

faith in **focus**

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of New Zealand

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"I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pen, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills."

Psalm 50:9,10

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Editorial

It is the time of the year when we generally find ourselves at our busiest. There are all those things to be done before the end of the year, together with the end-of-year functions and presentations, and on it goes! But that can be something we experience just about all the time with the busyness of life. And it's exactly because of that that we can forget what our primary focus should be. In amongst all those small details that need to be done we lose sight of the big picture which puts it all together. We must not do that. We have to set aside the time to meditate - to read God's Word, to pray to Him - personally and together in our families and our fellowship groups and in public worship.

If sometimes we feel down, and we honestly wonder how we will manage, look up. It is in God's hands. He is the One working out His will in Jesus Christ. And that means the Church will prevail. May this issue encourage you to see that - and to live like that!

The Plan of the Master Weaver

*Our lives are but fine weavings
That God for us prepares,
Each life becomes a fabric planned
And fashioned in His care.
We may not always see just how
The weavings intertwine,
But we must trust the Master's hand
And follow His design.
For He can view the pattern
Upon the upper side,
While we must look from underneath
And trust in Him to guide.
Sometimes a strand of sorrow
Is added to His plan,
And though it's difficult for us,
We must still understand
That it's He who fills the hole
It's He who knows best,
So we must weave in patience
And leave to Him the rest.
Not till the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Shall God unroll the canvas
And explain the reason why -
The dark threads are as needed
In the Weaver's skilful Hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.*

Anon .

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

The Muslims among us

Why the West is nervous

Cornelius Pronk

While vacationing in Michigan last July, I came across an interesting article in *National Review*, a conservative magazine associated with Wm. F. Buckley JR., Robert Bork, James Kilpatrick and other well-known authors who write on political, social and cultural issues from a moderately right wing perspective. This particular article written by Rod Dreher, one of the contributing editors, was entitled "On Tiptoe Through the Tulips: why Holland is nervous-and an alarming case for the entire West." In this feature article the author refers to what he calls "the fear and loathing many Dutch people have concerning the presence of Muslims in their country." While for years the Dutch were afraid to vent their anger publicly because Holland is perhaps the most politically correct nation in all of Europe, if not the world, they recently found an able spokesperson in the late Pim Fortuyn. Although this rookie politician was assassinated by a radical animal activist days before the May 15 national election, his influence persists. His sudden and tragic death was a major factor in returning the centre-right Christian Democrats to power and in securing the new Fortuyn party a large number of seats.

A responsive cord

What was the secret of Fortuyn's meteoric rise on the Dutch political scene? It was his ability to persuade large numbers of voters that the liberal secular West was engaged in a life and death struggle with an intolerant and religious Islam. According to Fortuyn, the very civil order in Holland is threatened by rapidly rising levels of street crime attributable for the most part to young men from Islamic countries. He warned that Muslim immigration poses a potential fifth-column threat to democracy because most refuse to assimilate and accept Dutch values. He viewed multiculturalism and political correctness as the main obstacles to the West's ability to accurately gauge the threat posed by Islam and to come up with a strategy to counter it.

The interesting thing here is that Fortuyn's voice struck such a responsive chord in the hearts of the Dutch, of all people. There is no country in the world where liberalism and secularism has taken a stronger hold than the Netherlands. Holland is an egalitarian social democracy, sexually emancipated, the first nation to legalize euthanasia, prostitution and drugs. It is fanatically anti-religious and is tolerant of all people and viewpoints, except of conservative Christians who still constitute

a sizeable minority in the country. Strangely, even though Muslims also have conservative values, they are tolerated because they come from Third World countries and liberals will go out of their way not to offend them.

But this characteristic tolerance toward foreigners is showing signs of abating, partly as a result of Fortuyn's sounding of the alarm bell. Many are now wondering what will happen to Dutch culture and values as a result of the influx of Muslims. This is not only true of the Netherlands, of course. The plunging birth rate of native-born Europeans has forced many Old



World countries to import large numbers of foreign workers, most of whom are Muslims. This is causing a great deal of anger and frustration in Germany, France and Great Britain as well. The same can be said of the USA and Canada, which also host millions of Muslims as well as Hindus and Sikhs. The best book to read on this subject is Pat Buchanan's *Death of the West*. In this disturbing book the author presents all kinds of statistics to support his contention that the West, and particularly Europe, is dying. If the present fertility rates hold, he writes, Europe's population, which presently stands at 728 million, will decline to 207 million by the end of the twenty first century, thus less than 30 percent of today's.

Why is this happening, asks Buchanan? This is his explanation: *Socialism, the beatific vision of European intellectuals for generations, is one reason. If everyone has the promise of a state pension, children are no longer a vital insurance policy against want in old age. If women can earn more than enough to be financially independent, a husband is no longer essential. And if you can also have sex and not babies? Why marry? By freeing husbands, wives, and children of family responsibilities, European socialists have eliminated the need for families. Consequently, families have begun to disappear. When they are gone, Europe goes with them. But as Europe is dying, the Third World adds one hundred million people—one new Mexico—every fifteen months... Absent divine intervention, or a sudden desire on the part of Western women to begin having the same size families as their grandmothers, the future belongs to the Third World.*

A rapid decline

It so happens that a large part of this Third World is Muslim, and many Muslims are migrating to countries like the Netherlands where they are causing immense social problems. Not that the fault lies with the Muslims alone. A big part of the problem is the rapid deterioration of religious and moral values in the Netherlands. Rob Hondsmerk, director of Focus on the Family—the Netherlands, told Dreher in an interview: "The things you Americans are facing today, Holland faced ten or fifteen years ago. I see America going down the same path, and if things keep going at the present rate, it's not going to take you fifteen years to get there."

What caused the rapid decline in religion and morality in Holland? According to Dreher, until the 1960's the country was one of the most religious and socially conservative nations in Western Europe, but the once strong coalition of conservative Protestants and Catholics and moderate socialists gradually broke down. Contributing to its demise was the fact that those who held right-of-centre views were dispersed among various confessional parties. This greatly diluted the strength of the conservative movement and paved the way for a socialist take-over. The big change took place in the late 50's and 60's when Holland experienced its great post-war economic expansion. As Dreher explains: "The Left captured the culture without firing a shot. The welfare state burgeoned and cultural leftists took over influential opinion-leading posts in academia and the media. They have so thoroughly dominated the national conversation for an entire generation that there are barely

any conservatives left [this is an overstatement because; there is still a fairly large conservative, even Reformed, constituency left, but the problem is they are too divided to have much of an impact politically, C.P.)."

Despite the fact that Holland has turned itself in a few short years into the most socialistic and morally permissive democracy in the world with the possible exception of Sweden, it has managed to function surprisingly well. This is due, says Dreher, to the residual Calvinism in Holland's national character. Most Dutchmen, he says, are hardworking, sober, honest and self-disciplined. They are generally satisfied with the welfare state because they consider it a good return for their investment in taxes, which are among the highest in the world. Until recently, therefore, few Dutch citizens found reason to complain (even the most right wing Reformed enjoy government pensions and other cradle to grave social benefits, C.P.).

But this comfortable arrangement is starting to show cracks in the foundation, partly due to the influx of waves of immigrants. Eight percent of Holland's 16 million people are of foreign descent, more than half of them being Muslims. Most of these immigrants reside in the four largest Dutch cities: Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht. A high percentage of them are unemployed, which means not only

that they need government assistance, but also that many turn to crime. Recent Dutch crime statistics show that 33 percent of all criminal suspects are foreign born, as are 55 percent of prison inmates.

One explanation for this high crime rate, especially among Muslims, is that they live in deprived circumstances. But there is also another factor that contributes to the problem. What few dared to say openly for fear of being accused of racial or ethnic bias is that many Muslims bring with them a culture of religious extremism. According to a recent government report, this extremism is encouraged in part by religious schools, many of which are funded by the Saudis. The same report also mentioned that 20 percent of Holland's Islamic schools receive funding from the radical Al-Waqf al-Islami or have radical Muslims on their boards. But whether radical or more moderate, all Islamic schools in Holland, the reports warns, show very little commitment to preparing their students for integration into Dutch society.

