a hush-hush reception and dinner being held this evening in suburban Virginia to be attended by Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, House Majority Leader Stenny Hoyer, Congressman Jim Moran, and six other House committee chairmen where invited guests are charged \$28,500 per couple for the privilege of socialising and sharing a sit-down dinner with nine key leaders of the U. House of Representatives.

Schenck characterizes this as 'hypocrisy.'

Rev. Dr. Rob Schenck, Faith and Action, PO Box 75157, Washington, DC 20013-0157 [1](202) 546-8451

A feminine focus

Abide with Me

Sally Davey

With considerable indebtedness to Faith Cook's book, *Our Hymn Writers and their Hymns*

Abide With Me is one of the best-loved songs of comfort and encouragement in the hymnbooks of the Christian church. Its words of hope, reminding the believer of God's constant presence, have strengthened many a Christian in the deepest trials of life. Little wonder: it was written by a man who knew he was dying, and who received comfort from the Scriptures in his own hour of need.

This man was Henry Francis Lyte, an accomplished poet and an Anglican

clergyman. For most of his adult life Lyte suffered from consumption – the slow, lingering disease of the lungs that led to the death of many a person in his nineteenth century world. He had feared death; but as it came, and as he meditated on Christ's promise to be with His people, he found he could face it with peace and joy. And the words of *Abide with me* have encouraged countless Christians who have sung them ever since. As one expert on English hymnody has written, '*Abide with me* ranks with the classics in every sense. In it this obscure and humble curate has ministered to a parish as wide as the English-speaking world.'

An orphan child

The sorrows of little Henry Lyte's boyhood years are very moving. His father, a military man, abandoned his wife and their three sons and left for the island of Jersey in the English Channel. Before he did, he placed seven year-old Henry and his older brother in a boarding school in Northern Ireland. Mrs Lyte and the littlest boy went to London so that she could find work as a nurse. Soon after, both mother and small boy died. No one told the two remaining boys at school in Ireland: perhaps no one knew what had happened? Homesick and lonely, Henry wondered why his mother did not come to him, or even write a letter. One of his earliest poems conveys this sense of desolation:

*Stay, gentle shadow of my mother, stay;
Thy form but seldom comes to bless my
sleep.*

*Ye faithful slumbers, flit not thus away,
And leave my wistful eyes to wake and
weep...
Light of my heart and guardian of my
youth,
Thou com'st no more to fancy's slum-
bering bed,
To aggravate the pangs of waking
truth...*

When it became obvious that there was no further financial support available for the two boys, it looked as though they would have to be placed in the local poorhouse. Then the headmaster of their school, Dr Burrowes, stepped in. He had grown fond of the boys, and Henry, in particular, was already showing considerable promise. Dr Burrowes generously decided to become their legal guardian and pay for the rest of their education himself. He encouraged Henry to study in a steady, disciplined way; but even so, there was time and energy for the talented boy to develop his poetic gifts. At only sixteen he wrote the following on the primrose, early English Spring flower:

*Hail, lovely harbinger of Spring!
Hail, little, modest flower,
Fanned by the tempest's icy wing,
Dusted by the hoary shower...*

Around the time he wrote these words Henry began his university studies at Trinity College, Dublin, hoping to become a doctor. A tall, good-looking and vibrant young man, he made lasting friends quickly. He also did well in his studies, and won a number of prizes for his poetry. Perhaps unsurprisingly (given

his gifts) he decided on the Christian ministry rather than medicine, and upon his ordination in 1815 he began his first curacy in a village church in the south of Ireland.

Christ alone atones for sin

Although this was his chosen calling, it seems he had not yet experienced God's saving grace; and in his new, lonely situation, he began to battle with intellectual doubts about the Christian faith. He had heard of the Methodist revival, and knew of Methodist preachers and their message of new life in Christ; but at this time viewed them as 'simpletons, unable rationally to defend their beliefs.' (He was probably right, but they had the faith he so much needed.) During his time in this parish he made a close friendship with the vicar of a nearby church, a kind and upright



Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847)

man. When this friend took seriously ill, and was worried about the care of his wife and young children should he die, he turned to Lyte, who began to spend a great deal of time with him. As his friend was dying he asked Lyte a question that smote his heart: 'How can I be sure of a happy eternity?' He then declared that both of them had been leading their congregations astray, and that nothing but the death of Christ could atone for sin. Nothing else would prepare him for an eternity in God's presence. When his friend died in this newly-received assurance, Lyte knew he himself would have to rethink his whole understanding of life and death.

The strain of all this led to a breakdown in Henry's own health. His chest was affected,

and he began to recognise the dreaded signs of tuberculosis, the 'cancer' of his day. It was obvious that a long break was needed, and he took leave of his church to travel for the warmer climate of the south of France. This helped him recover his strength, and while there, he spent a great deal of time studying the Scriptures. This confirmed all that his friend had told him about the need for Christ's atoning sacrifice. He was completely convinced, and resolved to begin his pastoral work anew.

A blessed marriage

He arrived in England in 1817 and accepted a calling to a church in Cornwall, where he met and fell in love with Anne Maxwell, who was, unknown to Henry, heiress to a large fortune. Anne's father, a clergyman, had known both John Wesley and George Whitefield well, but was quite hostile when his daughter began associating with the Methodists. As you can imagine, he was even more antagonistic when she became engaged to Henry, who had obviously 'Methodist' views.

