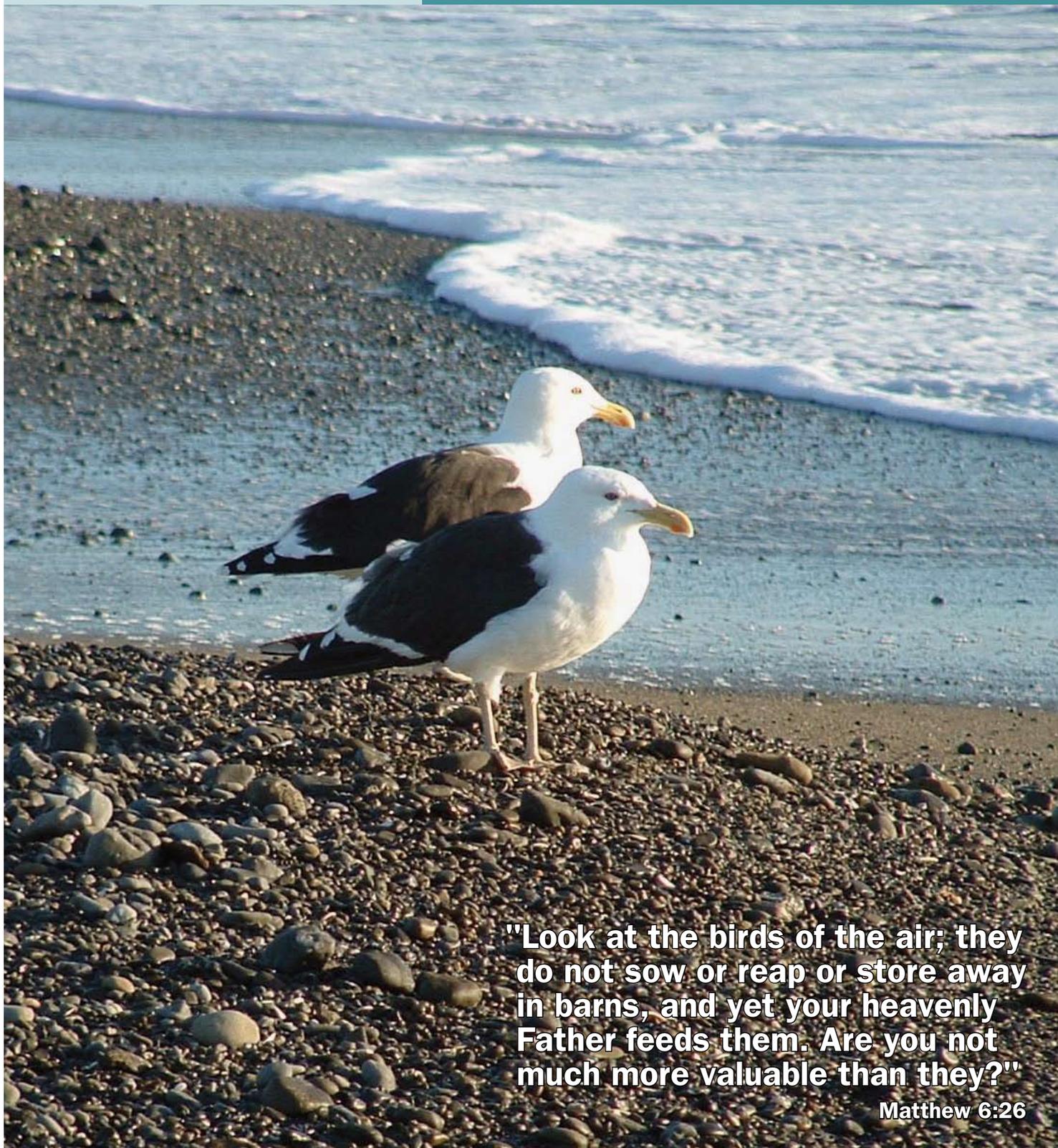


faith in **focus**

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

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"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"

Matthew 6:26

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Editorial

The lead article in our current issue concerns the length of ministry served by ministers. The Rev. John Haverland alerts us to the benefits of a long-term ministry. And these benefits generally do outweigh a short-term ministry of 3 till 5 years. I remember at the RTC that our then homiletics lecturer was a short-term proponent. While he said that late in one's ministry a long-term ministry might be warranted, he indicated that at least the first two or three ministries should be short-term, steadily growing in length. Well, that would be fine in a well-ordered world, and I know that this seems the best option when you see a long-term ministry that has taken a lot out of the minister and the congregation, but I think John has a good point.

What is a more pressing concern for our churches in regards to ministry at this time, however, is the lack of ministers to call. We have a number of churches seeking ministers currently and in Australia there are even more. While we have several doing vicariates presently and one next year, it looks like the years of that will be somewhat drier. There are different reasons for this, but let's pray and work that the Lord would provide the ministers of the Word and sacraments to fill our present pulpits and, Lord willing, the new churches that He will bring to institution in the years to come. It's encouraging the amount of young people involved in short-term service. Let's be prepared to take that a step further.

I have known what it is to use up all my ammunition, and then I have, as it were, rammed myself into the great Gospel gun, and I have fired myself at my hearers; all my experience of God's goodness, all my consciousness of sin, and all my sense of the power of the Gospel. And there are some people upon whom that kind of preaching tells when nothing else does, for they see that then you are communicating to them not only the Gospel, but yourself also.

Charles Spurgeon

Cover photo: Two seagulls, taken by Chris Kavanagh

Have you taken a nice picture?

Do you think you have a suitable photo to grace the pages of 'Faith in Focus'?

Please send it in—whether hardcopy or digital—and we will see if it can be used.

If you send a digital image, please make sure it is high quality or the biggest your digital camera can take, e.g. 3-4 megapixels.

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.

How long in one place?

Considering the length of ministry

John Haverland

This topic has been in my mind for a long time. I wanted to write this article about ten years ago, but my wife, who is a wise woman, encouraged me to consider it more carefully – so I put it on the back-burner. Having let it simmer all this time, I am now putting pen to paper. This is the question I want to consider: *What is the ideal length of time a minister should serve in a congregation?* Now you know why I have been procrastinating! For this is a complex subject. You might say, “It is impossible to answer that question because there are too many variables.” I have to agree – it is impossible to say how long one minister should stay in a particular congregation – because there are many considerations. These include the relationship between the pastor and the members, his preaching and pastoral gifts, whether the congregation is static or changing, the ability of the pastor to feed his flock, the willingness of the members to receive his ministry, his wife and children and their needs, situation and education, and so on.

Having acknowledged all this I want to propose that *longer ministries are better for both the minister and his congregation than shorter ones.* ‘Longer’ and ‘shorter’ are relative terms. By shorter I mean ministries of 3-6 years. By longer I mean ministries of 7-15 years – although there are a number of pastors who have served in one church for 25-30 years.

You may be asking yourself, “I wonder how long Mr Haverland has served in various churches?” Let me save you the trouble of looking that up in the RCNZ yearbook! I served in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach from September 1983 to December 1990 (first as a vicar and then as the pastor); then in the Reformed Church of Bishopdale from January 1991 to December 2003; then I was installed in the Pukekohe Reformed Church in February 2004.

Reasons to Move

Before I present some reasons in favour of longer-term ministries let me acknowledge that there may be valid reasons for a minister to move after a relatively short time.

Sometimes a pastor may have to move because the relationship between him and the congregation has broken down to the

point that a fruitful ministry is no longer possible. Our Church Order recognises this possibility in Article 16B. There may be other situations where the relationship is not at a breakdown stage but where a call to another congregation would be helpful for both the pastor and the church, allowing both to start over again, with both parties learning from their sins and failings. In situations like this a move may be wise and prudent. Eugene Peterson comments, “The pastor who in such circumstances insists on staying out of a stubborn wilfulness that is falsely labelled ‘committed faithfulness’ cruelly inflicts needless wounds on the body of Christ.”

At other times a pastor may be called away from his congregation after a relatively short time by a very needy church; the calling church may be in great need because of a long vacancy, or by division and trouble in the church in its recent history. Or a minister may be called to a unique opportunity in teaching or on the mission field. Short stays for these reasons happen more frequently when there are not enough ministers, as was the case in the early history of our denomination and as is the case now. This year, in our Reformed Churches in Australia and New Zealand, calls have been extended to ministers who have only been in their churches for three to four years. If there were more pastors available,

this would help ease this pressure to move after a relatively short ministry.

As we consider reasons to move we can acknowledge that sometimes a change can be helpful and stimulating for a pastor. It is possible for a minister to become too comfortable in a church; the people and routines of church life become very familiar. That brings security and stability, but it can also inhibit growth and development, for both the minister and the church. Each church I have served has challenged and extended me in many areas and so helped me grow and develop.

A change may also be helpful for congregation. Every minister has certain strengths and weaknesses. Another pastor coming into a church may be able to develop a new area of ministry, relate to members that the previous man could not relate to, stimulate the believers in the church to further areas of service, and urge a greater zeal in witnessing and evangelism. A change of pastor may also be useful if a congregation has become too dependent on their minister and are tempted to trust him more than the Lord.

Reasons to stay – for the Church

Having recognised that there are a variety of reasons why a minister may accept a call after a short time in a church, I want to



propose a number of advantages to a longer-term ministry. In putting these forward I am assuming that there is a healthy working relationship between the minister, the session and the congregation. Here are some benefits to the church.

Longer ministries provide greater stability. Calls from another church can be unsettling for the congregation, destabilise some people, and disturb church life. Yes, the church is built 'on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone' (Eph 2:20), but the Lord uses pastors to build the church and to add stones and cement them in place. If a man is a skilled builder, then there are advantages in him staying on that building site for some time and continuing the good work he has begun.

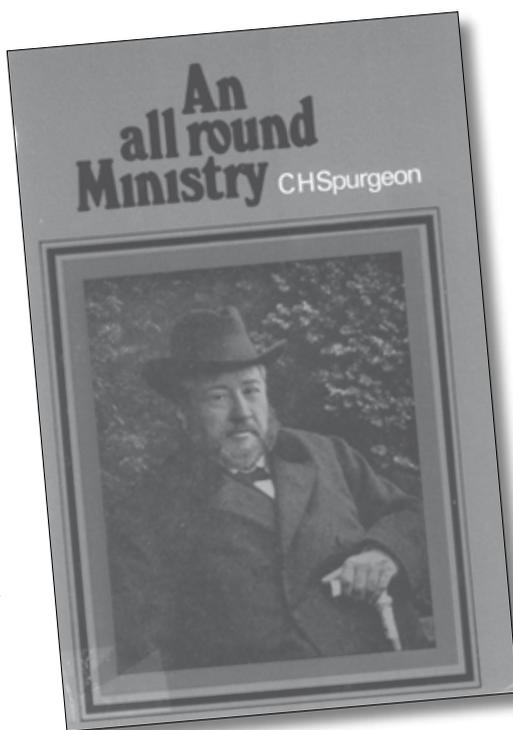
Frequent calls and moves from one church to another usually disrupt future planning and hinder the forward movement of a church. Many churches have experienced a situation where the pastor receives a call to another church and, as a result, much of the forward planning is put on hold until the call has been decided. Whether the minister stays or goes has a distinct bearing on what the session is expecting to do in the following year, and the years after that. A continuous ministry allows them to do long-term planning.