Tolerance for the intolerant

This is very serious and one can understand why many Dutch citizens are profoundly disturbed by what is going on. One can also see why the government is under great pressure to do something about the problem. Until September 11 last year, government officials by and large chose to ignore or downplay the danger of radical Muslims in their midst. And even since that terrible event they have been slow to respond to President Bush's call to declare war on terrorism. Several warnings have been issued by terrorism experts that violent Islamic extremists are conducting operations in Holland because they are counting on the country's deeply ingrained taboo against intolerance to give them relative freedom from scrutiny. This wilful ignorance, despite abundant evidence, is amazing. Dreher reports that while visiting Amsterdam he met the pastor of a small congregation of Iranian Pentecostals, all converts from Islam, who told him that he was shocked by the naivete the Dutch have about radical Islam. While admitting that Fortuyn was a bit of an extremist, he nevertheless agreed with much of what he said, and he was glad that somebody finally had said it.

Many Dutch voters agreed with the Iranian pastor who, incidentally, asked not be identified because of past violent threats from area Muslims. Even those who had reservations about Fortuyn's political philosophy recognized that he served as a catalyst for a long overdue discussion of Islam and the limits of multiculturalism. More discerning voters, however, recognized a fatal flaw in Fortuyn's position. The man wanted to save the Netherlands from the Muslim threat, but what exactly did he want to save it for?

As Dreher points out, Fortuyn was an open homosexual who bragged about his promiscuity

and championed Holland's anything-goes society as a morally desirable end. For him, Dreher says, *The glorious fruit of Dutch liberty was not the civilization the Oude Kerk [the famous Old Church located in downtown Amsterdam] stands for, but the institutions on the church's ramparts: Sexyland (live Sex Shows featured one block away from the church), the High Time Coffeeshop (where drugs are openly served), and the ladies in the windows (of Amsterdam's red light district). He did not grasp that the licentious individualism he praised was seriously weakening the bonds of the society he wanted to preserve. And such bonds still exist. The Dutch are, by and large, a middle class nation of friendly, modest people beavering through ordinary lives in quiet towns and suburbs. But they are the canary in the West's cultural mine—an advance warning system of what's to come for the rest of us.*

The West asked for it

It is easy to complain about the Muslim's apparent disinclination to assimilate Dutch or other Western cultural values, but what are those values? What does Holland, what does the West, including the USA and Canada, really have to offer Islam except greater opportunities to acquire material goods and freedom to pursue the pleasures of the flesh? Is it any wonder that many devout Muslims prefer to hold on to their own Islamic values and seek to protect their children from Western decadence? True, governments have the duty to root out terrorist cells hiding in Muslim communities in countries around the world, and they are doing this in varying degrees of intensity. They must deal firmly with all criminals, Muslims and other immigrants, as well as native citizens. But they cannot do much more than that. They cannot force them to adopt moral principles and values which Western nations themselves have rejected or are in the process of rejecting. Fortuyn, of course, did not want this either, because in his view Islamic religion and ethics posed a threat to the brand of hedonism he and many of his followers espoused. So in a sense, he was part of the problem, not the solution.

As Joshua Livestro, a conservative political activist says, "the Dutch worry about what's happening to civil society, but they don't understand that the state cannot make you moral. They fail to see that civil society starts with personal morality and with the family." Any solution, therefore, that does not address the breakdown of the family and the moral order can only be a stopgap measure, a finger in a crumbling dike.

While these observations are helpful, I believe the problem goes even deeper than morals. Morality is always rooted in religion and in Holland's case that means the Reformed religion. The Dutch have abandoned their rich heritage upon which their nation was founded in the sixteenth century. As Dreher puts it: "Like

TYNDALE PARK
CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

TEACHING PRINCIPAL

Tyndale Park Christian School invites applications for the position of Teaching Principal. This is an independent primary and secondary school with a roll of 120 pupils. The position requires a servant of Christ and a "fellow-worker" with leadership and motivational qualities. The applicant will need to be able to support and nurture the distinctive Christian characteristics of the school as laid down in its constitution, educational policy and purpose statement.

Further details are available from the Trust Board, 206 Murphys Road, RD1, Papatoetoe 1730; or fax the school (09) 274 9772; or email admin@tyndalepark.school.nz

dissolute descendants of old money, the Dutch have been living for two generations now on the moral and spiritual capital built from centuries of religious faith and practice, however, imperfect. The accounts are nearly depleted." In the words of Andreas Kinning, a legal philosopher: "What we are witnessing now is the very first generation who grew up without a religious background. They have become consumerists, materialists, and hedonists. They are still law-abiding citizens. We'll have to see what the next generation will become."

Only a genuine spiritual solution

That does not sound very hopeful for the Netherlands, nor for Canada and the USA, because the spiritual and moral climate is not that much better on this side of the ocean. Unless the Lord sends revival so that people will repent and acknowledge that they have

forsaken God and despised His law. Until that happens, let us who know the true nature of the problem and therefore the true solution as well, humble ourselves before the Lord and pray with Daniel: *We have sinned and have committed iniquity and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments ... O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day ... To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him ... yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him. (Daniel 9:5,7,9,11).*

But we must do more than pray. How about bringing the gospel to Muslims in our own neighbourhoods? Admittedly this is no easy

task. Muslims are among the most difficult people to evangelize because they have a fairly sophisticated religion with absolutes similar to Christianity except, of course, that they have no concept of salvation by grace and feel no need of a divine-human Saviour. The least we can do, however, is to acquaint ourselves with this rapidly growing religion and to financially and prayerfully support those who are trying to reach out to these strangers within our gates. For a start, you can learn more by clicking on a "LINK" to Islam on the Free Reformed web site: <http://www.frcna.org>

(The Rev. Cornelius Pronk is the editor of 'The Messenger', the denominational magazine of the Free Reformed Churches of North America, from which publication this article is taken.)

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21 September 2002

The Members,
Reformed Churches of New Zealand

Re Financial Needs of Society

Dear Sir/Madam/Miss,

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand made a major donation towards the legal costs in the *Living Word* Court of Appeal case involving the classification of the Christian videos *GayRights/Special Rights* and *AIDS*. This case was decisively won in a unanimous decision by the five Court of Appeal Judges in favour of the applicant for appeal (*Living Word Distributors Ltd*), quashing the banning order against the videos issued by the Film and Literature Board of Review, and upheld by the High Court on appeal. This was a historic win for the Christian lawyers Peter McKenzie QC and Mr Paul Rishworth, Associate Professor of Law at Auckland University, Counsel for Living Word - a small Hamilton-based Christian bookshop and video distributor. Living Word is run by a dedicated Christian couple who seek to serve the Christian community by supplying evangelical books and videos as teaching and inspirational aids. The Christian community has seen the hand of God at work in this successful appeal and we give Him all the praise!

The successful appeal established two crucial points in law relevant to the operation of the Films, Videos and Classification Act 1993 ("the Act"):

(1) a publication cannot be restricted or banned merely because it expresses politically incorrect views and/or unpopular

Continued next page

opinions (e.g. Christian views critiquing the promiscuous and unhealthy homosexual lifestyle). To come within the jurisdiction of the Classification Office and be restricted a publication must deal with matters of sex, cruelty, violence, crime or horror in such a way that it is “injurious to the public good” (section 3[1] of the Act). The Court ruled that neither video dealt with sex as a depicted activity involving sexual acts, despite claims by the respondent that they “dealt with sex”. Freedom of expression is safeguarded under section 14 of the Bill of Rights so that protections afforded minority groups as defined under the Human Rights Act, and incorporated in the Films Act cannot be used to trump rights protected under BOR.