Henry and Anne's marriage was an extremely happy one; despite the disapproval of Anne's stepmother, in particular. They were blessed with five children; and one can see the goodness of God in giving Henry so much in the way of family love following such a difficult childhood. But Cornwall proved to be unfriendly to his health, so in 1823 he moved to another parish, this time on the south coast of Devon, not far from Plymouth. Brixham was a fishing town, and his parishioners were mostly rough, hardened fisherfolk. However, Henry was a very faithful pastor; and spent many a long day visiting his people in their homes, that were hewn from the rock of the cliff face. For a man of uncertain health it was no mean feat to be labouring up and down steep cliff paths, but he loved this work. Both he and Anne knew the dangers of a fisherman's life. The church all agreed that whenever the boats were about to set out, the men would gather for a last sermon before they departed. Their pastor knew full well that it was likely some would never return and he gave a copy of the Bible to the captain of each ship, urging him to read it himself and to his men. Henry's preaching was pointed and direct, though full of the warmth of his gentle nature. He was soon greatly loved by his people, and the church, which held 700, was usually full to overflowing.

The ministry in many places and times

Lyte continued writing poetry, and numbers of his poems were sung as hymns in the

church at Brixham. When published, others began to sing them as well. In 1834 (when he was 41) his paraphrase of 66 of the psalms was published with the title *The Spirit of the Psalms*. They have been described as ‘magnificent’ by Erik Routley, the historian of English hymnody. Henry himself had drawn great strength from the words of David in his own times of sickness and trouble; and he wanted his congregation to share the same blessing. One of these paraphrases is the famous and enduring

*Praise, my soul, the King of heaven,
To His feet thy tribute bring;
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who like me His praise should sing?
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise the everlasting King.*
(from Psalm 103)

This hymn has a much-loved place in British national life; being among those sung during at least two important royal weddings, those of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth II; and at also the service for the fiftieth jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II’s reign in 2002. In August 1945 it was sung by emaciated men interned in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp, when the news of the Japanese surrender came crackling over the radio. Henry Lyte could not have imagined how his poetry would be sung by generations to come!

The end which is the new beginning

As the years rolled by Lyte’s tubercular condition remained, flaring up from time to time during cold winters or from over-exertion. Thanks to Anne’s inheritance he was able to travel to the warmer climate of the Mediterranean regions whenever he needed to recuperate, but he was never entirely

well. One great blessing was the house he was able to purchase in 1832. Berry Head House had a beautiful garden overlooking the sea; and many a time he enjoyed sitting watching the fishing boats return, and the sun set over the water.

But by 1847 he knew that the coming summer would probably be his last at home in England. He was weak and unwell. All his life he had feared the coming of death; but one summer evening, as he was sitting watching the sun set over the sea, he began to dwell on God’s unchanging character and its contrast with the impermanence of all created things. He then thought of the two disciples’ words to Jesus in Luke 24:29: ‘*Abide with us, for it is toward evening.*’ Reflecting on these words, he began:

*Abide with me, fast falls the eventide.
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me
abide.*

As Faith Cook observes, we can almost hear the young Henry calling out to his mother in the dark, begging her to stay with him. This becomes even clearer in the next two lines:

*When other helpers fail and comforts
flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.*

Lyte’s skill as a poet is very clear in the words of this hymn. His reversal of word order in repeating phrases serves to emphasise his point. In addition, many of the lines contain a dramatic pause, usually after the first four syllables – a strategy that compels the singer to reflect on the seriousness of the words just sung. For instance:

Change and decay in all around I see

And

*Where is death’s sting? Where, grave,
thy victory?*

Lyte’s reflections on that summer evening of 1847 have been balm to many a troubled heart, wherever English hymnody has been taken, ever since.

As night closed in Lyte returned to the house and wrote the words down for Anne. He was becoming very ill, and knew he had to leave again for the Continent. On the morning of Sunday 4 September, a few days before he was due to travel, he astonished his family by announcing that he wanted to preach to his congregation once more; and so he

*Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.*

*Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day;
Earth’s joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou, Who changest not, abide with me.*

*I need Thy presence every passing hour;
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter’s power?
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.*

*I fear no foe with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;
Where is death’s sting? Where, Grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.*

*Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;
Heav’n’s morning breaks, and earth’s vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.*

mounted the pulpit one last time, warning and exhorting those he loved so much. There were many tears shed as he left Brixham for what seemed certain to be the last time. And indeed, when he reached the south of France, he found he could travel no further;

he was so ill with flu. To his joy he discovered that all fear was removed from his death. As the end drew near he whispered, 'O there is nothing terrible in death. Jesus Christ steps down into the grave before me... Blessed faith! Today piercing through the mist of

earth; tomorrow changed to sight! Abiding for ever with the Lord.'

Thanks be to God for the poetry of Henry Francis Lyte.

Musings on urban/rural theology

Town or country?

Andrew Nugteren

Most people have a strong leaning one way or the other. I spent most of my growing-up years on a small farm just out of Levin, and loved it, so I suppose I'm a country boy at heart – no mega-urban sprawl for me!

But then I got thinking. What would God choose, were he given the choice? Would he prefer the wild sounds of the great outdoors, or the vibrancy of inner-city life? Depending on whom you ask, you'll probably get different answers.

To some, it would be an obvious choice for God. He'd choose rural, they claim. Away from the city. Back to nature. After all, God has revealed himself and his glory in his natural creation. And rural is as close to natural as you can get these days.

Besides, look at the alternative. Our urban environments seem to be dominated by the mighty modern townhouse – an invention that comes with as much asphalt as possible, to reduce the quantity of time-consuming green stuff we used to play on. Oh, there's the odd bush, shrub or flowerbed here and there for the sake of good looks, but not really a lot of opportunity for God's glory to shine. And if that still isn't enough evidence, remember that it was on a *garden* that God set his stamp of approval (and called "good") when he made the world, not a city.