A settled and longer ministry is often more effective evangelistically. There are, of course, many variables here because evangelism takes time, concentration and hard work. Usually, however, in his first few years in a church, a pastor is pre-occupied with getting to know his own congregation. After that he is ready to look out to the surrounding community. It is often after he has been there for five or six years that the church will see some evangelistic fruit on the ministry. This is partly because the members have learnt to trust him and are ready to bring unbelievers to church to hear the preaching of the Word, and partly because the pastor has time to assess and evaluate evangelistic opportunities in their situation and community. More time in one place also gives the pastor and his family opportunity to develop the long-term friendships and relationships with unbelievers that are the most fertile ground for planting the seed of the gospel and seeing it germinate and grow.

We live in times of change; this is a feature of our post-modern world. In times such as these many people in society are looking for stability and security. In disturbed and disturbing times each local congregation can have a steadying influence on its members

and on the wider community. A church will do that more effectively if there is stability and continuity in the ministry.

Most pastors will tell you that it takes at least three years to get to know the people in a congregation and do effective pastoral work, and to preach directly to where they are. As time goes on they will learn to trust him and will open up to him with their hurts and sorrows, and allow him to minister to them. This is not to say that his pastoral and preaching work in those early years was ineffective, rather that it was less effective. If he leaves after three years he has lost



the opportunity to capitalise on the pastoral foundation he has laid. If, however, he stays a long time in the church, and continues a systematic and regular programme of visiting and counselling, he will get to know his flock well, be more and more useful to them, and see them grow in grace. Spurgeon wrote, "Do not expect to get in the first year of your pastorate, that result which is the reward for twenty years' continuous toil in one place...it is equally foolish to expect the people to be all at once the same as they might be after they have been trained by a godly minister for a quarter of a century."

All of these are benefits to the congregation of longer-term ministries.

Reasons to stay – for the Pastor

When considering the benefits of longer ministries, there will be mutual benefits for both the church and the pastor. Let's consider some benefits to the latter.

If a pastor knows he is going to leave after three or four years in a church he will be tempted to ignore problems and sins in the lives of the members, thinking to himself, "Well, I'll be gone in a couple of years anyway." If he is committed to a long-term ministry he will have a greater incentive to deal biblically and thoroughly with problems in the church and sins in people's lives.

When a preacher moves from one church to another, he can go back to texts and sermons he has preached before and rework them in his new situation. To go back to previous sermons is not wrong, but to do that all the time will be detrimental to the fresh and lively preaching that builds up the church. If a preacher is going to remain in a church for an extended period he must be committed to regular habits of reading and study, both of the Scriptures and good books. It is only as we feed ourselves that we can feed others and continue to do so. It is only as we grow ourselves in knowledge of God's Word that we can urge others to grow.

Stability in one place will generally be better for a minister's wife and children. This allows for long-term relationships and friendships, and the security and stability of familiar faces and surroundings. Moving too frequently has disrupted the families of many ministers.

Staying in one church (or even moving to a smaller church) can teach us important lessons in humility and service. Our reasons for staying, or moving, may be driven by motives for worldly success or personal ambition. The book of Proverbs warns us, 'All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord' We need to remember this word of wisdom when we look with longing at the large and "successful" churches and wish we were there. Let's remember that the Lord can use his servants well in whatever place he puts them in his providence. Eugene Peterson offers Gregory of Nyssa as an example of one such servant:

Several times when my place seemed inadequate for my vision of what I wanted to do for God, a story held me fast to my place, the story of Gregory of Nyssa, who lived in Cappadocia in the fourth century. His older brother Basil, a bishop, arranged for his brother to be appointed bishop of the small, obscure, and decidedly unimportant town of Nyssa. Gregory objected; he didn't want to be stuck in such an out-of-the-way place. His brother told him that he didn't want Gregory to obtain distinction from his church but rather to confer distinction upon it. Gregory went where he was placed. And he stayed

there. The preaching and writing that he did in that backwater community continues its invigorating influence to this day.

Two centuries later St Benedict observed that many of the monks in his area were restless and would often 'leave one monastery and set out for another, supposing themselves to be responding to a greater challenge, attempting a more austere holiness.' Benedict put a stop to this movement by adding a fourth vow to the three standard promises to poverty, chastity and obedience: 'He introduced the vow of stability: stay where you are.' There may be times when we who are pastors need to heed that same advice.

If a pastor moves from one church to another after a short time, he may be able to hide sins of character from the members of his church. The longer he stays the more likely it is that these will be noticed, and the more likely it is that he will have to deal with them. That will be good for his sanctification. If a pastor has a godly character and is making progress in holiness he will, by God's grace and Spirit, have a powerful effect on the members of his church. He will demonstrate in his own life the truth he preaches. His character and speech will be a clear illustration of the gospel message.

Paul wrote to Timothy, '*Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*' Robert Dabney observes that the minister of Christian character succeeds 'because he has made his people love and trust him. His judicious social intercourse, his affectionate zeal in their welfare, and especially his sympathy with their sorrows, have won their hearty confidence.' Bryan Chapell makes the same point in more modern language in these words:

No truth more loudly calls for pastoral holiness than the linkage of a preacher's character and the sermon's reception. I must recognize that if I were to return to churches I have pastored it is unlikely that people will remember many specifics I said. They may remember a particularly vivid illustration, the way a verse had a telling effect at some crisis moment in their lives, or the impression a particular message left on their minds. Yet, not one person will remember a dozen words of the thousands I have spoken through the years. The people will not remember what I said, they will remember me and whether my life gave credence to the message of Scripture.

Conclusion

As I wrote at the beginning, I have been thinking about this subject for many years. I recognise that it is a complex issue and that there are many things to consider when evaluating a call; there is no one standard formula that will apply to every situation. Yet I reiterate my main point – that, generally speaking, longer ministries of a pastor in a church will be more beneficial to both the pastor and the church than those that are shorter. I write to encourage those of us who are pastors to weigh this up when evaluating a call and to encourage sessions and congregations to consider this in extending calls.

Part of our problem at present is our critical shortage of pastors. That is another issue (and probably another article!). Churches need ministers. The Lord provides pastors and teachers '*to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*' Let's put this calling before suitable sons in our families and before men in our churches. Let the men of our churches examine their lives for the gifts for the ministry and their hearts for a sense of call. Let's pray more earnestly that the Lord will provide pastors and preachers for our churches and that they may have blessed, fruitful and long ministries in the places they serve!

The new hymn book

Progress report from the new Psalter-Hymnal Committee

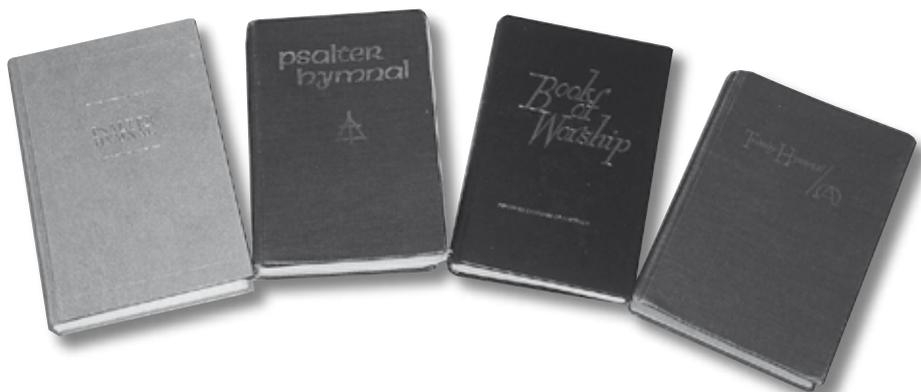
I am from time to time asked how the new Psalter-Hymnal is coming along (whatever it will actually be called when we get to that stage, Lord willing) and exhorted to write an article in Faith in Focus. I am not at all unhappy to do that and perhaps ought to have done so before now. But it is not the easiest thing to do on any kind of regular basis due to the fact that the project is proving to be a bit like laying the foundations for a very large building – a lot of work goes on but there is often not a lot to show for it! We knew it would be this way before we started. Some told us it would be more than we thought we knew and they were right. At times fools rush in where angels fear to tread! Bear with us fools. We are making progress, albeit slower than probably we would all like. We trust and pray that it is good progress and good work. Of course, none of us are going to end up with everything we want – neither we on the committee nor you all in the Churches. But

pray for us that we will produce a book (and the intention is to produce it electronically as well) that will help us all to praise God in song markedly better than we do now.

Support of Synod

As at Synod in September last year we had completed our selections for around the first 120 Psalms and Synod was sufficiently satisfied with the quality of those selections

that it not only charged us to continue the work and affirmed "*the ultimate goal of the committee is to produce a book of Psalms and hymns with musical scores and lyrics along the lines of the committee's work so far*"; that was very gratifying and encouraging; but Synod also approved "*the use of the committee's Psalm selection for provisional use in the churches for evaluation*" just as soon as the full Psalter has been done. At



that stage, while you are familiarising yourselves with the Psalter and critiquing it, we would be working on our hymn selection. It is intended to produce a provisional Psalter both electronically and maybe also in book form. It had been my hope that that would be ready some time later this year but unfortunately we are not going to be able to manage that.

Our work so far

At our last meeting in early August we completed our selection of all the Psalms with the exception of fourteen paragraphs of Ps.119. We hope to complete the whole Psalter at our next meeting early in November.

The committee at present consists of yours truly, Berwyn Hoyt, Lieda Brooks, Andrea Benfell, John Haverland (until the Psalms are completed) and John Goris (taking over from John Haverland when we get on to the hymn section). Over time we have assembled a transcription and proof-reading team most of whom are not on the committee but may well work as hard as the committee members: Bryan Hoyt, David Benfell and John Kloeg are doing the basic transcribing of the committee's selections using the Sibelius musical score

program. When they have done their work, the transcriptions are then passed on to Lieda Brooks, Lois Hoyt, Rob Vosslamber and myself for proof-reading. Sometimes these people pick up other things which occasionally sends us backtracking and reworking some selections. As the Psalms are transcribed and proof-read, they are posted to the web-site, a sub-site of the RCNZ web-site, so anyone interested can view the Psalms selections and interact with us. Until now, we have had selections with transcribing errors on the site. We are very thankful that Andrea Benfell has recently consented to coordinate the whole transcription and proof-reading process and all but the proof-read selections should be removed in the very near future.

Encouraging responses

We have already had favourable and encouraging responses to copyright requests from the Christian Reformed Church of North America (grey Psalter Hymnal, 1987) and the Free Church of Scotland (Sing Psalms, 2004) for which we are grateful. But we are at the stage now when we need to start getting firm permissions and from quite a number of sources and Rob Vosslamber has agreed

to do that work for us.

Up until Ps.143, and excluding 119, our main source of words has been the Free Church of Scotland (for 75 Psalms; they really have done very careful work with good poetry most of the time), the present blue *Psalter-Hymnal* (22 Psalms; occasionally with a little altering but in general we have tried to avoid this), the Christian Reformed Church's new *Psalter-Hymnal* (16 selections), Roland Ward's *Book of Psalms for Singing* (eight; Rowland is from the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia), the Australian *Book of Worship* (five) and other sources (twelve). We have also retained a number of others from our present book as 'b' versions or even hymns; this where they are well known or liked, good in themselves, but not close enough to the biblical text to retain as Psalm versifications.