Christian Ministers can now robustly declare the Biblical teaching on homosexuality, promiscuity, sex, gay rights etc. or any other subject involving human behaviour, without the fear of having their sermons or video and audio presentations “classified” objectionable by the Classification Office and possibly banned. The appeal success in *Living Word* has helped shape and redefine the landscape of public opinion in the whole censorship debate in New Zealand. Almost all classification decisions now use the *Living Word* ruling as a reference point in formal reports. The appeal success will also prevent attempts by “gay-right” activists to level “hate crime” charges against those responsible for producing publications that criticise “gay rights” etc.

The *Living Word* case was successful due to the tireless efforts of a number of dedicated Christian lawyers, researchers and the prayer and financial support of the Christian community. The total costs for the Court of Appeal case were kept remarkably low – about \$12,000. Hundreds of donors contributed. Large donations were made by the Society for the Promotion of Community Standards (\$3,000), two Christian businessmen (\$2,000), appeals through Challenge Weekly (\$5,000), Reformed Churches (~\$1,000) and the remainder from other donors.

The Society (SPCS) provided hundreds of hours of research support and assisted in the coordination of the appeal. It brought together the legal team and facilitated the day-to-day coordination of the preparation for the proceedings. The SPCS executive is most grateful for the spiritual and financial support received from the Reformed Churches and acknowledges the dedicated efforts of this group of churches to function as Christ’s body within the sphere of political life.

Financial Needs for Current Projects.

The Reformed Church members will be aware of the high profile legal cases the Society has been involved in over the last 12 months – High Court action over the French sex-violence film *Baise-Moi*; appeals before the Film and Literature Board of Review over a number of objectionable films such as *Visitor Q* and *Bully* containing sexual violence, necrophilia and a host of perverse material. The Society has mounted a successful challenge against the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Hon. George Hawkins, over his failure to appoint a Deputy Chief Censor. The purpose of all this litigation is to highlight the deliberate dereliction of duty on the part of the Minister, the Review Board, the Chief censor and senior classification officers to properly apply the censorship laws. The recent successful appeal to the High Court re *Baise-Moi*, the banning of a number of films from the Incredible Film Festival by the imposition of restriction orders and presentations before the Film Board, have highlighted the Society’s concerns to the nation. We know that many in the Christian community have been greatly heartened by the successes of the Society.

The Society has seen many of its financial needs for the above actions met through the generosity of its members. **We want to let the Reformed Church community know that we still have significant costs to meet with respect to these Court cases. We have spent about \$15,000 so far and there is no way under the present legislation to claim for costs. The SPCS executive would be most grateful if you would make these needs known to your churches.**

We sincerely believe that God is directing us to mount a continued challenge to the censorship authorities and the Government over the disturbing proliferation of “objectionable” material that is injurious to the public good. We believe that when good people do nothing evil can only but flourish. By our inactivity and tardiness in the face of such evil we effectively condone it. We desperately need moral leadership in this country motivated by men and women of Christian convictions based on the Word of God.

Our executive prays that God will continue to guide and inspire the Reformed churches of New Zealand into action in the cause of the Gospel of Christ.

Yours in His service

**David Lane M.Sc. (Hons.), Dip. Tchg.
Secretary SPCS
Tel. 04-970-1067**

In memoriam

Alexander Berthold Hendrik Funcke

25 September 1980 – 4 June 2002

Dear friends

In the early hours of June 4, at the age of 21 years, it pleased the Lord, in His wise and eternal providence, to bring to close the earthly life of Alexander Funcke. It was a troublesome life, as Alex was diagnosed with Systemic Lupus Erythematosus at the age of 14. SLE is a chronic auto immune disease, in which the the body develops antibodies (which usually fight bacteria and viruses) that attack healthy tissue instead. Lupus is usually a mild disease, however about 5% of people with lupus have serious problems with internal organs such as kidneys, heart, lungs, nervous and immune system and also blood and skin, which make the disease very difficult to cope with.

Alex fell into the 5% category. Initially, Alex tried to ignore his illness. However, he soon discovered that he would never have a normal life. The function of the kidneys deteriorated and early in 1999 he had to start haemodialysis. Then, in 2001 and 2002, within a space of nine months he underwent two serious heart operations.

Alex has in times passed caused us a lot of grief and sorrow with his behaviour and his illness. But if it was difficult for us, how difficult it was for him to accept that he had to have treatment if he wanted to live, that his life was never going to be as others his own age.

For years he struggled with "why me?". Try to explain that to an almost-adult. We can say that God has a purpose for everything, but that is an easy thing to say if you are not on the receiving end. Having the knowledge in your head is good, but knowing this in your heart and accepting that this is God's will is not our work, but His. Alex as an artist expressed himself through his paintings, but also through his poems. In his earlier poems he described his anger with the world, and God was not in the picture at all. Later, and it is a comfort to us that we found these, his poems changed and he spoke about leaving his life in God's hands. Giving up the fight to save himself, he seemed to accept his lot and he put his trust in God. This answers the question, "why me?" or, "why Alex?". God sometimes works in mysterious ways, to fulfil His purposes. Alex, as we knew him before he became physically ill would, humanly spoken, never have come to God. Too much had happened in his life already, and Alex at times felt a lot of hate and anger towards the world.

His illness was a means in God's hand to call Alex to Himself, and in His time take him from us. We grieve, but not without the hope we may have after reading his poem "Hope," which was printed in Palmerston North's church bulletin.

Many a time we are still reminded of him, and when we hear songs that were sung during the funeral service the tears still come to our eyes.

Again, many thanks to the people who never gave up on Alex and visited and encouraged him.

Alex was not always easy to deal with, and at times he was a bit of an oddball. But, and I quote from a book given to us by Scott, a Christian doctor and friend of Alex, "We're all oddballs, but God loves us anyhow". The oddballs in the Jewish society were the ones visited by Jesus—the lepers, the gentiles, the mad—and they were cured. (*What's So Amazing About Grace* by Philip Yancey) The ones society tends to avoid were visited by Him, who also in this case worked in the heart of Alex and turned him in such a way that he asked for Him.

Lenie & Ido Funcke



PS. We have since moved to Christchurch. Our contact details are: 55 Stanton Crescent, Hoon Hay, Christchurch, Ph (03) 3386407 email fulendo@inspire.net.nz

HOPE

*It says in the Bible, that God really cares,
and if you pray, He your heart spares.
From eternal agony, from hell and its fire,
So Lord I pray Thee, make me desire
Thee, and only Thee.
and if it is Thy will, take my soul and set me free.*

*Many tears I have shed,
Take me Lord,
Take me where I can rest my weary head.
My soul cries for the Lord, the only one there is.
Give me wisdom, Give me love
Give me Lord what I need,
And plant Thy holy seed,
in my heart.
And let me never from Thy ways depart.*

By Alexander Funcke

TEACHER

THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL ASSOCIATION
WELLINGTON DISTRICT

*invites Reformed applicants to respond to the following
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POSITION 1

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POSITION 2

Year 3 and 4 (class of 14 children)

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Phone 04-528 4700		Phone 04-5284030
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E-Mail: sales@nfad.co.nz		

A feminine focus

Elizabeth Prentiss

Comforter of the sick and sorrowing

Sally Davey

Have you ever felt inadequate to help people going through a really terrible trial? Have you been at a loss for words, afraid to go to them because you're not at all sure you'd offer any comfort, and conscious of a clumsy lack of understanding of their situation? So you hesitate, mindful of duty, grieving for them, but fearful of causing further distress? Many a Christian has been in this quandary before. Sometimes we go to the sufferer, and do our best for them in spite of ourselves. Other times we stay away, ashamed of ourselves. How can we gain the wisdom and the empathy to be a real comforter? To be sure, some have been given a special gift for this—but the truth is, we all need to learn how to weep with those who weep—and to offer wise consolation. God teaches us this.