Be that as it may, I'm not ready to be persuaded quite yet.

You see, while it's true that God dwelt in a garden in the beginning, that's not the end of the story. When we move forward to the time of King David, God chooses to dwell among his people in a *city* – in Jerusalem. Now if God wasn't into cities, I'm sure he could have had David set up the tabernacle (and later, the temple) in some suitable and secluded rural location. But no, the ark which symbolised God's presence is enthroned in a city.

Jerusalem isn't a temporary storage location, either. God isn't just grudgingly putting

up with the city until Jesus returns to restore a sin-ruined creation. Rather, God even goes so far as to use the imagery of a city to *picture* the new creation (Revelation 21). The new Jerusalem will be pleasant to the eye,

perfectly symmetrical, adorned with precious jewels; it will have streets of pure gold and will shine with the glory of God.

But what if you find yourself *preferring* rural, even though God is heading towards a



city? Well, perhaps one of the main reasons some of us struggle to appreciate the *beauty* of the city is because all too often our cities lack beauty. Our building codes are littered with rule after rule, guarding us against fires and earthquakes, telling us how many car parks we need to provide, but requirements for beauty take a definite back seat. We're good at functional, not so good at beautiful – here in New Zealand, anyway. They tell me that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but, since I'm not a trendy relativist, that doesn't wash on me.

J.R.R. Tolkien does ugly cities well, as any

beholder of beauty ought to acknowledge. Take Bree, the industrialised Orthanc or the occupied Shire. Cities whose soul has been reduced to progress, efficiency and the mighty dollar. But Tolkien also gives us cities of unparalleled beauty. Places that thrill the imagination, even when adapted for the big screen. The grandeur of Minas Tirith. The splendour of Lothlórien. The Shire after the cleanup has taken place. Paradise was Lost. But then Paradise is Restored.

And it's Paradise Restored that we see at the end of Revelation and that helps answer the question we began with. At the heart of

the new city is God's throne, and flowing from that throne is the river of the water of life, with the tree of life from the original Eden flanking its banks. Creation begins with a garden, and ends in a garden city. God may start rural, but he ends urban.

Andrew Nugteren is the newly ordained minister of the Reformed Church of Wellington.

This appeared first in Prism, a magazine a number of our young people produce.

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

Men's breakfast. The first men's breakfast of 2007 will be held this coming Sat (3rd of March) at 8am in the church basement. After the breakfast there will be a talk/study on prayer. We usually finish up around 9:30am. The purpose of these breakfasts is to strengthen our relationships with each other, so we can encourage one another to live as men of God in all we do. Please bring \$5 to cover food. Lord willing, see you there.

Last Sunday, surrounded by family, Su Kauhiwa went to be with her Lord and Saviour. The funeral took place in the church on Thursday (family service) and Friday. Su had been sick for quite a long time. Some 14 years ago, doctors gave her only 4 years to live. God in His wisdom granted her those 4 years and a further 10 years beside. Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with Poi, her children, grandchildren and wider family.

Notes from the Session meeting held last Wednesday night: Vicar: After training for the ministry in USA, Br Andre Holtslag will be returning to NZ and hopes to take up a vicariate in July. Session has advised the Vicariate Committee of its interest in hosting Bro Holtslag and his family. Should the vicariate proceed, Bro Holtslag will be

working closely with our counselor, Rev van Garderen.

Family prayer & praise items: Last Sunday morning, Sr Ella Ploeg suffered a serious stroke and was admitted to Waitakere Hospital. She has been unconscious since then. On Saturday morning she went to be with her Lord and Saviour. May God grant comfort and strength to her family at this time.

Christchurch

Pastoral. Congratulations to Jason and Rachel de Vries on the birth of a daughter, Amelia Faith, born at 12.20 am on Saturday 24 February (yesterday), weighing in at 6lb 2oz. Mother and daughter are doing well.

Pastoral. The Lord took to be with him early last week Elizabeth (Bep) Gorter. The funeral took place last week Friday. We would like to extend our heartfelt sympathy to Wiebe, children and grandchildren. Our prayer is that the Lord may uphold you during this time of loss and as a church family we will continue to stand with you and also support you with our prayers

Dovedale

Ben & Franci had a lovely little girl at 11:50am last Monday (12 Feb), only half a day after you all saw Franci at last Sunday's evening service. It went fairly quickly, and relatively smoothly, so we're really pleased and thankful to God. Thanks to everyone who popped in at the hospital or at home or at the baby shower, and for all the flowers and presents. Thanks also to the ladies who organised the baby shower! Feel free to pop in and see us in the evenings (47 Rosewarne St, Sprey-

don), or give us a call on 981 8049.

Wedding announcement: Lord willing, La Toya van der Meer and James Flewellen will marry at the Christchurch Cathedral on Saturday, 10 March. The wedding ceremony begins at 1:00pm. You are warmly invited to come and share in this happy occasion.

Session spent some time discussing how to proceed given our minister's acceptance of the call to Palmerston North. It was decided to call for nominations for the office of elder with a view to electing two men. Session also decided to take whatever steps are necessary to secure pulpit supply until a new minister is installed or ordained. This will mean approaching men who may be able to help us during our period of vacancy. A committee was also appointed to help facilitate the calling of a next minister.