The tunes

So far as tunes are concerned, we have not always chosen the tune recommended by the various books. Some of the Scots tunes, particularly, have sounded strange or difficult to our ears. At times we have retained the tune we are used to singing a certain Psalm to but looked elsewhere for the words. For example, Ps.11 has a very appropriate tune in the blue Psalter-Hymnal but the words are not so close to the Psalm as they could be; the Rev. John Goris has re-versified the Psalm to the tune we are used to singing it to. Ps.48 (PH.89) is set wonderfully to Diademata but is very incomplete. The grey Psalter-Hymnal reworked it but still didn't complete it. We were not completely satisfied with all their reworking so, pending their permission, we have made just a few alterations and written the extra stanza to complete it. (But we are trying not to 'fiddle' too much; not to be too finicky.) Mrs Coby Cressy of Hamilton provided us with a very fine and terse versification of Ps.87 to a tune of her own composition.

Of the tunes chosen so far (up to about Ps.143, excluding 119; and including 'b' versions, 85 are from the present book, 41 from the grey *Psalter-Hymnal*, sixteen from the *Book of Worship* and 33 from other sources. Some of the tunes from the 'grey book' will be familiar to some and not others, similarly with those from the BoW; perhaps most of the 33 from other sources will be new to most of us. We trust with this mixture we are providing a new modern-English Psalter (with the emphasis on faithfulness to Scripture rather than newness in itself) yet retaining enough that is familiar so that when we do

Upper Primary School Teacher Vacancy

Calvin Christian School is seeking teachers who believe in the vision of Christ-centred education in a school which has a Christian student population drawn largely from outside the Reformed Church.

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

We are specifically seeking teachers able to teach Grades 3 – 4 (ages 7 till 8), and or 5/6 till 8 (ages 9 till 12 years approximately), from the fourth term of 2006. Experience at this level would be advantageous.

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

Write to:

The Chairman
Calvin Christian School Trust Board
17 Phoenix Place, Papatoetoe
Manukau 2025, Auckland

get it in our hands, Lord willing, we don't find ourselves on such completely new ground we find it difficult to worship.

Pray for us

We do enjoy the work – but it is a lot of work! Pray for us, for if it is adopted finally,

it will play an important part in the life of our Churches in years to come and, after all, singing the praises of the Lord is the most important thing any human being ever does. On the other hand, if it is not adopted, what a lot of wasted time and effort. And that would be a very great shame when the world has

so many needs and our Lord has, we trust, fruitful work for us all to do. So we would greatly appreciate your prayers that we may serve both you and the Lord.

On behalf of the committee, John Rogers.

World in focus

Egyptian Copts lose homes, freedom over murder charges

Families of five jailed Christians have lost their homes northeast of Cairo after authorities persuaded them to turn over deeds to their property in exchange for what was supposed to be the release of relatives accused of murder. Abdel Masih Awad Sayeed, 86, and four relatives in Sharkeya province have been in police custody since 11 December.

Officials detained the five after the death of a Muslim the previous day prompted rioting in the village of Kafr Salama Ibrahim. Medical examiners concluded that injuries to Mohammed Ahmad Abu Talib, received when he intervened on his son's behalf in a fight with two of the Christian men, could not have caused his death, but the two Christians and three relatives are charged with 'conspiracy to murder' Talib. A cousin of Talib told Compass News that after the fight Talib suffered a stroke and died minutes later. Authorities proposed that the Christians pay Talib's family 1 million Egyptian pounds (US\$173,900) in compensation — half of which, the officials said they had already paid with the destruction of their homes.

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

Court rules Presbyterian church can split with its property

A state Supreme Court justice has decided that a regional body of Presbyterian Church (USA) that represents the Lower Hudson Valley cannot stop an Orange County church from leaving the denomination and taking its property with it.

An appeal is likely, but the case is an important one because there is a growing movement of churches that are looking to leave mainline Protestant denominations over controversial questions such as gay rights.

First Presbyterian Church of Ridgebury, which now calls itself The Church at Ridgebury, is a small congregation in the Catskills of New York. Founded in 1792, it announced last year that it was leaving Presbyterian Church (USA) because the denomination had dropped its strict adherence to the Bible in favour of modern positions such as acceptance of gay clergy.

The Hudson River Presbytery failed to convince church leaders to change their minds,

and went to court to prevent the congregation from taking its property.

The presbytery's case hinges on a clause that says church property is held in trust for the denomination. According to the presbytery, the church went along with the constitutional change and subsequently sought the presbytery's permission to sell a piece of property.

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

Trinity Broadcasting Network cancels show for criticism of Islam

A long-running, weekly TV program "Zola Levitt Presents," which is often critical of the jihadist ideology within Islam, has been cancelled by the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), producers say, because of efforts by TBN to cater to its growing audience in the Arab world.

The cancellation of this show makes it the second program cancelled by the largest Christian broadcaster because of sensitivities about Muslim content.

In January 2006, Hal Lindsey's "The International Intelligence Briefing" notified TBN he would not be back because of what he considered to be efforts to muzzle his opinions about radical Islam.

+ Trinity Broadcasting Network, PO Box A, Santa Ana, CA 92711 (714) 832-2950

ACLU tries to restrict Gideons from handing out Bibles to students

The South Iron R-1 School District in Annapolis, Missouri, has always permitted various groups to present information to students at district schools during classroom time but now the Gideons have been singled out in a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union of Eastern Missouri, which claims that two Gideon representatives were permitted to address fifth-graders during class time and then distribute New Testaments to them — an action the ACLU says is unconstitutional. The lawsuit seeks an injunction prohibiting the South Iron Schools from continuing to allow outside visitors into their classrooms for religious purposes.

Liberty Counsel has joined with conservative author and commentator David Limbaugh

in defending South Iron against the lawsuit. Mat Staver, founder and chairman of Liberty Counsel, says, 'An open access policy under the First Amendment requires that you treat religious speech equally. The ACLU may not like the idea that they have to treat religious speech equally, but the fact of the matter is the Constitution demands it. So we're now defending against this ACLU lawsuit which we believe, frankly, is frivolous.'

+ ACLU of Eastern Missouri, 4557 Laclede Ave., St. Louis, MO 63108 (314) 361-2111

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

Presbyterian church disappointed with discrimination decision

The Presbyterian Church on Prince Edward Island is considering filing an appeal after the Human Rights Commission ruled that Rev. Gael Matheson was the victim of sexual discrimination by the church.

Don Mackenzie, lawyer for the Presbyterian Church, said that church members are very upset by the ruling and stated that 'The presbytery called 18 witnesses, who all testified to the effect that Rev.

Matheson's dismissal had absolutely nothing to do with her gender. They gave full reasons why it had to be done, that it had to do only with the way she treated people and the fact that the church was falling down around her.'

While the presbytery argued that Matheson's problems stemmed from a deterioration of her relationship with her congregation, the commission found the deterioration was a direct result of the presbytery's failure to deal with harassment that Matheson was being subjected to.

+ Canadian Human Rights Commission, 344 Slater St., 8th Fl., Ontario, K1A 1E1, Canada (613) 995-1151

California church ends with a decision in its favour

The right a church has to use its property for worship has ended a five-year war with a decision in favour of Elsinore Christian Center in California, whose members wanted to develop a site in downtown Lake Elsinore.

The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty said the ruling from the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals

reversed the only judge in the nation to have ruled unconstitutional the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (RLUIPA).

Becket Fund officials said the church still may have to go back into court to seek damages, since the building approval it sought from the city took so long that the property it had intended to obtain was eventually sold to another buyer.

Becket Fund founder Kevin J. Hasson said, "We have never lost a RLUIPA case and plan to keep on suing until cities and counties learn to respect churches' civil rights.

+ *The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, 1350 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 605, Washington, DC 20036 (202) 955-0095*

China releases bishop jailed for more than ten years

The Cardinal Kung Foundation, which monitors allegations of religious oppression in China, says that China has reportedly released a bishop jailed for more than ten years for being a member of the underground Roman Catholic Church, loyal to the Vatican.

According to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Bishop An Shuxin, who was arrested in 1996 while working in Hebei province, has been freed.

BBC reports that the Chinese Church was established in the 1950s, after Beijing and the Vatican broke off diplomatic relations. It says China does not recognise the Pope's authority, insisting that all Chinese Catholics belong to a state-run church.

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

Russian Orthodox church opens in North Korean capital

In the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, the first-ever Russian Orthodox church has opened for services.

A story written by Komfie Manalo, the News Foreign Correspondent for Headline News, reports that the church celebrated its first mass at Trinity Church in communist North Korea on 13 August. The story also reports that 'While the mass was attended by North Korea's Vice Premier Kwak Pom Gi and other government officials at the Trinity Church, there is still no indication Pyongyang is relaxing its policy on religious freedom despite a constitutional guarantee.'

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

Edinburgh University makes plans to ban Bibles from residence halls

Ian Dunlop, chairman of Scotland's first full-time Christian radio station, says that Edinburgh University is displaying extreme intolerance for Christianity by planning to ban Bibles from its student residence halls.

The ban is a response to student association protests that the Bibles are a means of discrimination against non-Christians — and an effort to treat all religious faiths on campus equally. It had been a long-standing practice to place Gideon Bibles in the room of all new students.

Dunlop says he believes that to ban Bibles because they perhaps in some way might discriminate against students of other faiths 'flies in the face of everything that we stand for here in the UK as a nation standing for freedom and tolerance.'

Scotland's University of Stirling recently dropped its plan to remove 6,000 Bibles from campus after protests from Christian students.

+ *The University of Edinburgh, Old College, South Bridge, Edinburgh EH8 9YL*

Malawi Presbyterian consider cutting ties with PCUSA

Church of Central Africa Presbyterian leaders in Malawi say they may cut ties with the PCUSA due to a perception that the church now allows the ordination of homosexuals under certain circumstances.

Rev. Maurice Munthali, moderator of the Livingstonia Synod, did not agree with the PCUSA decision. 'We feel it may not only divide the church but it will disorganise our administration and doctrine.' Rev. Lackson Chingdaza, the moderator of the Blantyre Synod, agreed with Munthali, saying, "The local church would not associate itself with its US counterparts if they embraced homosexual clergy." "We cannot be one when we don't believe the same things."

+ *Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, General Synod, PO Box 30398, Capital City, Lilongwe 3*

Majority of Methodists agree to cooperate with Catholics, Lutherans

Methodist delegates have agreed to endorse a 1999 Lutheran-Roman Catholic agreement on the doctrine of justification at its World Methodist Council. A resolution was also passed by the council authorising further dialogue with the Catholic Church, with the aim of 'full communion in faith, mission, and sacramental life.'

Although most Methodists are in agreement, the general council of the Methodist Church in Brazil has voted to withdraw from inter-church bodies that include the Roman Catholic Church and non-Christian groups.

+ *World Methodist Council, PO Box 518, Lake Junaluska, NC 28745*

Christian school land-use lawsuit may proceed

Judge Samuel Conti has ruled that Alameda County in California can be sued for barring a Christian education group from building a new school on property it owns in the area. The county has sided with neighbours and others

who do not want the Christian group to build its new school near them, on the 45-acre parcel of land it has owned for years. Redwood Christian Schools (RCS), reported a 25 percent decline in enrolment while the county's efforts blocked construction of the new campus.