And how is this? He puts *us* through trials! Compassion and wisdom come when we experience trials first-hand and learn to deal with them with *His* help. Experiencing something first-hand gives us the equipment to help others in the same situation. Sufferers can trust someone who has been through the same affliction as they are going through right now—we all know a fellow-sufferer will understand! This is how 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 is worked out: "*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.*"

Her background

The story of Elizabeth Prentiss illustrates this truth exactly. We know Elizabeth, a Presbyterian minister's wife, as the writer of that captivating novel, *Stepping Heavenward*, and of the hymn "*More Love to Thee, O Christ.*" But as a Christian woman she was a sweet, impulsively-loving friend to those whose lives she touched. She had a particular ability to comfort the suffering—and there were many who drew strength from her help. But it was in the depths of her own trials—common ones, yet severe—that Elizabeth learned the compassion and empathy to give this help.

Elizabeth was born into a Christian family. Her father was Edward Payson, a much-loved Congregational minister in Maine, the northern-

most seaboard state of the United States. Mr Payson was part of a long tradition of faithful, godly Calvinistic ministers—the Congregational churches were those founded by the Puritans who came from England in the 17th century. Edward was a fine preacher and a man of prayer. He was a gentle man who loved all his children and brought them up to love and serve the Saviour. Little Elizabeth doted on her father, and whenever he was away she longed for his return. She really was "Daddy's girl." But in



Elizabeth Prentiss

1827, when Elizabeth was only 9 years old, Edward died after a long and painful illness (perhaps cancer). He was a most loving pastor, and near the time of his death he asked for congregational members to meet with him at his house. Here he urged them, as one about to die, to take great care about the state of their souls. "O! my friends! Do, *do* love this glorious Being. Do seek the salvation of your immortal souls. Hear the voice of your dying minister, while he entreats you to care for your souls." This left a great impression on many hearts; not least on his little daughter.

The effect of her father's death

Her father's death had a major and lasting effect on the family's life. They had to find a much more modest house to live in. Certainly, the family was not as well off as before. Mrs Payson, a woman of much faith, was nevertheless often weighed down and anxious about the difficulties of maintaining the household. Despite the loss of her father, however, both Elizabeth and her sister had a good education, one that developed her taste for good reading and her gift for writing. She also had an aptitude for languages: for the rest of her life she kept up the habit of reading theological and other religious works in both French and German. Her fluency with her pen was one important way Elizabeth was able to pass on to others the help that God gave her in her afflictions.

Though brought up to believe, in a believing family, young Elizabeth was in her twenties before she gained assurance of salvation. This certainty followed a period of deepening conviction of sin. As she describes the time, it is almost in the language of Jonathan Edwards, her New England forebear in the faith. She wrote to a friend full of love and praise for Christ as the "chiefest of ten thousand" and as One "altogether lovely." At this time Elizabeth was working as a teacher in Richmond, Virginia. She delighted in giving herself, heart and soul, to guiding and training the young girls entrusted to her care. It was not easy work: sometimes it took all her natural charm and wittiness to win their hearts and make them learn! But it seems she was a successful teacher, and taught them well.

Her marriage

Not long afterwards she met George Prentiss, a young Presbyterian minister, and the man she was to marry. All we know about Elizabeth's life comes from his biography and collection of her letters, which he published shortly after her death.* This, while a wonderful record, is also quite frustrating. George must have been a somewhat reticent man. The only reference to their romance and engagement in this book is that "*The records of the next year and a half are very abundant! But they are mostly of too private a character to furnish materials for this narrative, belonging to what she called 'the deep story of my heart.'*" George seems to have no appreciation of what

interests female readers—or perhaps he is warning us not to be too inquisitive?

In 1845 the young minister and his new wife moved to New Bedford, Massachusetts, a seafaring town from which whaling ships set off to distant oceans in search of whales. Some even came as far as New Zealand. (It is the town in which the beginning of Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick* is set.) About five years later, George was called to Newark, New Jersey; and a few months after that to a church in New York City. There they spent the rest of their lives. George worked hard as a pastor—and Elizabeth was a faithful and useful minister's wife; encouraging of her husband, and a kind friend to many needy souls in their congregation.

Deep personal suffering

It was in their first few years in New York that deep personal suffering marked their lives. Their little three-year old son, Eddy, sickened and died one winter; and a few months after that their newborn daughter, Bessie, contracted erysipelas and died a frightful death. Elizabeth herself nearly died, the shock coming so soon after giving birth. The entries in her journal and the letters she wrote to friends at this time show how sharply the deaths of little ones wound a mother. Her account of their last hours is impossible to read with dry eyes. But it was not as if Elizabeth was lacking in hope for them: for the rest of her life, she was to comfort friends who had lost children in the trust that her Eddy and Bessie would meet them in heaven. Without doubt, the death of these two dear children deepened her faith and made it more useful to others. George wrote of this time: "Never again was it exactly the same life. She had entered into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, and the new experience wrought a great change in her whole being."

The striking thing about what Elizabeth was learning, though, is that she did not allow her sufferings to swallow her up in self-absorption. Always, in her letters, we find a wonderful outgoingness, and an ability to feel deeply for others no matter what she herself had suffered or was suffering. To one similarly bereaved friend she wrote: "I never realise my own affliction in the loss of my children as I do when death enters the house of a friend. Then I feel that I can't have it so. But why should I think I know better than my Divine Master what is good for me, or good for those I love? Dear Carrie, I trust that in this hour of sorrow you have with you that Presence, before which alone sorrow and sighing flee away. God is left, Christ is left; sickness, accident, death cannot touch you there. Is not this a blissful thought?"

Sharing their experience with others

Elizabeth also turned this experience into helpful published writings for both children and adults. Children have to live with death sometimes, and they grieve, too. Some of

Elizabeth's most delightful books are written for children, and her *Little Susy* series, the first of which were written soon after her children's deaths, are probably the best-known. Susy was a little girl who died when she was six; but before she died she had learned many important spiritual lessons, and was quite a mature and trusting young Christian at the time of her death. As shown in Elizabeth's stories, Susy's teachers, Mrs Love, Aunt Patience, Mr Ought, Miss Joy and the angel Faith, were able to make their little pupil ready for heaven through many lessons in daily life. Likewise, Elizabeth's own experiences of bereavement—the loss of both her father and her little ones—gave her the insight to depict the trials of Katy, the heroine of *Stepping Heavenward*, in a realistic, edifying way. Throughout her life, Elizabeth received a huge correspondence from readers grateful for her delightful, empathetic writings that spoke so compassionately to their hearts.

For most of her life, Elizabeth also suffered physically. From her twenties onwards she had dreadful trouble sleeping; and would often wake up many times during the night—or lie awake, sleepless. She was one of those for whom sleeplessness meant very difficult days afterwards, when exhaustion would make every usual task, including social interaction, very hard going. She called it a "horrid calamity" and wrote, "I know just how one feels! I declare, a good deal of the time pulling words out of me is like pulling out teeth." Fellow insomniacs, doesn't this strike a chord?(!)

Neuralgia, a severe pain, often in the face, was also a frequent trial. Imagine suffering this kind of ailment in the days before good pain relief! Yes, Elizabeth knew what it was to be ill. There is no doubt that her early death (due to acute gastro-enteritis) in her late fifties was hastened by the general weakness of her health. But many women have suffered, you might observe. Why choose her, in particular? The reason is that she "improved" her suffering, to use the old expression. She turned it to spiritual benefit, both for herself and for others.