Congratulations to TJ and Miriam on the birth of Elijah Tjeerd van der Horst last Thursday morning, which also happens to be Miriam's birthday! Elijah weighed in at 3615g and both Mum and baby are well. TJ also is very much the proud father.

Church Camp! Weekend of 27 - 29 April 2007. **The glory of God!!and You!!!** **Speaker: Rev Sjikr Bajema.** Entry forms are now available on the table in the foyer. Please submit your completed entry forms to Paul Bakker or Arjen Buter by no later than 15 April. This weekend of worship of our Lord in Scriptural teaching, singing hymns in abundance and fellowship with brothers and sisters in one of those most beautiful settings in Gods creation, is not to be missed. Be there to glorify God and for the sake of others.

Dunedin

Lunch and Learn. As there has been a show of interest to revive the Lunch and Learn meetings, we hope to do just that. Our first meeting will be at the church hall on Monday 26 March, starting at 12 noon sharp, and will continue on a four-weekly basis. We plan to start with Dr R C Sproul's video "The Holiness of God". Bring your lunch—coffee and tea will be ready. We look forward to seeing you there. Tony & Jean Tromop

Foxton

Session decided to charge the Calling Committee to invite vicar Pieter van Huyssteen, who passed his Presbytery examination last week to come and preach in Foxton.

Point to ponder: "Worry doesn't help tomorrow's troubles, but it does ruin today's happiness"

Hamilton

Meditation: In an age of individualism, it is very easy for us to apply the same mindset to our own salvation. We can easily fall into the trap of thinking that our salvation is about us. But God has saved us for a purpose – that we might bring glory to him. And when he saved us we became a part of his family – we were adopted as his children. We walk the Christian life alongside others like us – sinners saved by grace, doing battle with the desires of their hearts as they are sanctified (made holy) through the work of God's Spirit within. And it is this community, the church, through which God has chosen to advance his purposes in this world. It is in the church that people catch sight of the love of God and the grace of Christ. This morning we will consider the church as a body. A body which is united – one in Christ – and yet is richly diverse. A body in which we are all uniquely gifted and called to play our part. And a body in which we share each other's highs and lows. Let us give careful thought to the contribution that God calls us to make to his body and let us remember that, in the church, we can never say "it's their problem." We are part of the same body. If it's their problem, then it's our problem too! – MW

Session Report- Profession of faith – Jordan Green has indicated his desire to transfer his membership to Aberdeen. He will do so by professing his faith on Sunday 22 April.

Hastings

From the Pastor. It is our privilege as a congregation this morning to witness the baptism of Hannah Lagas. Let us uphold the Lagas family in prayer as they seek to train

their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And let us continue to encourage one another as families through our mutual love as members of the Body of Christ.

Cadets and Calvinettes pinecone collecting. We are going to sell bags of pinecones again but first we'll have to collect them in the forest! This we do every year and it is a great fundraiser. Last time we made about \$1000. We will need all the help we can get and so want to encourage all parents and kids to come along, the more people the quicker we're finished. More details to come. So please keep Saturday the 17th of March free. The Counsellors.

Doumas' visit. In order for the session and members to discuss first hand with Rev. Alan and Mrs. Odette Douma about their interest and vision for the mission in Papua New Guinea, we have invited them to spend a week with us. Alan and Odette will arrive on Tuesday, 10 April, and be with us until Monday, 16 April. They will meet with the session and mission committee. We will also have a congregational meeting at which they can present the work they hope to do and answer questions any members have. Also we will be asking Rev. Douma to

preach for us on mission related topics on Sunday, 15 April.

Hukanui

Last Sunday evening we heard that Ron and Anneke Esselbrugge's son, Jude, failed to surface after jumping into Lake Karapiro from Keeley's landing. On Tuesday, police divers recovered Jude's body. Yesterday (Saturday) family and friends gathered to remember Jude's life. We are thankful that Jude gave evidence of a living faith and we trust that He is now with the Lord. Please continue to remember Ron and Anneke and their sons, Ishmael, Jeremy and Caleb in your prayers as they come to terms with life without Jude. Please remember also the extended Esselbrugge and vandenEngel families.

As you are aware, there are many vacant churches both in New Zealand and Australia. I have been approached by several vacant churches, who have requested that I visit them for a time of discussion regarding their vacancy. With the agreement of session I met with the Avondale Session this past week, will be travelling to Geelong (Australia) next weekend, and a church near Sydney mid

Calling all country boys and girls to become

NETWORKERS



If you have always wanted to be a Cadet or Calvinette but live too far away from a club, we would love to hear from you!

NETWORKERS is for children aged 9-15 years old, and you would be a correspondence member with the closest club, able to attend camps and any club functions that you could make.

Your counsellor and cadre would be your correspondent friends and leader.

INTERESTED?

Then write to me –

**Eddie van Leeuwen, 40 Victors Road
Hoon Hay, CHRISTCHURCH**

April. Please pray for these churches as they seek to find the right pastor. Please remember also that at this stage no calls have been extended.

Nelson

From the pastor: Recently we completed a series of sermons in the evening services on Covenant Highlights from Genesis. These sermons were well received by some of you and I appreciate your encouraging feedback. However we mustn't ignore our church order Art. 56, which states that "Ordinarily at one of the services on each Lord's day the Word shall be expounded as summarized in the Confessional Standards." To this end, I will this evening begin a series of sermons on the Belgic Confession, which is the second of our Confessional Standards (along with the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort and the Westminster Confession). The Belgic Confession was written by one Guido de Brès, a minister of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, in 1561... during the time when Roman Catholic Spain governed all of the Low Countries comprising Belgium and the Netherlands, hence the name 'Belgic.' He intended his confession to answer charges of heresy brought against Reformed Christians by Roman Catholic authorities. Whether he achieved his aim I can't say... but some years later, de Brès died a martyr to his Reformed faith. In spite of this, his confession lives after him. Even today it remains a very useful statement of our Reformed Faith, and we can benefit greatly by studying it. R.A.