Derek Gaubatz, director of litigation for the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, is representing RCS. Gaubatz says the group's claim against Alameda County is based on the free-exercise clause of the First Amendment, and on the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, or RLUIPA. And now that Judge Conti has rejected the county's arguments to dismiss the case, RCS intends to go forward with its lawsuit. The federal law known as RLUIPA, which was signed by President Clinton in 2000, protects religious institutions from discrimination in zoning and landmarking.

The Christian education group's lawsuit seeks US\$30 million in damages for lost tuition income and increased construction costs.

+ *The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, 1350 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 605, Washington, DC 20036*

Ceremonial ring missing

Police have appealed for information after a ceremonial ring worn by moderators of the Church of Scotland general assembly was reported missing.

The moderator, Rt. Rev. Alan McDonald, reported the ring missing after he attended a Women's Guild meeting in Glasgow's Royal Concert Hall.

The gold ring has a large amethyst stone and bears the motto: *nec tamen consumebatur*. The missing ring was a copy, made in the 1970s, of an older ring, which from 1910 onwards had been passed on from moderator to moderator.

+ *Church of Scotland, 121 George St., Edinburgh EH2 4YN*

Spiritual leader returns to Iraq

Mar Dinkha, the spiritual leader of Iraq's Assyrian Church, is returning to Iraq. Dinkha is scheduled to leave the US on 14 September.

Mar Dinkah the current catholicos-patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, will be returning to Iraq for the first time following the Liberation of Iraq.

Dinkha will be taking with him a team of his staff, as well as a limited number of followers. At one time the Assyrian Christians, according to the Iraqi Foreign Ministry under Saddam Hussein, numbered 2.5 million.

Recent statistics have over 100,000 Assyrian Christians leaving the country with those remaining struggling as Iraq moves towards what many believe is an Islamic Republic modelled after neighbouring Iran.

Dinkha's return is very much anticipated by the Assyrian Christians of Iraq.

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

Gay marriage could change legal landscape

Conservative attorneys say that a string of recent defeats for 'gay marriage' supporters has set a body of precedent that could make it tougher for future courts to rule differently.

Conservatives won in seven different states in July, including two large cases in New York and Washington where state supreme courts handed down rulings against 'gay marriage.' And in Nebraska a federal appeals court panel reinstated that state's marriage amendment, one year after it had been struck down as unconstitutional.

Chris Stovall, an attorney with the Alliance Defense Fund, told Baptist Press that 'It has created a body of precedent. It gets harder with every decision that comes down for the next court to reject that [state] limitation and to say, 'That's not what marriage is really about.'

+ Alliance Defense Fund, 15333 N. Pima Rd., Suite 165, Scottsdale, AZ 85260 (800) 835-5233

Hindu Extremists in India beat Evangelist

Hindu extremists investigating the activities of Varghese Thomas, an evangelist in Karnakata state, laid a trap for him on 3 September before beating him and his wife. Thomas is 60 and his wife, Leelama, is 57.

Thomas has established a small congregation in his home village of Guttigar, that meets

in a believer's home. On his way to a meeting Thomas and his wife saw the apparent victim of a motorcycle accident lying in the middle of the road, and he left his car to assist the victim. As soon as Thomas bent over the victim, the man threw red chili powder into his eyes, temporarily blinding him. A group of around 15 Hindu extremists hiding in the bushes nearby then jumped out and assaulted Thomas, accusing him of tricking people into coming to prayer meetings.

His wife Leelama said, 'One of them came up to the car and told me that both of us would face a cruel death if we continued to preach in the village.'

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

Hindu convert has license renewed

A priest in the Diocese of Ely in the Church of England, who converted to Hinduism recently, had his license to officiate as a priest renewed for three years. The Rev. David Hart, who has taken the Hindu name Ananda, now lives in India, where he carries out Hindu priestly duties in the village of Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. Each day Mr Hart, who was ordained in the Church of England in 1984, blesses a congregation of around 60 with fire that has previously been offered to Nagar, the snake god. According to the Bishop of Ely, the Rt Rev. Anthony Russell,

he was unaware of Mr. Hart's conversion to Hinduism, despite the fact that Mr Hart, who also serves as International Secretary to the World Congress of Faiths, published a book outlining his conversion in April.

Mr Hart stated that he does not view his conversion as a renunciation of Christianity. 'My philosophical position is that all religions are cultural constructs. I am acting out God's story on local terms.'

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

Parish in Texas pays to leave Episcopal Church

On 15 September the vestry and rector of Christ Church in Plano, Texas announced that the parish will pay the Diocese of Dallas US\$1.2 million for its title to the parish property, and disassociate themselves from the Episcopal Church.

In two statements posted on the website of Christ Church in Plano, Bishop James Stanton said that he had come to the conclusion that there are 'irreconcilable differences between Christ Church and the Episcopal Church, differences that would necessitate their separation from the Episcopal Church and, consequently, from the Diocese of Dallas.'

+ Christ Church, Plano, Texas <http://www.christchurchplano.org/documents/06_0915_roseberry.html>

A feminine focus

Sally Davey

The feminine virtue of hopefulness

One reason Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians was to encourage them when they were grieving over loved ones who had died. Some of them, it seems, had died at the hands of persecutors. They were suffering for their faith, as have many Christians in the centuries since Paul's lifetime. The Thessalonians appear to have been uncertain about what had become of their beloved, for he writes to reassure them that those who die in Christ will be raised from the dead: "...we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as those who have no hope." (1 Thessalonians 4:15) This verse has always reverberated in my mind as the specially memorable Scripture passage on hope. Why?

After all, there are many passages in the Bible that speak of hope. Hope is surely one of the big themes of Scripture. But probably this verse has stayed with me over the years because it contrasts the hope that believers in the Lord Jesus have with the *hopelessness* that those without Him are left with. This contrast has become strikingly true of our culture in the last few generations.

A world without hope

Our world is a sad one; a hopeless one in many ways. At times we see the painful face of genuine despair; at others, the heedless pursuit of material satisfaction that does little to blot out its presence. In a world from which the hope of eternity has been removed there

is little to encourage restraint on sin, and little to give people any incentive to behave with virtue. The writer of Ecclesiastes tells us that "God has put eternity in [men's] hearts" (Eccl. 3:11) – human beings are created with an awareness that this life is not all there is. But men and women have suppressed this (uncomfortable) truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18), and we reap the ugly consequences daily. Those without hope of eternity live as if today and tomorrow are all there is, and today and tomorrow do not carry enough weight to stem the tide of sin.

Lack of hope, particularly hope of eternity, affects life in the profoundest ways. Have you ever stopped to consider this? It has certainly affected the way our society thinks. Up until the late nineteenth century awareness of eternity coloured all the religious, political, legal and moral aspects of life, and provided the backdrop for creative endeavours of all kinds – music, art, literature, philosophy, and so on. Even educated people seldom thought or acted as though this life were all

there was. This did nothing, however, to quash the naively optimistic faith that was being placed in the physical sciences, the social sciences and technology to perfect human life in this world. At that time many thought the possibilities of science to improve the world were virtually unlimited. But by the time the new critical approaches to the Bible had undermined people's faith in its authority and Darwinian evolution had removed God from the natural world, the twentieth century was upon western culture. And then, shattering the false optimism, two world wars, the holocaust and a paralysing economic depression left the eternity-less view of life looking mighty grim. All that was left (if you refuse to admit the possibility of biblical truth) was a brave acceptance of the ugliness of life, human nature included. God intended that a true view of who we are should drive us to the cross of Christ; but if you reject the truth of the cross, you must just stumble on, heavily burdened by the bleakness of life. And for their honesty in that regard we can (to some extent) admire the mid-twentieth century existentialist writers who admitted this bleakness. However, for the most part, godless cynicism leads only to despair; and it is despair that has characterised much of modern art, literature and music. Meaninglessness, purposelessness and the destruction of absolute values are the chief themes of much serious modern creative work.

The effect of this hopelessness

So, where does this leave the ordinary woman? After all, not everyone immerses herself in 'heavy-duty' high culture. Yet, while your hairdresser or the woman in front of you at the supermarket checkout may not be reading highbrow literature or studying modern philosophy, she is being influenced by the hopelessness of the world around her. This shows itself in a number of specific applications. Take, for instance, the death of loved ones. Where there is no hope in life after death that is based on truth (heaven and hell as explained in Scripture), people begin to come up with their own ideas, based on wishful thinking. When is the last time you attended the funeral of an unbeliever – a workmate, parent of a friend, a neighbour, or a patient, perhaps? What strikes the

Christian in this situation is the confusion in people's minds about what happens when someone dies. Throughout the funeral people talk to the body as if the person were still there, alive. People are not sure where their loved one is – but hope he or she is around somewhere nearby. But it is nothing but fond speculation; and their friends will agree just to make them comfortable – after all most of them have no better idea anyway!

And this is not all. If we do not have the certainties that death, the judgment, heaven, hell – and the cross – provide us, then we are



at sea when it comes to our own morality and to making sense of the lack of it in the world around us. If death is simply the beginning of a happier non-existence (or something?) then why behave any other way than what seems good – or fun – or pleasurable – for the moment? There are no consequences if there is no judgment or hell. And if no one is punished for behaving with injustice, malice or violence, what is life but meaningless anyway? There is no hope! Life, in the words of famous 17th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes, becomes merely 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.' Enjoy what you can still manage to. Translated into 21st-century Kiwi womanhood it may mean

partying till you drop, experimenting with drugs if it makes you feel cool, leaving your boyfriend or your husband if he ceases to satisfy, getting the prescriptions you need to carry on the lifestyle you want (without the unwanted consequences), telling lies, stealing, and walking away from it all... (so long as there really is no eternity).

The source of this hopelessness

In addition, and maybe more potently, the elimination of biblical hope in our world has led to the replacement of true advisors with misleading (and hopeless) counselors. Let me explain. A long, long time ago (maybe two or three generations?) the authorities when it came to living the human life were people like ministers, clergymen and theologians. If someone was in trouble, if there was a person in the family dying, then the vicar, or the minister, was called for. And if a perplexing moral or social problem reached national headlines the media sought opinion from a theological professor, or one of the leaders of the larger churches. Not so any longer: the authorities on living are social science professors at secular universities – men and women who would probably rather lose their jobs than offer an opinion that could even vaguely be seen as religious. This is what happens at the 'macro' level.

But the same applies at the level of the individual woman's life. A contemporary woman's choices of advisors for life's difficulties also tends to reflect the lack of hope in our world. She is more likely to ask a friend, the girls at work, her doctor, the hairdresser or beautician, a therapist or a counselor than she is to seek advice from someone who knows the Scriptures well. And what sort of advice will she get from these sources? More likely than not, her friends will endorse whatever attitude she herself has: sympathy and a desire to be seen as kind are strong motivators. Seldom do friends have the wisdom or the courage to offer the directive counsel needed in many situations. But what about doctors, therapists and counselors? Their advice is dependent on their view of the world, and of human nature. I fear the experience of my acquaintances is that such advisors, while frequently kind and compassionate, are more likely to offer medi-

cation and a listening ear than they are to suggest solutions that lead to lasting change for the better. And unless there is genuine ground for hope that a person's heart and behaviour can change, palliative measures that ease the pain of life's circumstances are all that is on offer. But – it is not enough. God has made us with a longing for things to get better, for the horrible situation I am in to be changed, for I myself to get a grip on my anger, my discouragement, my self-pity or my bitterness. We need hope.