Developing her gift

George noticed this especially. He wrote that a time of intense suffering in the early 1860s prepared her for a period of special usefulness in the years following. There were an unusual number of tragic deaths and sicknesses in their congregation during this period, and Elizabeth was always in the homes and at the bedside of those in sore need. She developed her gift with words, always having the right thing to say or write—as from one fellow-sufferer to another. Her letters, preserved by George, are truly remarkable for their sympathy and wisdom. To a beloved sister-in-law, deathly ill on her 25th wedding anniversary, she wrote, "Dearest Anna, I have thought of you all day with the tenderest sympathy, knowing how you had

looked forward to it, and what a contrast it offers to your bridal day twenty-five years ago. But I hope it has not been wholly sad! For I can see, though through your tears you cannot, that the Son of God walks with you in this furnace of affliction, and that He is sanctifying it to your soul, that ages hence you will look on this day as better, sweeter, than the day of your espousals." (Biblical imagery, at her fingertips since the sleepless nights she spent in the Scriptures, is a hallmark of her writing style.) She also had a jolly good sense of humour, and her friends enjoyed her spirited fun. She used this to good effect in cheering people up as well. To one friend she wrote: "Can't you do M.S. [another friend] up in your next letter, and send her to me on approbation? Instead of being satisfied that I've got you, I want her and everybody else who is really good, to fill up some of the empty rooms in my heart. This is a rambling, scrambling letter, but I don't care, and don't believe you do. Well, good-bye, and thank your stars that this bit of paper hasn't got any arms and can't hug you!"

Yet quite reserved

Yes, Elizabeth Prentiss was a very likeable woman—one can't help thinking, after reading something from her pen, "I'd love to meet her!" But the truth is, as George tells us, that

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Elizabeth was underneath quite a shy, and naturally quite reserved, person. It was what the Lord put her through, for His sake, that made her the loveable, useful servant she was. Are you suffering right now? Do you wonder what for? Take heart from Elizabeth. She came

to understand some of suffering's deep purposes, and concluded: "I literally love the house of mourning better than the house of feasting. All my long, long years of suffering and sorrow make sorrow-stricken homes homelike, and I can not but feel, because I

know it from experience, that Christ loves to be in such homes."

George Lewis Prentiss, *More love to Thee: the Life and Letters of Elizabeth Prentiss* (Still in print and available today)

Abbeyfield Houses

Senior living options

No, this is not a story about monks and nuns, monasteries and convents or the like, simply one of the last in our series about options for housing the elderly. One day a leaflet in the letterbox attracted attention—an Abbeyfield House was to be built in our area.

"What is this all about?"

A phone call or two brought some answers, and a story of Christian compassion, courage and determination. It also led to a visit to Masterton to view an already existing Abbeyfield. Now, it is not expected that there will be a rush of enquiries amongst our church members, but there might be some ideas here: one or two church-sponsored 'Abbeyfield' type of houses is quite a thought.

It is not insignificant that the concept of Abbeyfield Houses is a Christian one. History honestly told would reveal that Christians have been to the forefront of social and prison reforms, social services, education, the establishment of hospitals and residential child care facilities, service to seamen in foreign ports, and the provision of homes for the homeless. The critical secular world has forgotten this. Abbeyfield Houses likewise arose out of Christian compassion—the God-inspired vision of a British Army major, Richard Carr-Gomm. His story cannot be told here, but

his experiences both in World War II in the army, and as a result of his re-affirmation of faith in the Lord at a Billy Graham crusade, led to action from his deep concern for the lonely, particularly the elderly lonely. His venture into this was a common experience in the development of a Christian life: a step by step journey with the Lord, from awareness of a need, conviction that something must be done, and the following through to unforeseen and often unimaginable fulfilment of a vision. Resigning from the army, Richard first worked for a Home Help organisation, and discovered that many of his clients were more in desperate need of human companionship than of the benefits of the practical help he was giving. (He was beginning to be known as the scrubbing Major.) All were keen to talk to him, and some spent sunny days sitting on a park bench to watch the world go by, their only pathetic contact with fellow humans. Richard Carr-Gomm saw that material (physical) and human (emotional) needs were interlocked.

This realisation led to the purchase, from his own army gratuity, of a six-roomed house badly in need of upgrading (he undertook the work himself), and the establishing of a home for four residents, he himself acting as its housekeeper and somewhat incompetent cook for the first few weeks. Not much time elapsed

before a second house was purchased, and soon he saw that for progress, a charitable trust should be set up.

Its beginning

His first five supporters met in his bed-sit at Abbeyfield Road, and so the Abbeyfield Society was born. The name chosen was not inappropriate, for Abbeyfield Road was so named in commemoration of the site of a large and charitable medieval abbey, one of those dissolved four hundred years earlier by Henry VIII. Richard's aim was that Abbeyfield Houses should run within a Christian framework with "interdenominational prayers, and a regular newsletter." By 1963 there were 180 houses in Britain. The TV programme, "*This is Your Life*," featuring Richard Carr-Gomm, brought a surge of interest and gifts.

Now well over nine hundred of these houses are spread across the world in several countries, each attuned to the particular needs and peculiarities of the individual country. In New Zealand, the first one was opened about seven years ago. Abbeyfield Houses are intended as an answer for those left living alone, who don't want to live alone, who are still active and capable, but who find other options not suitable or perhaps too expensive for them. So far, houses have been established



in Whangarei, Motueka, Nelson, and Masterton, and committees have been formed in other centres, in various stages of development. Of course, none of the houses is identical. Some of them are new, built 'from scratch'. Others are converted from already existing suitable large houses. The buildings are small when compared with 'institutions', intended to house not more than ten individuals, each with his/her own bed-sitter and private en suite. Each house has also a live-in housekeeper/cook with private quarters. She (or it could be 'he') is responsible for providing two main meals a day, and for keeping clean and in order the common rooms, as well as keeping an eye on the residents and their well being. Residents organise their own breakfast, and must be capable of caring for themselves, being responsible for their own washing, and the care and cleaning of their own apartments, although they are free to employ help for either or both of these, or a district nurse for showering.

One example

Masterton's Abbeyfield, which can be taken as typical of those in New Zealand, was formerly the vicarage next to the Anglican church. This vicarage, still in excellent condition, had outlived its usefulness for the purposes of the church, so was sold to the Abbeyfield Society. The church grounds were large, so a new vicarage was built behind the church, while sufficient ground to erect a large wing behind joined to the old vicarage was divided off from the church property. In this wing are the residential apartments, a laundry and airing room, facilities for visiting hairdressers, and a storage room shelved with named divisions for each resident for travelling bags and infrequently used items, and large enough to house such extras as an exercycle or similar. A communal gallery with easy chairs overlooks a cultivated courtyard. The old vicarage area of the house contains the housekeeper's private flat on the second storey, while downstairs are kitchen, the communal dining room, and the lounge/library. Residential suites are a good size (25 square metres) and are furnished with the residents' own furniture, so treasured possessions can be brought in and the personal atmosphere of one's former home is not lost. Some of the resident's suites are sparsely furnished, and some chock full of little knick-knacks, according to individual taste. Each room has space for a bed and dressing table tucked away in an alcove behind the bathroom, and for three or four easy chairs, sideboard and table, bookcase, or whatever takes your fancy. A nightstore heater keeps the temperature even, and each suite has a private telephone. Wheel-chair access is easy, and the en suite is designed for the elderly. The suite is the private domain of the occupant—no one enters without permission. We were privileged to be given this permission

by two or three of the residents so that we could view the accommodation.

Abbeyfields are not run as institutions or in 'rest home' conditions, but rather in as much a family atmosphere as possible. The residents live their own lives, come and go as they please, do their own personal shopping, and join or continue in their own clubs of interest. If they wish, their own hairdresser may come in and use the facilities provided. Visitors are welcome to stay for a few days. A special visitors' room is available for renting, and visitors' meals will also be provided at a reasonable charge. Three or four large garages are available, but many do not now own their own cars. The Abbeyfield committees try if possible to place the houses in a central location, near a shopping centre, or at least near a bus stop.

Who is responsible for the administration of a house?

The house is owned by an incorporated society and is run by a management committee, supported by a house committee which is responsible for maintenance, employing the housekeeper, and for activities such as arranged outings. New residents' applications are received and considered by the management committee.

Who may become a resident?