Food for thought...

CELL PHONE VS. BIBLE

I wonder what would happen if we treated our Bible like we treat our cell phone?

What if we carried it around in our purses or pockets?

What if we turned back to go get it if we forgot it?

What if we flipped through it several times a day?

What if we used it to receive messages?

What if we treated it like we couldn't live without it?

What if we gave it to kids as gifts?

What if we used it as we travelled?

What if we used it in case of an emergency?

This is something to make you go, hmmm, where is my Bible?

Oh, and one more thing. Unlike our cell phones, we don't ever have to worry about our Bible being disconnected because Jesus already paid the bill.

North Shore

Items from the session meeting. The last couple of years we have been having one General and one Pastoral Session meeting per month. We decided to revert to one meeting per month, combining both parts, although still starting with a meal at 6pm, to take effect after we finish our current Discipleship Study at our next meeting (DV). To ensure that we keep in touch regularly as a whole session, we will in future meet as a Session in one of the downstairs rooms between 10.10 and 10.25 am before the morning Service every Sunday.

Palmerston North

Marriage Banns. Congregation, Nathaniel Rademaker and Sharon Hendrikse have indicated their desire to be united in marriage. They want to begin their life together in the name of the Lord and in the presence of His people, and continue it to His glory. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place at St Lukes, Masterton on 30th of March 2007.

Pukekohe

From the Pastor. On Monday I will be attending the Board meeting of Grace Theological College. They have asked me to come onto the board to provide some representation from the Reformed Churches of NZ. This Wednesday the ministers of the Pukekohe churches will come together for a day of prayer. We did this last year and it was a valuable time of fellowship, praise and intercession.

Dawn Johnson has been attending worship services here for a while from the Anglican Church in Waiuku and we now welcome you as a member of the church and pray that you will be blessed through your life and fellowship in the Church.

Congregational Meeting: A special congregational meeting will be held on Tuesday the 3rd of April to discuss two important proposals from the session. One will be a report from the Property Committee with a proposed concept for a new church building on our current site. This report has been accepted by the Session and will be presented at this meeting with recommendations. The

report and drawings are available from the table in the lounge. The other is a proposal that we apply to have Andre Holtslag train as a vicar in our church for twelve months from July of this year. A letter explaining the background and reasons for this is also available from the table in the lounge. Both proposals will require a 75% majority from the congregation. These are important matters. Please plan to attend this special meeting.

Silverstream

Pastoral Notes. Let us remember to pray regularly for those involved in one or other of the prison ministries. Reports from those involved indicate that these are very worthwhile endeavours, with a number of prisoners being exposed to the Gospel through this means.

Church BBQ—Fun Afternoon. All invited to get together for fun, games, fellowship at Trentham Memorial Park 10 March 2007. Starting 3.00pm onwards, please bring BBQ's, games, sport's equipment, and heap's of energy to see out daylight saving. If raining, cancelled. See you all there. Edwin, Hank, Yvonne

Fellowship Dinner. On 1 April, 2007, the Lord willing, our church will have been instituted for 40 years. To celebrate this occasion, the Ladies Fellowship would like to invite the congregation to a Fellowship Dinner on Saturday, 14 April from 5.30pm onwards at the Pinehaven School Hall, DV. For more information please check your pigeon holes.

Wainuiomata

Holiday club meeting. On Thursday, 22 February at 8:00p.m. we plan to hold a meeting for all those interested in helping at the holiday club which we will hold, Lord willing, in just over seven weeks. As you can see this is not too far away and we need firm commitments as to who is able to help. If you haven't already, please let Caroline or Anna know if you wish to help but are not able to come to the meeting.

HOUSE-SITTERS WANTED

Wanted house-sitters for rural property on outskirts of Dunedin for two months during middle of the year. Would suit semi-active retired couple. For information please contact Paul Schinkelshoek (03)-4892199 or paulschink@hyper.net.nz.

Short Report of the Meeting of Christchurch Presbytery Saturday 3rd March 2007, at the Reformed Church of Christchurch

Rev. Robert van Wichen opened the meeting with a devotion based on James 3:13-18 after which we sang from Psalter # 355.

The delegates present were Rev. R. van Wichen and Br J. Bosma (Bishopdale), Brs G Posthuma and B. Mills (Christchurch), Rev. M. Flinn and Br P. Davey (Dovedale), Rev. H. Vaatstra and Br P. de Reus (Dunedin), and Rev. R. Adams and Br J. van Ginkel (Nelson). Rev. R. van Wichen served as moderator, Rev. H. Vaatstra as vice-moderator, and Rev. R. Adams as short report writer.

Minutes from the previous meeting (6.10.06) were approved. Arising from these minutes, Dunedin delegates reported they were still seeking a full-time minister for Oamaru/Timaru. The Dovedale delegates expressed strong support.

Rev. J. Klazinga reported on the preliminary examinations of candidates Michael Willemse and Pieter van Huyssteen. Subsequent to this, Br van Huyssteen's re-examination in the area of systematic theology was sustained, as was Br Willemse's final examination.