Our reason for hope

As Christians, of course, we have every reason to hope. We have the certainty of the gospel, that God sent His Son so that all who believe in Him (including you and I – single mum, teenage girl, elderly grandmother, middle-aged homemaker, university lecturer, shop assistant, auntie and little girl alike) may have eternal life. This offers us hope, the best hope of all, better than any fleeting pleasure or excitement this world may offer. We are Christ's, bought with the price of His very life. Given that, we have no reason, in the end, to be discouraged, afraid, angry or envious. We have been given everything! And for this reason, we should never live as though this world were all there is. We are pilgrims and strangers in it, and our hearts should not be clamouring for its goods as though we could never be happy without them. For sure, there is nothing wrong with wanting physical comforts, a loving family or the approval of our friends. But if we find ourselves grasping for them to the extent that they engulf our waking thoughts and tempt us to cut corners spiritually to get them, then that is time to examine our hearts and set our hopes, once again, more resolutely on things above. We need to have a light hold, not an iron grip, on the things of this world, and be able to say, as Job did, "*the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.*" (Job 1:21)

But as we all know, letting go of the things of this world is seldom easy. It takes careful consideration, much painful self-examination; and at times costly wrenchings when God intervenes and takes them out of our clutching hands. I'm sure we have all experienced such losses. But if, on mature reflection, we consider the ways such losses become gain if they show us Christ more perfectly, then we can be content with the lesson. Such lessons, strung together in the course of a lifetime, are part of God's perfect plan for making us more like His Son. They prepare us for eternity. And we may "*rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suf-*

fering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame" (Romans 5:3-5). No, hope does not leave us empty and disappointed. Quite the reverse: God has given us His Spirit, and by His work, God's love is poured into our hearts. Hope is a precious thing: it points us on to what we have not yet seen, and it produces lovely developments in our character.

Hope as part of love

But there is also an interpersonal aspect to hope for the Christian. It is part of love, as the Scriptures describe it. Towards the end of Paul's great description of love he writes that, "*Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*" (1 Corinthians 13:7) What does Paul mean? It is clear from the context that he is thinking of forbearance, of forgiveness. Hope obviously comes in when we are dealing with someone who is costing us quite a lot of patience. We are to put up with 'all things' from them. In commenting on this verse Calvin writes, 'every one wishes that others should carry him upon their shoulders, but refuses for his part to assist others. The remedy for this disease is love, which makes us subject to our brethren, and teaches us to apply our shoulders to their burdens (Galatians 6:2). Farther, as we are naturally spiteful, we are, consequently, suspicious too, and take almost everything amiss. Love, on the other hand, calls us back to kindness, so that we think favourably and candidly of our neighbours.'

Sometimes, to be honest, I have questioned this (partly, I am sure, because I am not loving enough). How can a love that is hopeful avoid becoming undiscerningly naïve? I am thinking of the sort of attitude that has been called "Pollyanna-ism." We probably all know Pollyanna as the famous heroine of Eleanor H. Porter's novels, the sunny little character who was always being 'glad' about everything and everybody. Rather than complain, she had learned to play the 'glad game,' and find something to be happy about in every situation. It was touchingly depicted in the little girl of the *Pollyanna* novels, and it was definitely praiseworthy. But translated to an adult context, it often (to me anyway) seems a bit unreal. Are we supposed to see good, and assume good motives, in people and situations that look anything but good? Sometimes people abuse our generosity by insisting that if we don't, we are being unkind, unloving and most definitely unchristian. They may even hold this kind of accusation over our heads until we give in and withdraw our

criticism. But I don't think this is what Paul means when he tells us that love forgives and 'hopes all things.' Here is Calvin again: 'When he [Paul] says all things, you must understand him as referring to the things that ought to be endured, and in such a manner as is befitting. For we are not to bear with vices, so as to give our sanction to them by flattery, or, by winking at them, to encourage them through our supineness [passive acceptance]. Farther, this endurance does not exclude corrections and just punishments. The case is the same as to kindness in judging of things.' In other words, our hopeful assessment of another does not require a naïve suspension of our powers of discernment. It does not preclude the possibility of correction or rebuke. But we do need to be generous, forgiving, and humble.

Hope is the certainty of sanctification

Besides, there is something so hopeful about the certainty of sanctification! The very fact that God is at work in people's hearts should give us every reason to be hopeful about them. Those whom He called and justified He will also sanctify and glorify (see Romans 8:29-30). There is hope that change is possible for the daughter who frustrates us, the mother or father who infuriates us, the workmate who drives us crazy, or the sister we have never truly forgiven. If they are believers, they **can** change, because they have the Holy Spirit in their hearts, and they have the Word of God to expose their sin and show them the way to change. One of the cruellest (and most untruthful) things you can say to a Christian who is convicted of her sin and is struggling with it is, "Oh, look at you! You're absolutely hopeless, you're still doing that – you'll never change!" Change for a believer **is** possible; solutions for a believer's struggles in life **are** available; a way through temptation and sin, for a believer, **is possible**.

I love Paul Tripp's books because they are so good at showing us how we can make progress, with God's help, in our battle against sin. These are books of hope. In one of them, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, Tripp explains how we can help others in this battle, and see more clearly from the Scriptures the ways God is at work in their lives to sanctify them. He writes:

'Scripture gives us a radical view of life that has its roots in the gospel... This view of life is that we are a people chosen by a sovereign, loving God who, in Christ, has forgiven us and adopted us to conform to the image of his Son, supplying all that we need to do what he has called us to do.

Therefore, we do not buy into the false hope of becoming independently strong, 'healthy,' aware, and happy individuals. All that we do and all that we hope for is rooted in the fact that we are weak vessels of clay that have been filled with the all-surpassing power of God's presence. We look to the future with hope, preparing for a time when there will

be no more sickness, sorrow, sin or death, for we will be with Christ and like him eternally. That is why, even in the dark days of personal suffering, we do not lose heart.' (2 Cor. 4:7-18)

We women have every good reason to live by hope, knowing that we will be in Christ's presence forever. And it is hope for this life

as well; hope that there is a solution for our problems, an answer to our questions, and a way through our troubles. Knowing this, we are also equipped to shed the light of gospel hope into the darkened world around us. Hope has not been extinguished from this world – all of Scripture testifies to its power!

The gates of Jerusalem

The Horse Gate

Patricia van Laar

Rev. 19:11,19 "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True... On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of kings and Lord of Lords."

Those of you who have visited Jerusalem, may perhaps be able to imagine in your mind's eye, a gate opening to a magnificent palace, gardens and courtyard on the east side of Jerusalem. Cruden's Concordance gives three references to the Horse Gate. All three give some information about it. The first, 2 Chronicles 23:15, (told before the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar,) identifies the Horse Gate entrance as being on the palace grounds. The gate would be situated near the stables of Solomon that housed some of his twelve thousand horses, the ones that he had with him in Jerusalem. (1 Kings 10:26.) In Nehemiah's day the gate also led to the site of the King's Garden and the tomb of David, the latter still existing in New Testament times (Acts 2:29), and to the tombs of his king-descendants. But there was now no king.

Neh.3:28 tells that above this gate, priests made the repairs. Nearby were built priests' houses. Also, as the Water Gate was "toward the east", this would suggest that the Horse Gate was also on the east. Jer. 31:38 confirms the east as the side where the gate was situated. This verse is a remarkable but enigmatic prophecy that the days are coming "when this city will be rebuilt for the Lord, from the Tower of Hananel (the second tower between the Sheep Gate and the Fish Gate)... The whole valley where dead bodies and ashes are thrown, out to the Kidron Valley on the east as far as the corner of the Horse Gate, will be will be holy to the Lord."

The gate of royalty

Although no description is given, this was probably, like the palace, quite a magnificent gate, a gate of pomp and ceremony. For the horse was a magnificent animal, highly valued. God gave it agility. Strength. Fearlessness. God 'clothed its neck with a flowing mane.' Powerful nouns, these, yet still more powerful are the descriptive verbs. Enjoy the leaping locust, pawing, rejoicing, laughing, eating up the ground, frenzied with excitement, snorting for the battle! God's vivid portrait to Job (39:19) leaves us breathless. Historical books of the Bible reveal the horse as the animal of the kings of Israel and their allies, and of the kings of Israel and their enemies. Visualise under the Horse Gate archway, a stately march of royal processions, of merchants with goods for trading (horses, chariots, silver, spices, cedar wood from Lebanon – all are listed under Solomon's trade transactions.) Eminent royal visitors – how many of these arrived here, to attend the royal household? The Queen of Sheba with her retinue, a very great caravan of camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold and precious stones, entering through this gate? Kings from the Palace, prepared to lead their troops into battle. The Monarch on his agile beast, triumphant after victory. And sometimes, after defeat or murder, the return of his body for a funeral. (See, e.g., 2 Kings 14:20)

Great gate of promise, if only Israel's Kings had remained faithful.

Gate of the meek and lowly

Was this the gate entered by another King, about 500 years after the time of Nehemiah? The Lord entered Jerusalem on what is now called Palm Sunday, not on a decorated horse of triumph, but on the lowliest member of the horse family, covered with the cloaks of his disciples – a donkey. Up to now he

had avoided public acclamation of himself as King. Once the people had tried to take him by force and make him King, but the time was wrong. He withdrew into the hills by himself (John 6:15.) It was to be his timing, not theirs. And now the time was ripe. Now he himself set out deliberately to make his claim. Any knowledgeable Jew would recognize this. The Pharisees and priests were scandalized. It was the entrance of the King of Zechariah 9: "Your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." The promise of an everlasting King had been made to David, not to this carpenter imposter.

Ah yes, but the crowd knew he was of the Royal House. "Hosanna to the Son of David," they cried. The leaders were willfully blind.

So the gentle King entered the city, palm branches and street clothes under his feet. Word must have reached Pontius Pilate. A few days later they delivered him into Pilate's hands. Did Pilate know the significance of his ride on a donkey a few days earlier? Was this first 'Palm Sunday' event the reason for the mockery, the purple robe, the crown of thorns, the altar-throne on which he was nailed?

"Are you a king?" asked Pilate.

"You say it," was the reply. And Pilate had a notice hung over the King's head, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews." Was his notice served as a warning? Be careful – see what happens to anyone setting himself up as a rival to Caesar!

The gate of the King of kings

But look at the next time we shall see Him. On a white horse! So without trying to put a contrived explanation to this gate, if we just take Scripture itself for the pictures the Horse Gate conjures up, we cannot go far wrong. The Prince of Peace entered

Jerusalem as King, on an ass. The King, coming again for warfare, coming in victory, coming for judgement of mankind, will be on a white horse. He too has his retinue – the armies of heaven, also mounted on white horses. (Rev. 19: 11 – 16.) Take your Bible and read the passage phrase by phrase, for yourself. Anything we could say about this is inadequate. For we enter the realms of eternity, where all is known and where our salvation was planned before time began. Let your mind dwell on the Glory of this King. Each phrase is an exquisite word picture of the One Who is coming. Then turn back to Hebrews 1, and meditate on verses 1-3. Finally, read again in Revelation 1:12 –17. The indescribable, glorious Saviour, who once rode on a donkey.