There is actually no age restriction on this, although the lonely elderly are particularly targeted. A report on the applicants may be made by their own doctors, but new residents must also be examined and passed by the GP appointed by the committee, although once in residence the occupant may retain the services of his/her own GP. Newcomers are admitted for two weeks on a trial basis only, at the end of which other residents have a say as to whether the newcomer will become permanent. This helps avoid the difficulty of having newcomers who are obviously quite incompatible with the current residents.

What does it cost?

The residents pay a set sum per week. This is geared to be within the reach of people with little income beyond the Government superannuation, and covers the total rental/living expenses (including breakfast ingredients), lighting and heating, but not telephone rental (which is at a reduced rate), and of course personal expenses. The government 'living alone' allowance is not affected by the living arrangement.

A family atmosphere

Once a resident is accepted permanently, he/she is encouraged to look upon the house as "home". It has been found that this 'together but separate' living has been good for both physical and mental health. Those who make decisions for themselves, remain active, and enjoy social contact with others, do not

deteriorate as fast either mentally or physically. In other words, both social contact and independence are good for us! However, in the case where there is deterioration in a home dweller to such a degree that full-time care is essential, a committee consisting of relatives and both the personal and the Abbeyfield GP meets to assess the resident and make any decision concerning relocation to an intensive care rest home.

The residents in Masterton Abbeyfield were obviously well looked after and contented. Some were in their own rooms doing their own thing, some were enjoying each other's company sitting in the gallery, two were in the lounge reading books from the communal library, and one frail old gentleman with a walking aid was being introduced to the others as a potential new resident on the two week trial basis. The housekeeper had arranged for the chairman of the management committee to come in especially to meet us. Both received us with great courtesy, and were very happy to be interviewed and to show us round.

So, here is something to think about. Something to pray about. Perhaps an Abbeyfield House is for you, either as a resident yourself, or as a sphere of service. Wherever they are built there is a need for voluntary practical helpers, for committee members, and for a housekeeper keen on cooking (perhaps also in need of a home!). The latter of course is a salaried position, open to anyone active, with a love of and patience with and care for people—particularly older ones.

Keep an eye out for any Abbeyfields in your own region. The Lord inspired these houses. The Christian church should maintain an interest in them.

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World news

Dramatic shortage of Reformed pastors expected

Despite a year-long campaign to attract new students, only six have enrolled for their first year of study at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) in Kampen, The Netherlands. Kampen II launched a campaign in 2001 with the goal of recruiting 25 students.

The (Liberated) Reformed Churches have 302 ministers serving 126,456 members. Some 55 congregations have vacant pastorates. A large number of pastors will begin retiring in 2010. As a result, the shortage is expected to rise dramatically.

In an interview with the "*Nederlands Dagblad*" Kampen's Greek professor, J.A. Meijer, underlines the fact that real numbers are even worse than they appear to be at first sight. Two of the six new students are women. And the faculty knows from experience that only half of the men who enroll will become ministers. The Reformed Churches can realistically expect only three freshmen to

enter the ministry. Since 12 students enrolled in 2001, the two classes combined will probably produce no more than nine pastors.

Over the past 12 months, Kampen II has made serious efforts to publicise the school and find potential candidates. Last spring, 25 interested candidates visited Kampen for an information day. The school also received many responses from men who had already completed university education and were interested in full-time ministry.

Meijer continued, "After all that effort, we did not expect this response." Professor Meijer further notes that potential theology students are aware of what is going on in the church. Many pastors are on forced leave and "that has not escaped the notice of these students."

In an interview with "*Christian Renewal*" the Liberated Reformed Synod's new moderator, Dr. Erik de Boer, points to the dramatic rise in the number of pastors who leave the ministry or who are forced to leave their congregations. He estimates that up to 30 percent of the denomination's pastors have been in some sort of difficulty over the past few years. In his own classis, two of the eight pastors have been released from their congregations.

"Twenty five years ago, congregations were willing to accept the weaknesses of their pastors. They viewed them as God's servant, with all his strengths and weaknesses. Congregations today demand much more from a pastor and are less willing to be patient with him. If the minister does not live up to the expectations of a part of the congregation, a body of resistance may develop. A shift in the church council may tip the balance against a minister," according to de Boer.

+ Dr. John P. Elliott, Executive Editor, *Christian Observer* (540) 229-7703

Irian Jaya verges on explosion

The recent fatal attack near the Freeport mine in Papua (Irian Jaya) could be far more significant than it initially appears. There are several groups with a vested interest in annihilating the overwhelmingly Christian indigenous community. The Indonesian government wants control of resources; the military wants power, and the Islamists want to consolidate Papua as part of the Islamic world.

On 3 November, 2001, Osama bin Laden made a broadcast on Al-Jazeera television condemning the granting of independence to East Timor, which he had considered to be "part of the Islamic world."

While the Laskar Jihad has been building

its troops in Papua since 2000, there has been a huge influx of mujahideen since April 2002. As in East Timor, Maluku, and Central Sulawesi, they operate in collusion with elements of the Indonesian security forces.
+ World Evangelical Alliance Secretariat, PO Box 1530, Wheaton, IL 60189

Hungarian Reformed vision for America

Across more than eight decades, ministers serving North America's Hungarian Reformed community have gathered on Labour Day to discuss the common interests of their congregations. Elders and church representatives hold a similar meeting for the Presbyters Association.

Billed as a Holy Fast for repentance and renewal, the 2002 gathering drew attention to the expanding mission of Hungarian Reformed institutions in America and adopted a seven-point set of priorities for the future.

1. Preach the Word and teach Reformed doctrine and heritage with particular attention to the Heidelberg Catechism and Second Helvetic Confession and the doctrine of grace through Christ.
2. Cultivate spirituality and personal holiness through discipleship and church discipline.
3. Develop educational resources focused on polity and sacraments. Explore the possibility of developing Hungarian Reformed schools.
4. Establish ways to acclimate non-Hungarians into the Hungarian Reformed Church without compromising the historic mission to the Hungarian-speaking communities.
5. Create an expanding missionary vision.
6. Guard against seeking quantity at the expense of quality.
7. Compile and distribute a statistical report on the Hungarian Reformed congregations in America.

Most members of the Association hold membership in the Hungarian Reformed Church in America, Calvin Synod, or Presbyterian congregations with historic involvement in Hungarian communities.

+ Rt. Rev. Louis Medgyesi, Bishop of Calvin Synod, 607 Plum Street, Fairport Harbor, OH 44077
+ Rt. Rev. Alexander Forro, Bishop of the Hungarian Reformed Church in America, 9 Grove St., Poughkeepsie, NY 12601

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Missions in focus

Sent to Sendai

Cal and Edie Cummings are missionaries serving with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (USA). Their field of service is particularly difficult. Generally, when that term is used—a “difficult” mission-field—we instinctively think of the Muslim world. But no, that’s not it. The Cummings are serving in Japan—a closed country if ever there was one. With only 1.5% of the population professing to be Christian, and annual church growth of only about 0.1%, Japan is certainly an unharvested mission-field. But is the harvest ripe? I’ll let you decide for yourself, after reading these portions of the Cummings’ latest newsletter.

Community outreach

“Thank you for praying for the community outreach in southern Sendai. God has been bringing burdened women, whose hearts are opened to the gospel, to the class. Family concerns, relationships, health, and future—along with the general anxieties in the country over the economy, education, government corruption and ineptitude, and safety—weigh on their hearts. One shocking statistic recently published in the newspaper here is that 30,000 Japanese have committed suicide each year since 1998. That’s one hundred people a day for the last four years! There are many anxious people who have no hope. Oh, that the eyes and heart of the Lord would be in this land.

“Recently, two young mothers have been especially on my heart. At our community center meeting, Mrs Yamada poured out her heart concerning the fact that she wants faith in Christ as she has been hearing from the messages, but her husband and his extended family are practising members of the Soko Gakkai, an aggressive Buddhist sect. She and her husband agreed to ‘religious freedom’ in their marriage, but she is coming to believe that, not only does she not want to join the Soko Gakkai activities, she really wants to know the Saviour Jesus. She fears her husband’s reaction if she tells him of her desire and fears he will forbid her coming to our meetings, which are her source of fellowship and hearing about Christ.