Rev. Vaatstra reported on the November meeting of Wellington Presbytery at which the resignation of Rev. G. Milne was reluctantly accepted and his ministerial status in the RCNZ terminated. Christchurch delegates then briefly reviewed the minutes of other presbyteries which had been received for information. The discipline policy for youth camps adopted by the Wellington Presbytery in July 2006 was especially noted.

Nelson's proposal re the advantages to be gained from a Presbytery-wide block insurance scheme was received for information. After some discussion the proposed church visitation schedule for 2007 was approved.

Dunedin delegates then responded to Art. 47 Questions. They sought advice on the organization of home groups and how church attendance might be better encouraged. They also reported positive benefits from having had a vicar during 2006. Rev. M. Flinn then prayed for the Dunedin congregation.

Rev. Vaatstra reported on behalf of the

OMB. The RCNZ and the Canadian Reformed Church have agreed to jointly support the theological college in PNG through the local church there. Some classes had now begun at the college. Rev. John Rogers will be teaching in Uganda in September or October.

Rev. Flinn reported about the work of the RTC. Prof. Murray Capill will become the principal next year. He also promoted the upcoming Fan the Flame Conference, and stressed the need for more men for the ministry.

Then the Christchurch delegates responded to the Article 47 questions. They raised several matters of concern, as well as reasons for rejoicing. General discussion followed a report from the church visitors about recent events. Rev. R. Adams then prayed for the Christchurch congregation.

The next meeting of Presbytery was set for 7th July, 2007 at Bishopdale with Dunedin being the convening church. The moderator then closed the meeting in prayer.

Ralph Adams – Reporter

C.A.R.E.

Dirk van Garderen

The third of four CARE (Centre for AIDS Rehabilitation and Education) based in Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu, South India, showed yet another face of this ministry. The long road journey from Madurai was more relaxing than previous ones. I guess I was getting more used to India's roads and traffic *and* was now in a vehicle that had air conditioning!

Tuticorin is a bustling port situated in the southern tip of India, facing Sri Lanka. It has been a centre for mission activity since 1555, which saw the arrival of Jesuit priests. Their impact remains obvious to this day. Something like 50% of the population is Christian (mainly Roman Catholic). A dominant feature of the city is a huge basilica¹ rather incongruously named *Our Lady of the Snow*.

Christian influence notwithstanding, HIV is a real problem in this area as well – especially among the poor. One story I was to hear a number of times is about many of the young men of this region. They are enticed to thriving centres like Mumbai (formerly Bombay) with offers of jobs and a chance to earn big money. Once there, many of them find themselves treated with contempt and end up living in squalor. These youngsters, now far away from family and friends, are easy 'meat' for unscrupulous employers who pay pitiful wages. With despair comes promiscuous behaviour. This in turn has resulted in many of them becoming HIV positive. Many eventually drag themselves back to places like Tuticorin to languish and die. As I discovered first-hand, the devastating impact on mothers, wives and fiancées is very real.

Reaching out in Tuticorin

The CARE team in Tuticorin proved to be dedicated but, by and large, much less experienced than their counterparts in Madurai and Dharmapouri. They are under the excellent leadership of Mr Gell, who is working hard to guide and help. One very young staff member who stood out in my mind was a young woman who had been raised an orphan in the Peniel Orphanage. She was now a qualified nurse and felt called to use her training and gift in ministering to the HIV population in Tuticorin. Grace received has now become grace shared.

The staff members were keen to introduce themselves and their work. I met with



The mother and daughter in my first visit. Widowhood awaits. The possibility of a future for this little girl is the offer of a scholarship to continue study



By the front door of the block the widow and her son lived in.

them in the newly-built clinic on Mr Gell's property. They have some 430 patients and their families on their books, and organise regular 'camps' in three nearby locations.

What made coming to Tuticorin memora-

ble was a series of home visits with members of the counselling team. I saw those at the receiving end of this ministry as well as how they were being ministered to.

No sickness benefit

The first call was to a woman in her early 30s. On entering her 'house' – a small, low-ceilinged dark room measuring 3mX3m, dominated by a double bed – what struck me most was how pregnant she looked. But she wasn't. In fact, I was seeing the effects of the A.R.T. (Anti Retroviral Therapy) medication she was taking! The swelling of her abdomen was quite painful. Her husband, a truck driver, was away at work – a temporary lifesaver. However, because of the increasing impact of HIV, after he works for a day he needs to rest up in bed for the next two. Without work the family cannot survive. There are no sickness benefits. Their 12-year-old daughter was there as well. She fears being tested for HIV herself and being labelled a 'positive,' because of the stigma and discrimination this would bring. Her future looks grim. It was at this stage that the C.A.R.E. director, the Rev Samuel

Raman, was able to point to another facet of the ministry. Linking up with funds available via the Dutch organisation, Redt Een Kind (Save a Child), the possibility of offering her a scholarship became very real. A door! I appreciated the way in which C.A.R.E. was once again able to combine a ministry of word and deed.

The widow

The second visit was to an even younger woman – a widow. Once more, the visible impact of A.R.T. medication was obvious. She had a 9-year-old son. Her 'house,' a single room that was even smaller than the previous one, was tidy. Houseproud in the good sense of the word. One corner of the room was dominated by a stainless steel mixing bowl with an electrically driver dough mixer. I asked her what it was for and was told that this was the source of her livelihood. She mixes dough for one of the many bakeries Tuticorin is renowned for. Her salary is just on \$(US)1 per day! Rent for the 'house' is \$(US)9.00 per month. On top of that she must provide school fees for a Roman Catholic school her son attends,



The team at Tuticorin. Mr and Mrs Gell who are in charge of the programme are on the left. The young nursing graduate from Peniel is second from the right.

as well as clothing and daily food. The only good news on the horizon in this home was that her son had recently been diagnosed HIV-negative. The tragedy is that this kind of situation is replicated in tens of thousands of households throughout India. What an opportunity and challenge!