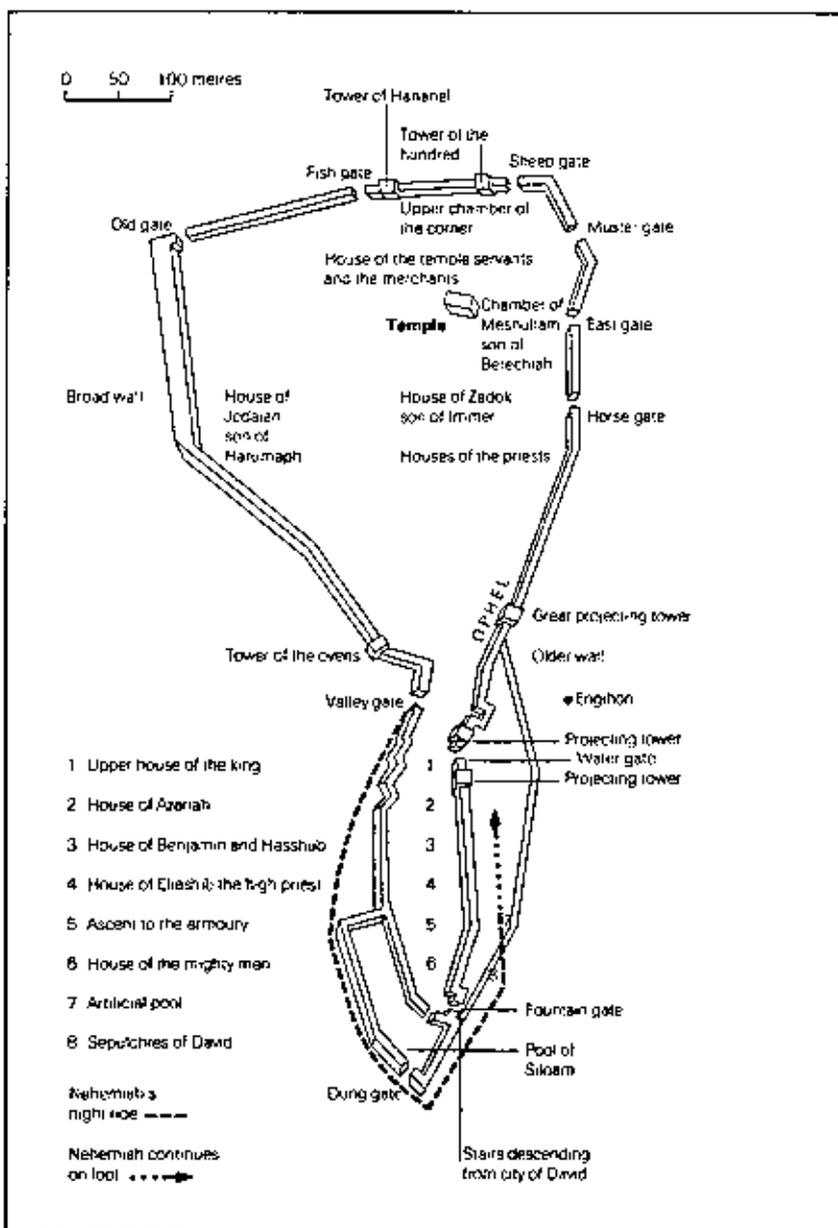
This gate brings to mind nothing except the glorification of the Saviour. The lowly King on his way to save His people. The warrior King, to overcome His enemies and to be the just judge.

Man may rail against Him, but in these difficult days, the Horse Gate reminds us that He is on the throne, that before Him every knee shall bow. And a wedding procession will follow!

Then we may join with the great multitude that John heard shouting:

Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are His judgements... Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and give Him glory.

For the wedding of the Lamb has come... On His robe and on His thigh He has this Name written: King of kings, and Lord of lords... And He shall reign forever and ever.



Nehemiah's Jerusalem (after Aharoni and Avi-Yonah). The site names are derived from Ne. 3:1-32, proceeding anti-clockwise from the Sheep Gate at the NE Corner. Taken from Derek Kidner's Commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah, IVP.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

I enjoyed, as usual, Sally Davey's September 2006 article, this time about patience as a feminine virtue; and the fictional instance from *What Katy Did* was a fine illustration; but I fear Mrs Davey is confusing fact with fiction by telling us that Katy grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, as her home was in a small but ever-growing town called Burnet in the story.

The name Susan Coolidge was a pen-name, but it seems the author really did

come from an educated family of prosperous academics in Ohio; and as Burnet was evidently a paddle-steamer port on Lake Erie, I guess it was really Cleveland scaled down and countrified. Further, although Miss Coolidge's 'Katy' books were first published in the 1880s, Katy grew up in the 1860s, as is proved by a reference in *What Katy Did at School* to St Valentine's Day 1869, when Katy was nearly 17; and as we know she was only 12 when the first book began, that must have been in 1864. Even then Cleveland must have been a good-sized town; a lot bigger than the fictional Burnet, I conjecture.

Interestingly there's not a word about

the Civil War, which didn't end till 1865; just as Jane Austen's novels never mention the Napoleonic Wars in progress while she wrote. No, before World War One, it was quite the norm for civilians to have almost no involvement in their own nations' wars - how times have changed! At any rate, anyone who hasn't read the books about Katy and the rest of the Carr family should take the trouble to look for them. The children grow up, get married, and move away, while some of their former schoolmates are already married with little children. I detect only one anachronism, in Clover, referring to the telephone in what must have been 1874, two years before Bell first patented it. The reference is also

to a small town out West, where there would not yet have been any telephones even in 1876! But such discrepancies matter little, I know.

H. Westfold, Wellington.

Dear Mr Editor

It was with disappointment that I read "A Feminine Focus" (Aug 06). In the review of 'Safely Home', Mrs Tani Newton appears to be presenting a view, rather than a 'review'. This one-sided summing up of the Home Schooling verses Christian Day Schooling

debate, is a snub to centuries of Reformed tradition in Christian Day Schooling. The Reforming Fathers encouraged the setting up of schools to educate all children (which in those days was a mostly illiterate population) so that they would be able to read the bible in their native tongue and thereby gain an understanding to direct their life and worship as God commanded.

To use the 'Hebrew model' as proof that home schooling is the only biblical model is too simplistic. The Hebrews (and other cultures) would pass their knowledge and (generally manual) skills down to their chil-

dren. Those desiring their children to learn a different trade or skill - sought to apprentice their children to those who could teach them. Very few would have been 'literate'. Those that were desiring this education for their child would have sought it from those who were. If a father seeks another to educate his child, his role is not being 'usurped'.

As Romans 12 says, we are all of the body of Christ, we all have different gifts and we should all exercise them accordingly, to benefit the body, not only our own immediate family.

Alice Saathof

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

Family prayer & praise items: We thank and praise our Lord with Br & Sr Joe and Margaret Wielemaker, their children and grandchildren for 50 years of marriage. Quite a milestone!

Evangelism Team Update: Eight of us (including Marco from Pukekohe) braved Queen Street last Saturday night to help celebrate Sharon's birthday evangelism style. We met first for about half an hour to watch an evangelism DVD and for prayer at 7:30pm. Cameron came with us for the first time, making it more than 20 members who have participated in our evangelism efforts so far. It was great to see Nick and Josiah witnessing hard and so full of enthusiasm for the task. It's fantastic to see how quickly these young teenagers can grow in confidence and effectiveness on only their second or third outings. You would be amazed at the positive reception we received from passers by. Three French young adults thanked me for making them consider the facts of God's judgment. A pair of schoolboys who I had taken right through the gospel waved at me an hour later as they went passed the other way. Two other schoolboys made plans to see me again later after admitting their sins would force God to send them to Hell if they died that night unless they repented and turned to Jesus. Ben Goris was busy handing out gospel tracts to everyone

passing by. Meanwhile in Wainuiomata, Tjeerd was invited to speak about Avondale's evangelism experiences at an evangelism conference, which was also very encouraging. If you want to see what it's all about and how it's done, see Reuben, Josh or Tjeerd and we can bring you along. If you want to know how to present the gospel clearly, biblically, and effectively, we can lend you our Way Of The Master DVD's which provide a simple but no-nonsense evangelism approach. Please pray for this outreach ministry, especially as we seek for new ways to apply what we are doing within our church and community. Reuben Ploeg

Bishopdale

David, Johanna, Emma, Lucinda and Annabelle Capill have been worshipping with us for some time now. We are pleased to now officially welcome to them as members of our congregation. May the Lord richly bless you as you worship with us.

We also are pleased to welcome Christine Cooke who moved from Masterton to live here and has now settled into her new home at Unit 3, 165 Highsted Road, Bishopdale. Her telephone number is 359 9566. Christine is Philippa Williams' mother. Philippa, her husband Kelly and their children are members of the Dovedale Reformed Church.

Congregational Meeting: Instead of having our fellowship groups this week, we will be meeting together at the church to discuss a number of important matters, including the proposed plans to extend the church auditorium and renovate the rest of the building. We will also give an update about calling a second minister. Robert van Wichen and Fred Braam will report on the 'From Embers to a Flame Conference' that they and Richard van der Pyl attended in Melbourne a

few weeks ago. Session is also considering the possibility of moving the AGM to February each year. This is an important meeting and so we strongly encourage you all to be there.

We can rejoice with Cathy and Cedric Carrenceja (and Tai and Tara) who God blessed with a healthy baby boy last Sunday evening. His name is Ethan John, and he weighed in at 6 pounds 14 ounces.

Bucklands Beach

Welcome. Cobus and Welma Van Der Walt, who have been worshipping with us regularly for some time now, have asked to be admitted to membership of our congregation. The elders have formally agreed to this request and therefore we now officially welcome you into the life and ministry of our church. May the Lord bless and make you a blessing as a part of this body.

Christchurch

Mrs. Anna Begg has expressed her desire to publicly profess her faith in this church. She and her husband Ian and son William have been in Christchurch for well over a year now, having moved here from Dunedin. With joy in our hearts, we look forward to celebrating her profession of faith and the baptism of her son William in a couple of weeks on 10 September.

Dunedin

Congratulations to Geert and Jessie May Tepper with the birth, on Monday 14 August, of their daughter Ivy Grace, weighing 7lb 9ozs. May God continue to bless this young family and guide these parents as they raise Ivy in His ways.

Congregational Meetings. In last week's bul-

Continued on page 16

We need Your HELP!

We believe a key component to the ongoing well-being of the Reformed Faith in New Zealand is the provision of a biblically sound Christian world-view to the youth of our churches.

Our schools are independent of the state and are thus free to develop and implement a genuinely Reformed Christian education. Currently we run both a primary and a secondary school located in the Hutt Valley near Wellington. Our teaching staff are all fully-qualified registered teachers who are personally committed to the Reformed faith and who are motivated to see the Reformed faith applied to education develop as a credible alternative in what is a heavily state dominated educational environment. We want to see our students think like Christians, live like Christians and excel like Christians to the glory of God.

Being independent of the state means our schools receive far less funding (around 1/5 th) of that which would be available should we integrate with the state system. In order to maintain our independence we need to build a stable financial base so that the burden does not solely fall upon the families who use our schools.

We are extending an invitation to you, to our brethren, who share our conviction that the Reformed faith is the most biblically consistent form of Christianity to join with us in this ministry.