Pray that she might have an undivided heart for Christ, and that the gospel will reach her husband as well.

“The other young mother is someone we have known for some time and have asked for prayer for in the past. Last month Nobuko Sasahara attended a meeting at Yamagata Chapel on ‘Women in the Church.’ After the speaker spoke and the ladies had a time of

prayer, Nobuko came to me and said, ‘I want to become a Christian.’ Her mother-in-law is a very devout Buddhist and is insisting that Nobuko participate in all the ceremonies at the temple and shrine, and have herself and her two children enrolled at the temple as well. But Nobuko refuses. Her mother-in-law is threatening to cut her off from the family, even threatening to have her son divorce Nobuko. How her faith is tested, even as her heart longs to be Christ’s disciple! *Pray that Nobuko and Yamada will have a heart from Christ and that they will know the eyes and the heart of the Lord to be with them.*

Answered prayer

“God is so good in answering the prayer of faith. He has brought new members to our English classes. We have seen new faces in the Hachinohe church each month. Canaan Church has called a young man to be their pastor, and will be in their new building in September. On Pentecost Sunday a covenant child professed her faith, and an infant was baptized. God is adding to His church.

A great need

“We really sense a great need for more workers to come to Japan. I have been travelling once a month up north to Hachinohe to assist a Japanese pastor whose health is very fragile and whose congregation is quite small. Another small RCJ chapel in Rokunohe is without a pastor as well. They are greatly encouraged by our coming, yet we pray for the day when there might be more workers for the harvest. To the south of us, there is another small group of people in Fukushima without a full-time pastor. Kaz Yaegashi preaches twice a month there besides his weekly ministry in Yamagata. Then there is Koriyama, a city of 400,000 without an RCJ church and Akita that has no Reformed witness. *Pray for more missionaries. Pray also that more missionary associates will come forward in the next few months.* Please won’t YOU come!!

*“Love in Christ,
Cal and Edie Cummings and children”*

News from the OPC:

At the start of this year, MIF reported on **Rev Ben Westerveld** who is working Quebec City, Canada, on behalf of the OPC and the Reformed Church of Québec. In a recent report to the OPC’s Committee on Foreign Missions, Rev Westerveld said, “the Lord has done some pretty amazing things! More people are worshipping with us. We’ve received two new families, a single adult, and two other new converts. As well, several new people come

on a very regular basis. It’s quite exciting to worship with a group of fifty believers! Many members are more active in nourishing and practising their faith. They are reading their Bibles and praying more regularly. Bible studies and fellowship groups are well attended. People are talking to their neighbours about Jesus and inviting them to church. Big and small deeds of kindness are quietly taking place. In short, the Lord is answering your prayers and the prayers of many others. Thanks! We’ve really seen the Lord do some wonderful things.”

MIF Prayer Notes:

The **National Diaconate Committee** has once again requested that our special collections over Christmas, be designated for the ongoing work of C.A.R.E. India—a Christian ministry to those suffering from HIV/AIDS. Rev Bert Kuipers from the Australian churches travelled there in September last year, and took video footage of his trip. The NDC has edited this down to a 15-minute presentation that is available in MPEG format on a CD-ROM. One copy of this presentation has been sent to each session throughout New Zealand. If you would like to see it, and have a computer to play the CD on, please ask your deacons. Please also pray for the ongoing work of the NDC, and for the outreach of team members involved with the C.A.R.E. project in India.

Continue to pray for the

Overseas Mission Board, as they look at possibilities for further involvement with the work in Papua New Guinea. Praise the Lord for increased interest in missions, and for those who are now involved in, or are contemplating, missionary service.

Pray for **SPROUT** as they continue to promote the work of mission to the young people in our congregations.

Rev Stephen and Dorinda ‘t Hart appreciate our prayers as they continue with their ministry in Papua New Guinea. Pray for God’s provision and guidance as the church in Port Moresby seeks to establish a Reformed bookstore in the months to come.

Rev Hans and Lisa Vaatstra also need our prayers as Hans prepares for his exploratory journey to Papua New Guinea in the New Year. Pray for God’s guidance and protection in preparations and travel, and for a clear indication of whether the Vaatstras should work in this field of service in time to come.

Rev Barry and Mrs Anne James are back in Uganda, to spend a further year at the

Continued next page

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Westminster Theological College in Mbale. Pray for health and strength as they settle in, and for wisdom as they re-establish relationships with missionaries and national believers. Pray for provision of the equipment and other resources they need to live and minister in Mbale. Most of all, pray for an effective ministry that would impact the lives of seminary students and, from there, people in the congregations where these men will serve in years to come.

Janice Reid is in Myanmar at the beginning of this month, and in the second week she travels from there to Cambodia. In Cambodia, she plans to provide informal training for radio announcers, to meet with the Director of the FEBC office there and explore ways in which the International Resource Group can provide assistance for local staff in Phnom Penh. She will also have meetings with a French colleague who is based there, and who provides assistance with Janice's *Hands-On Training* project.

Country profile: **Japan**



Japan is a vastly crowded island nation with some 126 million people. It has been called "the world's most powerful export-oriented economy," despite the lack of natural resources. In spite of this, though, the low birth-rate and the ageing population are beginning to slow the rate of economic growth.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution, but nationalistic Shintoism is on the increase. Over 80% of Japanese claim no personal religion, but most follow the demands of idolatrous and ancestor-venerating Buddhism, as well as the rituals of polytheistic Shintoism. Many also follow some of the hundreds of newer religious movements which are offshoots of these. Soko Gakkai is the largest of these new movements, with 17 million followers.

Pray for Japan:

1. Praise the Lord for the spiritual openness of the 1990s, after very little real church growth for over a century. The

Kobe earthquake and the threat of others in the Tokyo area, the failure of the ruling class, economic meltdown, increasing rebelliousness of young people and the rise of anti-social and violent cults have all provoked soul-searching and even a questioning of Japanese value systems.

2. Japan is a mixture of openness and unresponsiveness. The powers associated with idolatry in temples and ancestor worship in homes have never been decisively challenged.
3. Japanese are sincere, polite, hard-working—and too busy to give heed to the Gospel. Most see the value of religion, 20% have a definite religion, but only 10% believe in the existence of a personal God. Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring revelation of God and then a conviction of sin to the nation.
4. Pray for the Church in Japan:
 - a. For new leaders, writers and evangelists to communicate God's Truth to fellow-Japanese.
 - b. Church attendance is low, having decreased since 1995; only 33% of Protestants attend services weekly. Often Christians are influenced by the Buddhist/Shinto religions which have no regular attendance requirements, and this thinking is carried over into Christian activities.
 - c. The drive for success and desire to satisfy the demands of employers make it hard for men to openly identify with and become active in a church. Women are in the great majority in most congregations.
 - d. At least 70% of all churches have an average attendance of less than 30. Too much is expected of the pastor. Pray for pastors willing to activate lay people to engage in outreach to non-Christians.
5. Numerous rural areas are scarcely touched with the gospel.
6. The ruling elite have been little influenced. Pray for the Emperor cocooned in tradition and committed, by his position, to Shintoism. Pray for politicians, bankers and industrialists who have such global impact through their leadership — or lack of it.

C.A.R.E. – a special work of care and compassion

Have you seen the CD video that the National Diaconate Committee have placed with each Church? In September 2001, the Rev Bert Kuipers visited the C.A.R.E. programme in India. The CD is the record of that visit. In it we hear the Doctor explaining the medical history and condition of patients, we observe the house visits, travel with the P.P.'s (volunteers who themselves have H.I.V. which is under treatment) on their circuits, and attend out-patient clinics. We are also introduced to the director of CARE, Paulus Samuel. He tells us simply how, after witnessing the most distressing sufferer he had ever experienced, he was challenged by a doctor friend, who was a follower of another religion. As they left the patient's side the doctor stopped Paulus and challenged him: "Why don't you guys do something for people like this? **Only you Christians do such things!**" Under the hand of God, that was the catalyst that led to the development of the CARE work in India.