One more visit

Although it was getting dark, there was to be one more visit. We drove to a relatively prosperous area festooned with party lights along a narrow street. A young couple whose family lived halfway down the street was about to be married. They sure know how to advertise and celebrate this feast with a maximum of fuss! We walked beyond the lights to the very end of the street to a large house.

One small basement section of it provided housing for a large family. I presumed that these folks were the house-owner's servants. Walking inside the two-roomed

unit brought me face to face with a gigantic picture of a haloed Jesus. Such pictures are typical of Indian Christianity. I found all Christians, evangelicals, charismatics and Roman Catholics alike, are huge on such 'holy' pictures. They use them to announce their identity both publicly (on cars and auto rickshaws) and privately (in their homes) much as their Hindu neighbours use equally garish pictures of their deities. For someone like me, coming from a completely different Christian culture where the most daring Christian symbol was a Huguenot cross, this was difficult to accept or get used to.

But that picture faded away as I looked into the huge, pleading eyes of a young man who had only days to live. He looked like a living skeleton. His emaciated face was dominated by huge teeth and, above all, by his eyes. His whole life story could be read in them with a single look. He was one of the many young men who had gone to Mumbai

to make his fortune. All he ended up finding was HIV and now, in the terminal stages of full-blown AIDS, tuberculosis was choking the life out of him.

C.A.R.E. at this point was providing nutritional foods (Horlicks), daily visits to him and his family and, the ultimate weapon, daily prayer. The whole family gathered around the bedside as I was called to intercede for this young man and to ask for the Lord's blessing on his soul.

'Won't you please come and help thousands like me?' asked the eyes.

The Rev. D. J van Garderen is the convenor of the National Diaconate Committee

- 1 A basilica is a Roman Catholic cathedral which has been elevated to this status and consecrated by the Pope (John Paul 2).

Missions in focus

Janice Reid

Reformed Churches Bible College Opens its Doors

Open Day

Students scurried around preparing – setting up the classroom, blowing balloons, writing a welcome notice on the blackboard, preparing water and cordial for the guests... The students had been living there for a week now and had already been busy around the place; planting gardens, clearing grass, setting up their accommodations etc... And this day 26th February 2007 was an exciting day for them – representatives from the churches were coming to see the college and attend an opening service to begin this year of teaching.

The pastor from 9-mile, Pastor Bas

Fairio (who is also the Bible College student councillor) led the service, in which he had a devotional sermon on the acquiring of wisdom.

The principal Rev. Stephen t' Hart had an address in which he expressed thankfulness for the work carried out so far and the desire that this Bible College will benefit the churches in Papua New Guinea. Pastor Bob Bouway (who arrived to become pastor of Ekoro congregation last week) also had a short speech and wished the College God's blessing. The student representative had a talk and the students all introduced themselves, telling us who they were, which Church they were from and how they got to this point. They also sang a number of songs, again expressing their trust and hope in God.

Finally the 3 pastors, Rev. t'Hart, Pastor Bas Fairio and Pastor Bob Bouway, and Br W. vanderHeide prayed for the 11 students, the teachers, the Churches and the student life at the college.

Afterwards a light lunch was enjoyed by all. All in all, it was a blessed day in which we could commit this work into God's hand and ask for his blessing.

Teaching

Since this special day, we have seen 4 teaching days. The students have been busy

learning about the content of the Bible, the doctrine of the Church, and something about the history of missions. They have worked in the gardens, cooked in the outdoor kitchen, working out the various responsibilities that come with living a communal life.

On the weekends they go back to their churches, to see their families (due to ac-

Continued next page

MIF prayer notes

Please remember **Wally & Jeannette Hagoort** in your prayers and in particular for blessings on the new youth programme they are introducing / developing, and for Jeannette as she has commenced teaching literacy to ladies at East Boroko.

Janice Reid expects to spend some time this month in language study (Indonesian), and some time in Kupang, West Timor, helping with initial training and organisation of the new, Reformed radio station being established there. She asks you to pray for clear thinking and effectiveness in both of these endeavours.



commodation constraints wives and families are not able to live on campus) and to work in the churches in whatever capacity they are able. Over time they will be given 'home assignments' to take back with them to complete in the non-teaching weeks. There will be four weeks teaching and then two weeks of non-teaching. To give you an idea, their week looks something like this:

DAILY TIMETABLE (Tuesday – Friday)

5:30	Wake up and wash
5:30 - 6:00	Personal Devotions
6:00 - 6:30	Clean up inside and around houses
6:30 - 7:15	Breakfast; Get ready for School
7:15 – 9:00	Content of the Bible (W. vdH)
9:00-9:30	Morning Break
9:30-10:00	Devotions
10:00-11:30	Christian Doctrine (S. t' Hart)
11:30 - 1:00	Lunch
1:00 - 2:00	Block Course

(Top and bottom) Faculty and students at the RCBC opening.



2:00 - 5:00	Work in College/Personal Gardens
5:00 - 5:30	Wash / Sport (Tuesday)
5:30 - 7:00	Dinner
7:00 - 8:30	Study Time (Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday) Bible Study (Thursday)
8:30 - 9:30	Get ready for the night
10:00	"Lights out - No Noise"

Saturdays and Mondays are for travelling to and from the villages as well as working in the college/student gardens. On Monday night there will be a worship service to start off the week.