Ways we believe you could help in this work are:

- if you are a parent, consider moving to the Hutt and enrolling your children in our schools or look at boarding your child during the week with one of our families (*partial and full tuition fee scholarships are available – for more details please contact us*);
- giving regular prayer and/or financial support;
- offering part- or full- scholarships to help families meet the costs of school fees;
- consider making a bequest from your estate.

For more information, see our website at:

www.wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz

Christian School Association (Wellington District)

PO Box 43-127, Wainuiomata 5014

email: admin@wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz



Continued from page 14

let in it was made known that Session was considering a proposal to call a second minister to Dunedin and Oamaru, with a view to strengthening the work in Oamaru and possibly establishing a work in Timaru. This proposal has now been developed to the point where it can be presented to the congregations for deliberation and approval. A printed proposal is available today. Members, please ensure you receive a copy, and consider it carefully and prayerfully. Congregational meetings to discuss and vote on the proposal will be held in Dunedin on Thursday 14 September at 7:30 pm in the church hall, and in Oamaru on Wednesday 13 September.

Sponsorship Opportunities!!

The Wellington Regional Youth Committee (WRYC) is seeking sponsorship for the upcoming National Youth Camp (NYC) in January 2007. As many of you are aware, these camps are great opportunities for our youth to gather together for a week to learn more about our Lord, spend time in His Word together, build new and existing friendships, help each other out with the duties and take part in the sports and other activities that are arranged.

While it is free (Praise the Lord!) to read and study the Word, there are many other costs involved in running a youth camp for hundreds of youth. Any sponsorship surrounding finance, clothing, AV equipment, sports gear or anything else would be much appreciated.

If you would like more information or are interested, please contact the WRYC president Josh Couperus at jmcouperus@slingshot.co.nz or alternatively Jesse Dyson at jesseandhannah@xtra.co.nz

*Yours in Christ,
Wellington Regional Youth
Committee*

Please see a member of Session if you need any further information.

Hamilton

Meditation: What does Church Membership signify? (By Dr Mark Dever.) Church membership signifies an individual commitment to grasp hold of one another in mutual love and discipleship. By identifying ourselves with a particular church, we let the leadership and other members of that local church know that we intend to be committed in attendance, giving, prayer, and service. We increase others' expectations of us in these areas, and we make it known that we are the responsibility of this local church. We assure the church of our commitment to Christ in serving with them, and we call for their commitment to serve us in love and to encourage us in our discipleship. In short, we enter a covenant relationship with that church and its leadership. Church membership signifies a regular responsibility that involves people in each other's lives for the purposes of the gospel. Church membership should not be viewed as a loose affiliation useful to members only on occasion. This is a self-centred way of looking at membership. It says, "I want to join this club for the benefits that it can offer me. But as soon as it starts demanding more than I feel I'm receiving, I think I'll start looking around." Church membership is not a set of rights that I purchase with my tithe. It is a set of responsibilities that I commit myself to carrying out, both for and with other members in gospel fellowship, work, and joy. Church membership signifies an inward love for God and His people. By joining ourselves with God's people in local church membership, we show that we want to covenant with them to help and be helped, encourage and be encouraged, rebuke and be rebuked. In other words, we show that we want to love God's people, and be loved by them. According to 1 John, this willingness to love God's people is the fundamental indicator of our heart's disposition towards God Himself. *If someone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also (1 John 4:20-21).* To enter church membership is to enter into a covenant with the other members and the leadership. It is a commitment to being meaningfully involved in the lives of other members to do them good spiritually.

Hastings

From the Pastor. We rejoice with Adriaan and Marilee Smith on the birth of André Johann Sunday evening. He is a big 4Kg! We give thanks for a safe delivery and a healthy baby, which the Lord in His grace has given to the Smiths. May

the Lord give you wisdom and faithfulness as you raise this little one for Him.

Leaflets to advertise our Church. A Total of 2500 leaflets will be ordered, of which 500 will be distributed to Motels, Hotels, Motor camps, Information centres and other suitable venues while 2000 will be distributed in the neighbourhood of our Church.

Public profession of faith. Recently Kyra Koster has requested to publicly profess her faith and become a communicant member of the church. After visiting with her and hearing her love for the Lord and her desire to serve Him according to His Word, the session was happy to grant her permission to take this step. Unless there are lawful objections, Kyra will publicly profess her faith on Sunday, 17 September, in the morning service.

New members. At our elders meeting last Thursday we had the joy of receiving Adriaan and Marilee Smith as communicant members. Adriaan and Marilee and their newborn baby, Andre, live at 701D Grove Rd, Hastings. Their phone number is 878-4998. As announced two weeks ago, Marco and Harmony de Boer and been received as members from the Reformed Church of Nelson. They are presently living at 28a Te Awa Ave, Napier. They can be contacted at 834-1194 or mobile 021 0617 961. However, they have just bought a house so their new address and phone will be put in the bulletin after they have shifted in a few weeks time.

Vicar. What is a vicar? Aside from its usage in the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, its general meaning is "a person appointed to do the work of another." In the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, we use it to refer to a man who has finished his academic training for the ministry and is appointed to do the work of a minister in a local church under the supervision of the session and minister of that church. It is a year of on-the-job training before being examined, called and ordained for the ministry. David Waldron has now been officially appointed to serve here in Hastings as a vicar. David finished his academic training just over a month ago at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong. He and his wife and children are working in Alice Springs for three months. David is leading services at the local church as well as Bible studies and doing evangelistic work in the area. For his on-the-job training David will be doing the following: 1. Preaching at least once per Sunday, and twice on occasions when our pastor is gone. Also later in the year making him available to preach in other churches. At least initially these sermons will be vetted beforehand and critiqued afterwards by our pastor. There will also be regular evaluation by the elders. 2. Participating in the full work of the session

including home visits with the pastor and the elders. Also asking him to lead session/elders' meetings on occasion for his training. 3. Finding a suitable leading role for David (and possibly Jenny) in some of the church activities/ministries. This could be with our prison ministry, an evangelistic outreach to new contacts we have recently made, a friendship outreach to international students at high schools and EIT, leading one of our fortnightly Bible study groups, etc. 4. Making special visits with the pastor to the sick, to those with spiritual difficulties, and new contacts. 5. Assigned reading on various aspects of pastoral ministry according to need. Let us be in prayer for David and Jenny and their children as they continue their work in Alice Springs and then towards the end of the year make the shift back to New Zealand and then in January to Hastings. In the next few weeks we will put more information about David and Jenny in the bulletin.

Hukanui

Profession of Faith: Pieter Wisse, Juliet Wisse and Dan Voogt have indicated their desire to publicly profess their faith in Jesus Christ. We are thankful to God for the work He has done in their hearts, and the session wholeheartedly endorses their request. If there are no lawful objections, this will take place on Sunday 3rd September in the morning service.

Jon and Lisa Stephens were blessed with the birth of a baby boy, Michael Alexander, born on the 7th of August. He came a little early, and spent a few days in ICU with some complications, but is now at home and doing well.

Monday night ladies' fellowship. All women are invited to the home of Carina Wassenaar (36 Cate Road, Rototuna) TOMORROW NIGHT (Monday August 28th) at 7:45 p.m. for a time of prayer, encouragement and fellowship. Join us for some fun and a cuppa.

Mangere

Pastoral. This morning we rejoice as the sign and seal of the sacrament of baptism is administered to Naomi Elizabeth Verheij. We pray for Br & Sr Jacco and Carmen as they raise Naomi up in the grace and knowledge of the same Lord Jesus Christ they themselves have been blessed to have been brought up under. God continues His covenant down through the generations. And let's support them where we can, so that we mean what we pray.

Nelson

From the Pastor. This morning, it is our privilege to witness Covenant baptism administered to Francois Cornelius Terblanche (junior), son of Francois and Maria Terblanche. We rejoice with

the Terblanche family on this happy occasion. And all here this morning are invited to join with Francois and Maria in the adjacent hall after the service to celebrate this occasion.

On Monday afternoon (at 4.00pm), Ewout and Louise have been called to appear before the parliamentary select committee in Wellington in relation to their individual submissions against the so-called Anti-smacking Bill that is currently before Parliament. Session has agreed to provide Ewout and Louise with financial support so that they can appear before the committee and so present what is in effect a Christian view about this destructive and irresponsible legislation. Needless to say the select committee is composed of members who are mainly in favour of the legislation and are therefore likely to be hostile to Ewout's and Louise's arguments, and will want to reduce them to nonsense. This will take a great deal of courage on the part of Ewout and Louise, and I therefore want to encourage all members to actively uphold Ewout and Louise in your prayers, especially at the hour of their meeting.

A high school girl wrote the following letter to a friend: "I attended your church yesterday. Although you had invited me, you were not there. I looked for you, hoping to sit with you. I sat alone, a stranger. I wanted to sit near the back of the church but those rows were all packed with regular members. I was directed to the front. I felt as though I was on parade. During the singing of the hymns I was surprised to note that some of the church people weren't singing. Between their sighs and yawns, they just stared into space. Three of the kids whom I knew from school and respected, were whispering to one another throughout the whole service. Another girl was giggling. I really didn't expect this in your church. The pastor's sermon was very interesting, although some members didn't seem to think so. They looked bored and restless. One kept smiling at someone in the congregation. There were several people who left and then came back during the sermon. I thought, "How rude!" I could hear the constant shuffling of feet and doors opening and closing. The pastor spoke about the reality of faith. The message got to me and I made up my mind to speak to someone about it after the service. But utter chaos reigned after the benediction. I said good morning to one couple, but their response was less than cordial. I looked for some teens with whom I could discuss the sermon, but they were all huddled in a corner talking about the latest football scores. My parents don't go to church. I came alone yesterday hoping to find a place to truly worship and feel some love. I'm sorry, but I didn't find it in your church. I won't be back."

Anonymous

Palmerston North

FM 88.4 - FM 88.4 The only Christian broadcast TRUE LIGHT in PN - 24 hrs per day Christian music with many hymns out of our own Psalter Hymnal. Try it out, it is uplifting!

A note of appreciation. As a member of this congregation can I say how grateful I am to the session for their diligent labours on all our behalf. It is not always easy. But what a blessing to know that we have a session who are willing to pray and discuss and visit and think through the needs of the congregation biblically. We do not all always agree with their conclusions. But these things too are in the hands of the Lord. Please remember to uphold these men in prayer and encourage them in this vital work. "Give thanks to the Lord for He is Good for his Love endures forever".

Session Notes. Session is pleased to inform the congregation that the Rev. Barry James and his wife Anne will come and pastor the congregation here for a short while later this year. He is planning to arrive the 8th of October, and will be with us for approximately 5 weeks.