AIDs victims live with a terrible curse manifesting itself in a disgusting disease, while the HIV positive patient lives with both haunting fears and a loathsome stigma. This sphere of work is not the glamorous side of medicine. Think about it! In the 37 months to the end of July 2002, CARE has had 1233 patients, each of whom will have experienced any or all of the following feelings or emotions: dismay, agony, anger, rejection, regret. Then reflect for a moment on the reality that in that same period, 31% of those same clients have died—that is 387 souls. What depressing outcomes! What bleak results! How would you handle that degree of mortality in your work environment?

Out of this, our Redeemer God is nevertheless able to draw beauty, just as He is able to nurture from a putrid, stagnant pond a water lily of pristine colour and beauty. Through His gracious work, He can transform from broken twisted and hurting lives new creations, new creatures, bearing the distinct likeness of Christ.

In each communication that we receive from Paulus, he urges upon us in New Zealand to pray for the work of CARE. Ought we not to pray for what only our Father in heaven can do, transforming the ugly into beautiful, the detestable into loveable, the sinner into saint? And ought we not to pray for these brothers and sisters who are working at the coal-face of kingdom work, that theirs might be a graciousness, a winsomeness that engages for the Lord Jesus Christ the attention of the sick, the needy and those at the end of their own human resourcefulness? Please include the CARE team and work in your regular prayers. May God's compassion shine through this

beautiful but difficult work.

Christmas appeal

This Christmas, we wish to dedicate our RCNZ Christmas Appeal to the ongoing work of the CARE programme. The generosity of our Churches over the last two years has enabled us to provide total ongoing support of \$40,000.00, which has been forwarded in regular quarterly sums of \$5,000. With your enabling, the NDC would love to continue this measure of kingdom investment in that work. Look out for a second CD video that gives a different perspective on this work, to be released about the time you receive this Faith in Focus issue.

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Your National Diaconate committee suggested to Paulus Samuel that CARE write up for us some case studies so that we, so far away, may be able to put a face, so to speak, on the work done there in India with the support of our humble gifts. The following are but two examples (*is but one example*) of several that are now on file with us.

Muthumalai aged 36 was widowed in 1998. She has a son aged 20 and a daughter of 16. Her parents died when she was a child. She comes from a middle class family, having been brought up by her Aunt and Uncle in the city of



Tuticorin. She married Muthuraj in a very proper way.

Then as days went by many problems arose within the wider family. For that reason the couple moved to Bombay and started a family business in food. The husband ran the Idli shop. They thought that by relocating they would leave their problems behind. In Bombay the husband had contact with many friends, through whom he developed relationships with numerous women. He often fell sick and eventually became very ill so that they were not able to continue the business. This led to their return to their native city Tuticorin, where she took

her husband to various doctors in search of help. He did not regain his health.

They were referred to the Madurai Government Hospital where he gave a blood specimen for testing and were advised to return after one week for the results. Since returning from Bombay they had incurred heavy debts on account of treatment so that they did not have money enough to get the result from Madurai G.H. Amidst much suffering the result was obtained. It was then she came to know the truth that her husband was affected with HIV/AIDS. She was deeply shocked at the report and did not know what to do for her family. In spite of continuous treatment, her husband died. She received support neither from her husband's nor her own family. Her son's studies were curtailed and he was sent to work in a small shop. With a child's wage she tried to meet the family needs. She was extremely worried about herself and her children, especially her daughter.

Then she heard in Madurai Government Hospital that the CARE organization helped HIV/AIDS people. First she attended a family get together meeting organized by CARE in Madurai. Then she began coming regularly to 'out patients'(O.P.) and medical camps. In the meantime, seeing the love and concern of the CARE team she accepted Christ as her personal Saviour, and found in Him the true peace and joy. Then she volunteered herself as a 'positive person' (P.P.) volunteer, as she had a thirst to share her testimony and God's love with others. So now she has been working as a P.P.volunteer with the CARE team for the past 3.5 years. Her younger daughter is staying with her and pursuing education. Her job is to meet the people affected with HIV so as to share her experience, to encourage and comfort them. In the beginning she found it difficult to talk to strangers as it was something she was not used to doing. But now she finds a lot of meaning for her life through this work. She shows much interest in helping and comforting others in situations like her own. She now travels 50 kms in a day about to visit 3 to 4 patients. So far she has visited 445 patients with the co-partner worker.

Her health status has remarkably improved in spite of not taking attiretrovate medication. By the fellow patients she is now regarded as a soft spoken, kind-hearted and comforting person. She is also instrumental in gathering 'positive people' and co-ordinating one of the monthly regional medical camps conducted by CARE. The CARE team is much strengthened by her involvement as a P.P. volunteer within the team.

She has received Christian baptism, and

by God's grace is now without suffering, has a peaceful and thankful heart, and is happily running her family. Her prayer is that JESUS will use her more and more and grant her many days to live for HIS Glory.

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Hema is a childless widow of 26 years of age who comes from a lower middle class family. She discontinued her studies after the 5th standard out of lack of interest and then, as the eldest daughter of the family, helped her



mother at home. She has two younger sisters and one younger brother.

When she was 22 her parents arranged her marriage to Mr.Somasundaram who was



working as a painter. So Hema married with lots of expectations and dreams about her future married life. But unfortunately, within a few weeks of marriage, Somasundaram became sick and thus began her episode of visiting different hospitals. At that point of time, she never thought of becoming HIV positive nor did she know anything about HIV/AIDS. Within a few months, her husband became bedridden and passed away. During this period she came to know that her husband had been aware of his HIV status even before the marriage. This

made her very angry and she got frustrated in life.

Eventually, she went back to her mother's house as a HIV positive widow. There was no peace in the family and the younger sister's marriage was postponed because of Hema. She constantly became depressed and attempted to commit suicide many times. She felt betrayed by her husband and other family members.

During this phase, she came in contact with CARE. Continuing to relate to the CARE team she found peace through a process of healing, and came to know the Lord. She showed much interest in helping and comforting others affected by the disease. Right now she visits the houses of positive people, counsels and comforts them. She travels about fifty kms to visit three or four patients in a day. So far she has visited 457 patients with the co-partner worker.

Her health status has improved remarkably inspite of not taking atiretrovate medication. She is now seen by her fellow patients as a softly spoken, kind hearted and comforting person. She is also instrumental in gathering people and conducting one of the monthly regional medical camps organised by CARE. The CARE team is much strengthened by her patient work as a 'positive person' volunteer in the team.

Life becomes chaotic for any child whose parents are diagnosed with HIV/Aids. To become orphaned at a young age is very sad. It's worse in India where your livelihood and chance of further education are in jeopardy. *THERE IS A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE.*

Ch.A.O.S.

Christian AIDS Orphans Support

(Adminstrated jointly by the N.D.C. of the RCNZ and W.D.& R.W. of the CRCA.)

This scheme is associated with the CARE community based AIDS development project in Southern India. Ch.A.O.S. seeks to secure village based care for Aids Orphans or near orphans. The program only costs about 25c/day or just \$90.00 per year. Every year, sponsors receive a fact sheet, with a photograph of the sponsored child. The HIV status of many of these children is not known because they have not been tested. Each sponsored child will be followed up by Christian workers and enabled to complete schooling at least to grade 10. We'd like to challenge every family in the RCNZ to take on the financial

responsibility for just one child. If you do participate, you must also be committed to pray for your child. Many, many children as yet do not have a sponsor. PLEASE HELP. You have an opportunity to lessen a child's chaos, and introduce them to the God who cares. Become a Ch.A.O.S. sponsor today. Contact Leanne (details above) as soon as you can.

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