We are very thankful for how well this past week has gone. It is not easy for people of all different cultures (they are all from different groups, each with their own customs and habits) to live in such close confines. We ask for your prayers, also for the student

life on campus – that they will also be able to learn lessons in patience, love, kindness, encouragement, self control, peacefulness and that through all this they may all grow closer to their Lord and Saviour. That they may know how He would have them serve Him, that they would be able to seek first His kingdom and His glory.

Hopes and Dreams

Thus far we have at the college grounds a classroom, a resource room (which at present is being used partly as student accommodation), an ablutions block (bathroom), and one student house. As you might imagine, with 11 students we are currently very pressed for space. With the support of Mission Boards and individuals we hope to be able to erect at least 4 more student houses with outdoor kitchens in the near future and then another classroom; as well

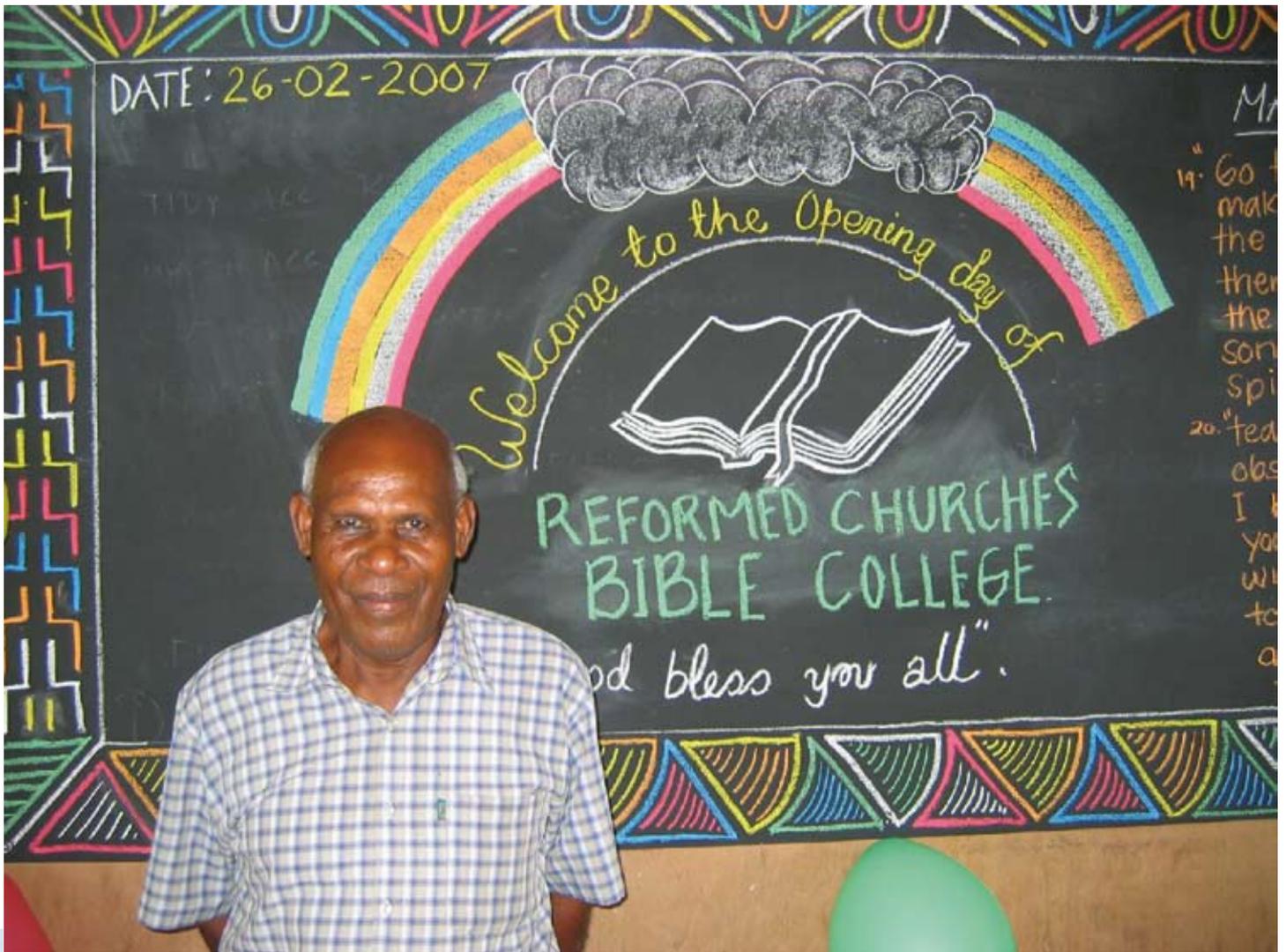
as further improvements to the property such as electricity to the houses and classroom, an oval (sports field), pathways, water pumps, and the beginnings of a chicken project. For those interested, there is a more detailed financial update available. Please write to the email address below.

RCBC Newsletter

We are working on producing a regular newsletter from the Reformed Churches Bible College. This will have regular updates on the latest buildings, financial information, 'from the board of governors,' what has been happening at the College, and blurbs about/by the students. If you would like to subscribe to this email newsletter please write an email to the college address: rbc-png@yahoo.com. Your address will then be added to the list and you will receive the newsletters.



Students at the RCBC opening.



(Above) The local Pastor who was involved in leading the opening service

(Left) Kitchen at the RCBC

(Below) Library and Resources room



Planning a mission trip?

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