Meditation. Last Thursday, many of us attended the funeral of Erica Seymour. We extended our condolences to the Seymour and Reitsma families, for we know that their loss is great. It is without doubt that Erica will be sorely missed and it is our continuing prayer that the Lord will uphold her family through this time of grief. The funeral was attended by more than six hundred people, and as far as local funerals go, it was huge. And sometimes when you attend funerals you are left empty and flat, because there is no gospel and no hope. In fact, sometimes the deceased are 'talked' into heaven even though they have never professed any faith in the Lord Jesus nor darkened the doors of a church their whole life. Unlike so many funerals, we didn't have to 'talk' Erica into heaven for we knew she was there already, not because of her many good deeds, although they will not go unnoticed, but because she trusted in Christ's work of salvation alone for her own salvation. And what a great testimony and witness this funeral service was of the Lord's blessing, goodness and faithfulness. Not one person in that huge auditorium could have left that funeral without being confronted with the good news of Christ. We may well have different understandings of how the Lord in His grace works salvation in a sinner's life, but one thing is sure: that all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their only Saviour will be saved! Praise God! Erica, who is now in glory and enjoying all the beauty and riches of being with her Lord, would not want us to dwell on her passing, nor to make a memorial of her. I dare say she would be interested

in only one thing, that we trust in Jesus and tell everyone to trust in Jesus alone, for there is no greater thing to know. Even the rich man in hell who rejected God and His offer of salvation pleaded with Abraham to send Lazarus back to earth so that he could warn his family about the foolishness of such rejection. By the Lord's grace and Spirit, may the six hundred plus people who heard the gospel at Erica's funeral and the many thousands, perhaps millions today who hear it from various pulpits throughout this world, embrace the good news of Jesus, that He came to save sinners so that all who believe may have eternal life in glory with Him and the many believing loved ones who have gone before us. JZ

Pukekohe

From the Pastor: At the recent Men's Presbytery Day, Rev John Rogers challenged the men present to read some good Christian books – a challenge we could all take up! Many find this difficult, partly because of the distraction of the TV and the computer. John Rogers offered some helpful advice: If you read for two hours one evening each week and read thirty pages, then in three months you would have read a book of more than 300 pages! If you kept that up, you would read four solid books each year. Reading good books is of great benefit to your spiritual well-being and will make you more useful in the church and kingdom of Christ. So get yourself a good book, turn off the TV and computer, and settle down to read!

From the Pastor: We are thankful to announce that Anna Smilde will profess her faith publicly to the congregation and join the church as a communicant member. The date is yet to be determined.

Silverstream

Pastoral Notes. Our condolences and prayers are with the family of Bas Vandenbergel, who went to be with the Lord early on Thursday morning. Please pray that the Lord will sustain Martha and the family during this time. We pray that the funeral on Monday will be a comfort to the family, friends and brethren, as the Gospel is heard. We also pray that the Lord may use

the occasion to bring the Gospel to any who are present who do not know Him.

Wellington

Call accepted. The call extended to Bro. Jan Lion-Cachet to serve the church in Klerksdorp, RSA, has been accepted by him. The family plans to leave at the end of November or early December, D.V.

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

Missions in focus *Janice Reid*

Love for Kids

By Klariske Feenstra

In July this year I was able to take part in a short mission trip with some members of the Willetton Christian Reformed Church of Australia. We headed off to St Petersburg,

Russia to take part in the 'Love for Kids' Russian Outreach program run by Kids Outreach International (KOI – www.kidsoutreach.org).

I spent two and a half weeks at what are now known as 'Health' or 'Rest' camps for children aged 7-16. During the camp the children took part in a range of sport, swimming, craft, music and social activities, with the range and quality of the programmes being dependent on the financial status of the camp. The children stay for varying lengths of time, some for three weeks, others longer. Many orphans are sent to these camps for the entire summer as their orphanages close

for the summer months.

The children at the camp did not understand English, so for every three team members, interpreters are assigned. The mission likes to use Christians but they are not always easy to find. The interpreters are usually students aged 18-25, or adults that are unemployed or like to earn some extra money. These people are essential to our communication with the Russians, and are seen as team members. We were blessed to have three interpreters, two of whom were committed Christians.

Travelling to Russia is long and tiring. I

met up with the team for the first time on the plane in Singapore. From there we flew to Helsinki, Finland where we spent a day and a night catching the train to Vyborg, Russia. The train journey took about four hours, which included the border crossing. This was an experience itself: trying to fill in the forms that were written in Russian, and with the guards looking inside some of our bags (we had 28 pieces of luggage for seven people!). During this time, the guards took our passports away to be checked and stamped. This left me feeling strange and wondering if I would see my passport again! However they did come back, and I breathed a sigh of relief.

After some two hours we arrived at Camp Horizont, which is situated in the middle of dense forest (about two hours away from St Petersburg, using the local train). This was our home for the next 16 days. My initial reaction was 'this isn't too bad, I was expecting worse.' The buildings didn't look too run down but with closer inspection, I could see that I was wrong! The toilets were disgusting. The ceiling and walls were covered in mould, and the little bin next to the loo was definitely a 'don't look' area! (Due to the fantastic sewage and plumbing system in Russia, loo paper does not get flushed, but rather thrown into the little LIDLESS bin.) Despite all that the loos did flush, well, sort of...

We had arrived during rest time, so there weren't many people about. We were introduced to the camp director, Nadesda, the programme director, Olga, and to our three interpreters – Natalie, Ira and Yuroslav. From there we girls were shown our room, which was situated towards the back of the camp, amongst the trees. Arriving at our room, we were somewhat shocked. The smell was a mixture of fresh paint and dampness. The room was slightly smaller than an average living area, with seven child-sized beds about 30 cm apart with mattresses 2cm thick on springs. As for storage space, it was very limited! The three boys, Andrew, Peter and Yuroslav, would be staying in one of the main buildings where the toilets were but also where many of the counsellors and camp staff lived, along with their pets.

So after leaving our stuff we headed off to the dining room for lunch. It would be our first Russian meal. The look on Andrew's face along with the instant smell of the dining room that seemed to hit you straight on the nose, didn't do much to help me remain positive. This was going to be a real challenge and it was only the beginning! The meal started off with some sort of soup (we had soup everyday for lunch) that

didn't have much flavour, but was filled with veggies, especially cabbage. This was usually followed by mashed potato, buckwheat, rice, or noodles (cooked to death) with a small amount of meat. The meat varied from chicken or a fish patty-type thing, to sausage, to liver. Veggies were usually sliced tomato and cucumber.

Dinner was much the same except for no soup, but with two loaves of bread. We also received juice boxes with very delicious Russian chocolate bars or sweets.

Breakfast was usually one of six different types of porridge made from water which usually had a layer of melted butter on top (thank goodness for the big jar of brown sugar that Karalyn took!), or plain macaroni with grated cheese. Too bad if you didn't like porridge: it was that, or go hungry!

Snack time was everyone's favourite time of day: a big kettle of hot, sweet tea with a hint of lemon, some sort of stone fruit, cake or ice cream.

There were about 300 children, 150 of them from three different orphanages. The rest were the 'rich kids' who were sent to camp for three weeks by their parents. The children were divided into seven groups, usually split up by age, with orphans and 'rich kids' in separate groups. We also had one group of special needs children. Each group had about 30-40 children along with two counsellors.

Our theme was based on Psalm 139: "You are Special and Unique." We had a variety of crafts portraying this message, such as placemats and bookmarks with the phrase written in Russian. The children were able to decorate them and have them laminated. For the placemats, we took the children's photos to glue onto their page. Other crafts included jewellery making, butterflies and special masks. Before beginning each craft we would recite a poem, sing, or do a puppet play to remind the children how special they are.

Thinking of this reminds me of one special little orphan boy, Andre. He would have been about six, and talked non-stop. It didn't matter if we couldn't understand him or if he couldn't understand us, he just kept on talking and laughing! He was very special. He LOVED doing the masks, and spent much time decorating every centimetre with the glitter pens.

There was also one shy little girl named Mariana. She was an orphan, and probably very poor. The few times we saw her, she was wearing an Aussie t-shirt that had been given to the orphanage group by the team. Mariana really enjoyed painting and spent

much time making a beautiful picture. We saw that her shoes were way too small and I remembered that I had some shoes with me that I thought might fit her. When I gave them to her along with two kiwi hair ties, Mariana couldn't stop smiling. She was so overwhelmed that she ran off saying 'spaseeba' (thank you). From then on we saw a lot more from her, and she appeared to be a lot more confident (especially around us). Giving to a child that was in need really made me feel happy. The quote 'it's better to give than to receive' hit home.

The team had the opportunity to hand out Russian Bibles to anybody who wanted one. Before doing this, we made gospel bracelets. It is an easy and short way to explain what it means to have God in your life. This was very well received, with many children staying behind to read their Bibles and ask questions.

One of the hardest things I found was not being able to speak the Russian language. There were times that it was very frustrating not to know what the children were saying, and having to rely on the interpreters. Quite often I would walk past some children who really wanted to talk to me, except I didn't know what they were saying so had to somehow explain that I didn't know. This often resulted in the children walking away, and leaving me very frustrated!! At times like this, I found myself wondering what I was doing in a country where hardly anyone speaks English. However, I had to remind myself that simply being there and working alongside the children, was a way for me to show the children that I loved and cared for them.

I can write so much more, but it's hard to



Cutting bookmarks



Daema and friend. Klariske is in the background.



Klariske Feenstra (front right) and the team.

explain unless you've experienced it yourself. I can only hope and pray that one day some of you may be able to experience what I have. It's been a truly amazing experience and I feel very blessed to have been given the opportunity to take part. It's made me realise how fortunate we really are, and how powerful prayer can be. For that, I want to say a HUGE thanks to everyone who prayed for me and the team. I would recommend this mission trip to anyone who's interested in short-term missions or working with children. I've found it a life-changing experience, with memories that will stay with me forever!

If you would like to take part in this outreach and want more information, please feel free to email me as I would love to organise a group (both young and old) for the next Russian summer.

*Klariske Feenstra, member of Wainuiomata Reformed Church.
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MIF prayer notes

Pray for **Fred and Tineke Frericks** who are back in Pakistan for 5 months to help at the hospital and school in Sahiwal, which is a ministry of the ARPC(USA). Pray for safe travel, quick adjustment to the culture, and God's guidance as they serve the people there.

Leo and Heidi Hendrikse are in Romania for 4-5 months, helping to run a dairy farm that was set up in conjunction with the Hungarian Reformed Churches and the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee. Profits from

the farm go to support a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre. Pray for safety, quick language acquisition and cultural adaptation, and especially for good health and endurance during the coldest months of Hungarian winter—apparently temperatures can get down to -20°C.

Pray for **Janice Reid** in her work of teaching radio announcers at small Christian stations in South East Asia. Pray for safe travel this month, and wisdom as she helps announcers learn key skills that will make their outreach more effective. Janice asks you to pray for Rev. Ed Dethan in Kupang, West Timor: he hopes to establish a radio station at his Reformed Christian School, helping children to reach out to other children as they learn vital skills for the future.

Wally & Jeannette Hagoort ask prayer for the development of the Leadership Training Centre in Port Moresby. Lord willing, Mark VanderPyl from Bishopdale will go to PNG this month to oversee construction of the first classroom and the ablution block, which will allow classes to begin next year. Pray for Wally and Jeannette, for health and strength as they split their time between Mapang, Reformed fellowships in Moresby, and the development of the Training Centre.

Pray for **Evan Whetton**, from Mangere congregation, who is in Korea, helping Reformed missionary candidates to improve their English language skills so they can go to other countries to preach the Gospel. There are very many Reformed missionaries from Korea, serving in all manner of countries from Thailand to Tajikistan, and their work is crucial. But they cannot serve if they cannot learn English, which they usually need before they can learn the language of their new country. Helping these missionary candidates to improve their English fluency is a vital task, so pray for Evan as he plants seeds for the Kingdom by equipping others who will go forth.

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; so, for September, information should be sent before the 15th of July. If you would like our congregations to pray for you on your mission trip, send details to Janice at reid4radio@ihug.co.nz.